

# *Altar Server Handbook*

*I will go in to the altar of God: to God who giveth joy to my youth. Ps 42*

You have been given a divine privilege above all earthy 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 laity 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 sloppy.

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.

===== *MOVEMENT and POSTURES* =====

*The gestures and bodily posture of both the Priest, the Deacon, and the ministers, and also of the people, must be conducive to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity....(General Instruction of the Roman Missal [GIRM] 42).*

Servers walk smoothly at a moderate pace. When servers walk together they walk in pairs, shoulder to shoulder.

**HAND GESTURES**

HANDS WILL ALWAYS BE JOINED Except when sitting. If the hands are not in use, they are to be palm-to-palm with the right thumb over the left thumb, in the form of a cross pointing diagonally towards Heaven. The fingers are held together. This position is referred to as “**Joined Hands**” in the Ceremonial of Bishops (paragraph 107).



When a server carries a sacred object, hand gestures are not required. When one hand is in use, the free hand is placed flat over the heart.

*SIGN OF THE CROSS.* From the “Joined Hands” position, the left hand is placed over the heart. The sign of the cross is made with the right hand. The right hand will smoothly move to touch your forehead, your chest above your left hand, then the middle of your left shoulder, then the middle of your right shoulder. Always end in “Joined Hands” position. The sign of the cross is **not** to be made hastily, half-heartedly, or in a sloppy fashion for you are blessing yourself and calling to mind your Baptism.



*STRIKING THE BREAST DURING THE CONFITEOR* (I confess to almighty God.....). When the Confiteor is prayed, all strike their breast at each mea culpa (my fault) (Order of Mass, no. 4). From the “Joined Hands” position, the left hand is placed flat over the heart. The right hand strikes firmly, but noiselessly the chest, slightly above the left hand.

*THRICE SIGNING YOURSELF DURING THE GOSPEL ACCLAMATION*. The left hand is placed over the heart. The right-hand thumb makes a small cross on the forehead, over the lips, and just above the left hand.

IT IS BEST **not** to make orans hand motions (Ecclesiae De Mysterio, 6.1, 2) as this is a priestly gesture.



## **STANDING**

When standing, a server should never slouch. They remain still with the body facing straight ahead. At the proclamation of the Gospel, servers turn the whole body towards the Book of the Gospels.

## **SITTING**

Servers sit straight without leaning. When wearing a surplice or alb, it should rest on the lap, not stretched out. The palms of each hand are placed flat on each leg with fingers together and extended. Servers should always remember that they are visible to the congregation! Don't swing your legs or fidget or play with your vestments please! You are not participating in a causal event!

## **KNEELING**

When kneeling, the back is straight. The hands are in the Joined Hands position. Unnecessary motions should be avoided unless you need to balance yourself or ring the bells.

## **BOWING**

A profound or solemn bow requires bending the entire body at the waist. It should be done smoothly and not with haste.



A profound bow is done at the following times:

1. When reverencing the Altar, which symbolizes Christ (GIRM, no. 275b) [unless you are carrying an object].
2. When the Creed is said or sung, servers make a profound bow at “**and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man**” (GIRM, no. 137). (It is assumed that altar servers will know the creed by heart).
3. “Before and after incensation, the one performing the incensing makes a profound bow to the person or object that is incensed” (GIRM, no. 277).

A simple bow is a lowering of the head made “when the three Divine Persons are named together and at the names of Jesus, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the Saint in whose honor Mass is being celebrated” (GIRM, no. 275a).

The simple bow is also made when carrying sacred objects and a bow is required.

## **GENUFLECTING**

At St Joseph’s the tabernacle is not located in the sanctuary and so reverencing it is not required during Mass. However, before or after Mass altar servers should always genuflect when passing the Tabernacle unless they are carrying items which would hinder them make the movement with proper solemnity (carrying candles, processional cross, et cetera). In such cases a simple bow is preferred.

When genuflecting, servers stop, bend the right knee all the way to the floor and rise in a fluid but unhurried motion. The back is straight. If servers are moving as a unit they will make the genuflection together as a unit.

