

ALTAR SERVER TRAINING MANUAL FOR ST. JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

Last revised January 23, 2016

INTRODUCTION

You have been given a divine privilege above all earthly honors in being permitted within the sanctuary to serve at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, at which the Church gives to God, officially and in the name of all, the worship that is due to Him alone.

In earlier times, only ordained acolytes, that is, clerics in the fourth minor order conferred upon candidates to the priesthood, were permitted to serve at Mass. Today, when the number of clerics in minor orders is smaller, custom has tolerated specially-selected laymen to substitute in these duties.

As an altar server, you should reflect the same attitude as the priest in celebrating Holy Mass. Specifically, you should perform your liturgical duties "digne, attente, devote," that is worthily, attentively, and devoutly, in body, mind, and heart. Your sacred duties require of you the greatest reverence in the sanctuary, the deepest attention to your duties, and the most zealous preparation of all your liturgical actions.

You should always conduct yourselves worthily in your position, a position to which even the angels of heaven cannot aspire. If you serve with care and devotion, you will edify the congregation, who look to you as an example for the proper disposition of assisting at Mass. If, however, you perform your duties with haste, carelessness, and inattention, you will degrade "the most beautiful thing this side of heaven," the worship of Almighty God in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

In and around the church, in the sacristy, and especially around the altar, you should show by your demeanor the holiness of the duties that you are performing. Even your exterior cleanliness should be a mark of your interior purity of heart. You should, of course, avoid any levity, irreverence, and idle talk in the presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Before Mass, when you are waiting for the procession to the altar, you should be preparing your mind and heart for the sacred duties upon which you are about to enter. At the altar your movements should be stately and dignified, not hasty or affected.

Devout altar servers have been the cause of conversions to the faith. On the other hand, careless servers have been the cause of the failure of souls to come to the faith. It is said that the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was kept from the Faith by the irreverence he witnessed of altar servers near the presence of Our Lord in the Tabernacle.

The French poet, Paul Claudel, on the other hand, was won back to the Church when he observed the reverence of those at the altar in Notre Dame Cathedral. "It was the most profound and grandiose poetry, enhanced by the most august gestures ever confided to human beings. I could not sufficiently satiate myself with the spectacle of the Mass."

May you at all times conduct yourself worthily, attentively, and devoutly, and by your actions and example at the altar bring glory to God and many souls to the one true Church.

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