

## The Deacon In the Mass

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For many Catholics their main encounter with a deacon will be at Mass. As we have seen from previous articles liturgical and sacramental ministry is only one part of the deacon's ministry and for most deacons it will be the smallest part. In this article we will consider the deacon in the celebration of Mass.

The book which outlines how the Mass is celebrated in the Roman or Latin Catholic Church is the General Instruction on the Roman Missal (GIRM). There are a number of forms of celebrating the Roman Rite set out in chapter four and one of these is Mass With a Deacon. Mass with a deacon is set out in section 171-186 of the GIRM. Other sections of GIRM also provide instructions about the ministry of the deacon.

Mass is not a private devotion but the prayer of Christ through his body the Church. GIRM 22 states that, "The celebration of Mass, as the action of Christ and the People of God arrayed hierarchically, is the centre of the whole Christian life for the Church both universal and local, as well as for each of the faithful individually." Clergy and people celebrate this liturgy in different and complimentary ways but always unified in the one sacrifice.

"In celebrations at which the Bishop presides, and especially in the celebration of the Eucharist led by the Bishop himself with the presbyterate, the deacons, and the people taking part, the mystery of the Church is revealed" (GIRM 22). The Church is gathered around its bishop, who is the vicar of Christ, as the community of disciples gathered around the Risen Lord.

It is only in the context of the communion of the Church that the participation of the bishop, priest, deacon and laity make sense and are fully revealed.

We do not have space here to look at the details but only the outline of Mass With a Deacon. The first thing to note is that "When he is present at the Eucharistic Celebration, a deacon should exercise his ministry, wearing sacred vestments." The reason for this instruction is that it allows the Church to see itself more fully when all ministers and laity take their part in the celebration.

The deacon is not a concelebrant, i.e. he does not share any of the presidential prayers which are prayed by the priest alone. He participates as a deacon because he is one and not because he has the permission of the priest. The laity also participates because they are laity and not because the priest gives them permission. The instruction amplifies the meaning of GIRM 22 above.

A dalmatic, in the appropriate liturgical colour over a stole and alb is the proper vesture for a deacon (GIRM 338). The dalmatic is an ancient vestment and unlike a chasuble it has sleeves.

A deacon accompanies the bishop or priest at Mass and walks and sits at his right side. He will accompany the chief celebrant in processions in which the altar is incensed at the start of Mass and at the preparation of gifts.

If there is a Book of the Gospels the deacon processes in immediately before the presider and goes directly to the altar on which he enthrones the Book of the Gospels. He awaits the arrival of the

presider and both venerate the altar with a kiss. If there is no deacon and a Book of the Gospels is used, it is placed on the altar before Mass.

A deacon always proclaims the Gospel. He takes the book from the altar and processes to the ambo or if there is no Book of Gospels goes directly to the ambo. He may incense the book.

Normally the one who presides at Mass preaches. Deacons have the faculty to preach because they are ordained. A priest may delegate a deacon to preach at Mass just as he may delegate to another priest.

It is the deacon who announces the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful. The presider introduces the prayers and offers the prayer which gathers all of the intentions together at the end. If there is no deacon present a lay person may offer the intentions. The reason it is the deacon who announces the intentions is that it links this prayer with the rite of dismissal. The deacon brings the concerns and needs of the world before the community in the prayers and at the end of Mass sends the community on mission to the world.

Deacons assist with the chalice. They prepare it for the priest by mixing the water and the deacon elevates the chalice during the doxology (through with, with him and in him...) while the priest alone prays. At the conclusion of the doxology he joins the people in the great amen. Frequently the deacon will administer the cup at communion time.

Deacons assist the priest celebrant in distributing Communion. At the end of communion he purifies and arranges the sacred vessels. Just as he had previously prepared the altar by arranging the corporal and sacred vessels before the priest prepares the gifts. He may assist with the ciborium to place any of the reserved Blessed Sacrament into the tabernacle and if needed to bring extra hosts from there at communion time.

Throughout the liturgy the deacon may give directions to the people or make announcements, especially those at the end of Mass, unless the priest prefers to do this himself. It is the deacon who invites the people to exchange the sign of peace.

After the final blessing, given by the presider, it is the deacon who sends the community on Christ's mission to the world. After venerating the altar he processes out at the side of the presider.

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