*On the Solemnities of the Annunciation and of the Nativity of the Lord [Christmas], when the Creed is said or sung, all genuflect at "and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man" (et in carnatus est ) (GIRM, no. 137).*

===== *DUTIES and INSTRUCTIONS* =====

**ATTIRE**

Black shoes and dark slacks (no shorts). Shirt/Blouse color should be white or light colored. Please do not come in tennis shoes or you may not be allowed to serve!

No high heels. Black or white closed toe shoes preferred

No dangling ear rings or bracelets

Hair combed, pulled back away from face

Hands washed please.

At each mass you attend, whether serving or not, you are encouraged to dress as if you would be serving mass. This way you will be prepared to serve if called upon.

**Arrival, Vesting, Preparation**

20 minutes early (at least). If you do not arrive by 15 minutes to mass time you may be replaced.

Vest quietly saying the vesting prayers

Review with your fellow servers who will perform the following duties:

- Book bearer
- Bells – it is preferred that the cross bearer or lead should do this as they are more experienced
- Children’s offering basket
- Lavabo (Priest’ hand washing)
- Candle bearers (most experienced should handle the candle closest to the ambo)
- Cross bearer – it is preferred that the cross bearer be old/larger since the cross is heavy

If you are not proficient at a task don’t do it. There is no reason the more experience servers shouldn’t perform multiple functions.

## Role Specific Instructions

### =====**Lead Server**=====

1. Set an example for the less experienced servers by vesting quietly saying the vesting prayers and by performing your duties with the utmost reverence and solemnity.
2. Ensure all roles are assigned and that the servers are comfortable with them.
3. **Ensure that the Gospel stand candles are lit before mass. If they are not, light them with the bell extinguisher and taper from the working sacristy. Light the innermost candle first.**
4. Make sure the processional candles are lit and all servers are lined up in the Vestibule/Narthex 5 minutes before mass begins.
5. Open the missal held by the book bearer to the correct page.
6. In the sanctuary direct the altar servers if needed and gently correct any errors or poor demeanor.
7. Be ready to cover any dropped or spilled Sacred Species with a corporal during communion.
8. If there is no Deacon, or Acolyte and if the Priest has not purified the vessels at the altar, the lead server is to CAREFULLY cover the sacred vessels with a linen.
9. Extinguish the Gospel stand candles after mass using the bell extinguisher.

### =====**Candle Bearer 1 & 2**=====

Candle bearer 1 and 2 should be of similar height if possible. They need to be *competent and knowledgeable* about the task required of them since this duty is so visible and requires coordination and attention to detail.

#### **Candles will be held in the following manner:**

- The outside hand (left hand if you are processing on the left of the cross) should grip the candle holder near the top
- The inside hand should grip the candle holder near the bottom

#### **Preparation**

1. Light the candles 5 minutes before mass starts
2. Take your position at the entrance of the church flanking the cross bearer

#### **Entrance Procession**

1. Proceed to the Sanctuary Steps flanking the Cross Bearer (GIRM 120, 188)



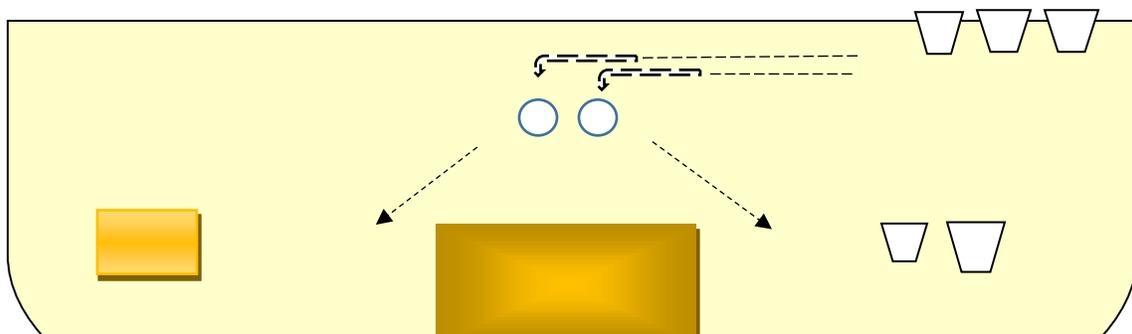
2. When you reach to base of the sanctuary steps, **WAIT** for the Cross bearer to fully ascend the steps before beginning your ascent (otherwise you will run into the cross bearer)
3. Ascend steps together
4. Place Candle in stand
5. Hands to "joined hands" position
6. Take 1 step backward, then reverence the Altar in unison
7. Turn in unison toward the back of Sanctuary and proceed to your seats.

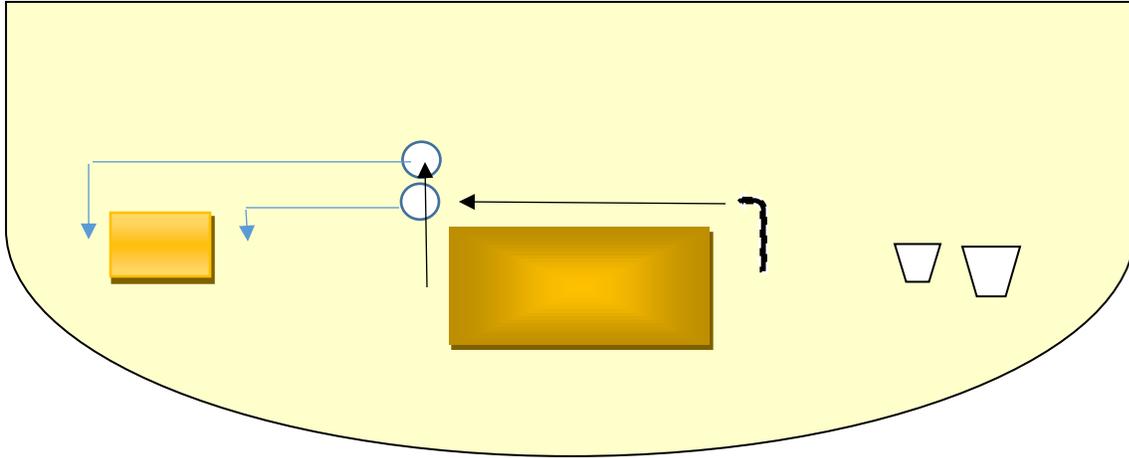
## Gospel Procession

### 1. As soon as the second reading is finished and the lectionary is put away

- a. Proceed shoulder to shoulder to even with the center of the Altar behind it-(see diagram below)
  - b. Turn together to face the Altar, in unison make a profound bow towards the altar, and wait for the Alleluia or other Chant (if Lent) to begin.
  - c. As soon as the Alleluia begins IMMEDIATELY proceed to your candles and, facing each other, remove the candles in unison (You do not need to reverence the altar a 2<sup>nd</sup> time before removing the candles).
  - d. IMMEDIATELY walk to the side of the altar between the altar and ambo and wait shoulder to shoulder while facing the ambo for the Priest or Deacon.
  - e. After the Priest or Deacon has raised the book of the Gospels he will turn toward the ambo. Be watching for his turn it, is your cue to lead the Priest/Deacon to the ambo.
  - f. Process to the Ambo making a 90 degree turn at the Ambo and take your positions beside it. (GIRM 133)
2. At the Ambo, stand holding the Candle upright and **not** at an angle (as best you can determine)
    - a. Do NOT rest the candle against the Ambo
  3. Bow your head slightly during the proclamation of the Gospel.
  4. After the Gospel proclamation, the Deacon or Priest will turn to take the Book to the Gospel stand.....turn with the Deacon or Priest and process behind him a few paces to the Gospel stand.
  5. As soon as the Priest or Deacon places the book of the Gospels on the stand...
    - a. Turn 90 degrees toward the Altar and process in tandem toward the back of the altar (you will be several paces behind the altar).
    - b. When the following candle bearer reaches the corner of the altar he/she will stop and wait for the leading candle bearer to make his/her turn towards their candle stand. The following candle bearer will turn toward the candle stand when the leading candle bearer turns and both will proceed to their respective candle stands in unison.
    - c. Place the candles in the stands, take a step backward, reverence the Altar in unison and proceed back to your seats.

<Gospel procession diagrams>

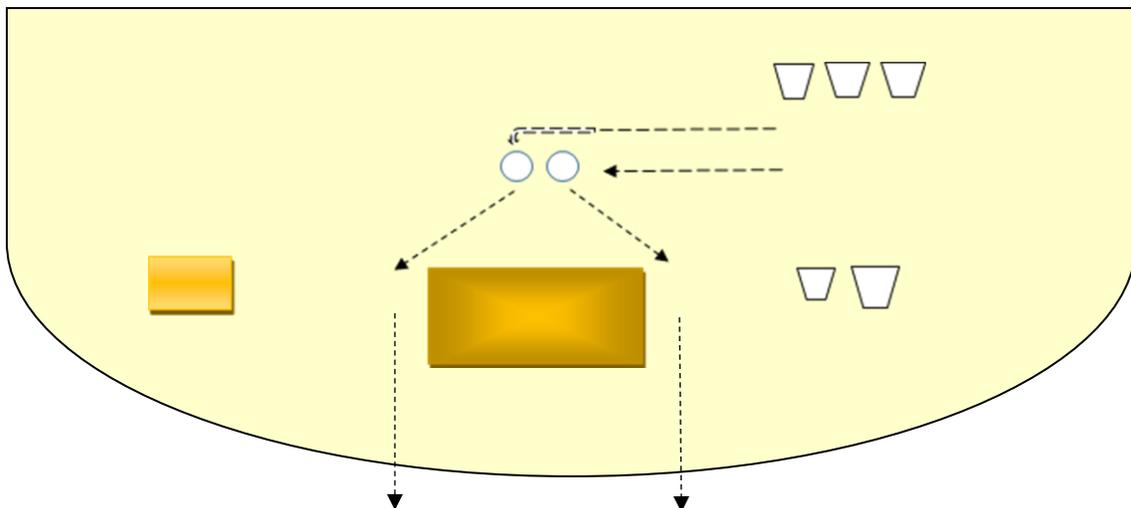


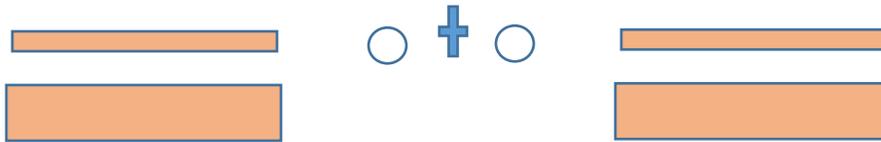


### Exit procession

After the Priest or Deacon dismisses the Faithful with “Go in peace” ....

1. IMMEDIATELY proceed shoulder to shoulder to even with the center of the Altar
2. Turn as one toward the Altar, bow, and proceed to the candles (same as at the Gospel procession)
3. Facing each other, remove the candles in unison
4. Turn towards the Nave and walk directly down the steps of the Sanctuary (do not wait).
5. Walk into the Nave to even with the first pew!!!! (the cross bearer will be between the candle bearers)
6. Reverence the Altar with a head bow when the Priest bows
7. Turn toward the exit and process out. (the turn should be made inward)
8. Return the Candles to the Sacristy and extinguish them using the “bell extinguisher”





## =====**Cross Bearer**=====

### Preparation

1. 5 minutes before mass take your position at the entrance of the church flanked by the candle bearers.

### Entrance Procession

1. Hold the cross with the Corpus 2 to 3 feet above your head if you can safely manage it.
2. Proceed to the Sanctuary Steps flanked by candle bearers (GIRM 120, 188)

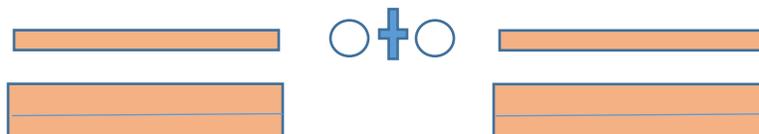


3. Walk at a **moderate pace**, don't rush and don't leave the candle bearers behind.
4. When you reach the sanctuary steps:
  - Stop momentarily
  - Reverence the Altar with a head bow
  - Proceed up the steps, and place the processional cross in its holder

### Exit procession

After the Priest or Deacon dismisses the Faithful with "Go in peace"....

1. Retrieve the processional cross and exit the sanctuary
2. Walk to the first set of pews, turn to face the altar and wait
3. Reverence the Altar with a head bow when the Priest bows
4. Turn toward the exit and process out.
5. Return the processional cross to its holder



## =====Book Bearer=====

### Entrance procession

Seat yourself closest to the credence table

### Opening prayer (the Collect)

1. Retrieve the Roman Missal from the bottom shelf of the credence table during the Gloria when the name of Jesus is said the second time. Wait holding the book at your chair.
2. The lead server will open the book to the proper page.
3. When the Priest says "let us pray", proceed with the missal to his chair and stand holding the open missal. Stand holding the missal as you have been instructed.
4. Return the missal to the credence table after the Collect is prayed.

**Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth. – Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. – Lord Jesus Christ (bow head), only Son of the Father; Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us: you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer. – For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the most high, Jesus Christ (bow head), with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen**

5. During Advent, Lent, or if serving a daily mass and the Gloria is NOT said, retrieve the missal as soon as the Kyrie begins.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

**The Offertory:** After the universal prayer (prayers of the faithful) the offertory begins

### The Offertory Chant or Hymn

Book bearer (or another altar server) will take the basket for the children's collection to the bottom step when the offertory hymn starts. *Remember to bow to the altar before returning to the credence table area.*

### The Preparation of the Altar

When taking items to the altar always leave 4 or 5 feet between you and the person you are following to avoid a line at the altar and avoid running into one another.

Hand items to the one setting the altar, never place them on the altar unless instructed to do so.

If you are handing an item to a Priest always give a simple bow to him after he has taken the item (even if he is not looking at you).

After handing the item to the one setting the altar and bowing (if Priest) turn toward the crucifix, take several steps toward it and then move back to the credence table or your seat.... NEVER turn around as you may run into the server behind you.

Bring the following items to the Altar in this order:

1. Corporals – assist the one setting the altar as usual.
  - a. Open the Corporals to the left, right, up, down.
  - b. Leave a 1 inch gap between the edge of the corporal and the edge of the altar.
2. Cups
  - a. Take one at a time, NEVER more than one per server.
  - b. Hold the cup with both hands.
3. Ciboria that have unconsecrated host in them. Leave empty ciboria on the table until after the rite of peace.
4. Chalice
5. Purificators
6. Water cruet
7. Roman missal

### The Presentation of the Gifts

When the Priest rises we will all rise and descend to the foot of the sanctuary.

Children's collection:

- The one who took the Children's basket should retrieve it immediately.
- Take the Children's collection to the pillar.
- Go to the wine flagon bearer who will be standing beside the altar, remove the stopper and take it to the credence table.

The Priest or Deacon will hand you a gift:

- If the collection, then immediately take it to the pillar and the proceed to the credence table to **prepare for the Lavabo**
- If communion wine, immediately proceed to the right side of the altar. Have the stopper removed and wait for the Priest or Deacon to receive it. Remain at the altar so you can receive the wine flagon back and take it to the credence table. At the credence table put the stopper back in the flagon and then go and wait at your seat or get ready to assist at the lavabo if this duty has been assigned to you.
- If communion bread, immediately proceed to the right side of the altar and wait beside the bearer of the flagon for the Priest or Deacon to receive it. Remain at your position at the altar so you can receive the water cruet back and take it to the credence table. (It is preferable that you carry the cruet in one hand and have the

other hand over your heart). Then go and wait at your seat or get ready to assist at the lavabo if this duty has been assigned to you.

- If the book of petitions, then immediately proceed to the altar and wait for the Priest to receive it. Then go and wait at your seat or get ready to assist at the lavabo if this duty has been assigned to you.
- At the altar, after you receive anything back from the Priest make a simple bow.

### The Lavabo

- After blessing God for the gifts and placing the chalice on the altar, the Priest bows profoundly and says quietly, In spiritu humilitatis (With humble spirit....).
- *GIRM 144. If incense is being used, the Priest then puts some in the thurible, blesses it without saying anything, and incenses the offerings, the cross, and the altar. While standing at the side of the altar, a minister incenses the Priest and then the people.*
- After the Priest has bowed to the altar he will turn towards the credence table for the Lavabo.
- Approach the Priest shoulder to shoulder (bowl on left and cruet on right)
- The one with the water cruet will pour it over the Priest's fingers
- The one with the bowl will hold it under the Priest's fingers and also have the towel over his/her left arm.
- After the Lavabo, bow to the Priest, turn inward, and take the bowl/water back to the credence table and stand in front of your seat.

### **The Eucharistic Prayer:**

The Preface Dialogue: (keep your hands in "joined hands" position please not in an orans position)

### The Sanctus (Holy Holy Holy):

After the Sanctus, all Altar servers will take their places kneeling beside the credence table on the 2<sup>nd</sup> step. The server tasked with ringing the bells should kneel closest to them.

The Epiclesis – the Priest calls down the Holy Spirit upon the offerings. Bells will be rung once.

“and so, Father we bring you these gifts. We **(Bells\*)** ask you to make them Holy by the power of your Spirit, that they may become the body and blood of your son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at whose command we celebrate this Eucharist”

**\*Bells are rung once (GIRM 150)**

### The Institution Narrative and Consecration

- **At the elevation of the Sacred Host the bells are to be rung 3 times**
- **At the elevation of the Precious Blood the bells are to be rung 3 times**

The Mystery of Faith (Mysterium Fidei), The Anamnesis, The Intercessions, The Per Ipsum and Great Amen

**STAND**

**The Communion Rite:**

The Our Father (Pater Noster)

Altar servers will remain on the Sanctuary steps next to the credence table for the Our Father, and sign of peace. (Archdiocese instruction). Altar servers will pray the Our Father with hands in "joined hands" position (not holding hands).

The Rite of Peace (take any empty ciboria on the credence table to Father)

The Lamb of God (Agnus Dei)

- The Priest, Deacon, or Acolyte will now retrieve the Blessed Sacrament from the Tabernacle.
- Stand facing the tabernacle and genuflect when he does.
- Take your places again on the sanctuary steps leaving room for the minister to pass.

**KNEEL**

The Ecce Agnus Dei (behold the Lamb of God...)

After the Priest and the Deacon have received communion, go and stand in front of your seats and wait to receive Holy Communion. Father and/or Deacon will bring Holy Communion to you as usual. After receiving, go and kneel on the sanctuary step and take some time to prayer. After the Priest, Deacon, Acolyte, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion have begun distributing Holy Communion you may begin clearing the Altar.

Clearing the Altar

After distribution of Communion has begun you should clear the altar as usual

- If the Priest has folded the outside Corporals they should be taken from the Altar to the Credence table.
  - Never remove an unfolded corporal
  - Never unfold a folded corporal unless assisting the Priest, Deacon, or Acolyte
- Place the book of petitions on the Priest's chair
- The book bearer should then retrieve the Roman Missal

After Communion

- The Priest will gather the remaining Blessed Sacrament into a ciborium on the altar
- Wait beside the altar for Father to hand you the now empty ciboria
  - Receive a Ciborium
  - Make a simple bow (to father) remembering to turn to your right to avoid a collision.
  - Take the ciborium back to the credence table

- NEVER EVER EVER hold a sacred vessel in a haphazard manner. Hold them reverently. NEVER against your body for they have not been purified and particles or drops of the sacred species may be present.
- Last of all the Priest, Deacon, or Acolyte will take the Blessed Sacrament back to the Tabernacle. When he genuflects, you should genuflect also to your Lord in the Tabernacle.

On behalf of Father and the whole parish I thank you for your diligent and reverent service at the Altar.

=====VESTING PRAYERS=====

**C**assock

O Lord, the portion of my inheritance and my chalice, You are  
He who will restore my inheritance

*Dominus, pars hereditatis meae et calicis mei, tu es qui restitues hereditatem meam.*

**S**urplice

Invest me, O Lord, as a new man, who was created by God in  
justice and the holiness of truth. Amen.

*Indue me, Domine, novum hominem, qui secundum Deum creatus est in iustitia et sanctitate  
veritatis. Amen.*

## Alb

Make me pure, O Lord, and cleanse my heart; that being made pure in the Blood of the Lamb I may deserve an eternal reward.

*Dealba me, Domine, et munda cor meum; ut, in sanguine Agni dealbatus, gaudiis perfruare sempiternis.*

## Cincture

Gird me, O Lord, with the cincture of purity, and quench in my heart the fire of concupiscence, that the virtue of continence and chastity may abide in me. Amen.

*Praecinge me, Domine, cingulo puritatis, et exstingue in lumbis meis humorem libidinis; ut maneat in me virtus continentia et castitatis.*