

# Altar Servers



***2011 General Instruction of the Roman Missal  
(GIRM)  
Canadian Edition***

# Overview

- The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (***GIRM***) makes a distinction between a formally instituted acolyte, which is a permanent ministry, and another minister who exercises the ministry of serving.
- A server may exercise the functions of the acolyte, except where the text reads a “formally instituted acolyte.” The word “acolyte” is retained in those places where it is used in the ***GIRM*** to indicate those functions that are considered more important or proper to the acolyte, as mentioned below in no. 187.

# Overview

- The acolyte may have several functions of various kinds and several may occur at the same time. It is therefore desirable that these functions be suitably distributed among several acolytes. But if there is only one acolyte present, that acolyte should perform the more important functions and the rest are distributed among several ministers. (187, 109)

# Overview

- The function of altar servers is regulated by the norms established by the bishop for his diocese. (107)

# Preparation

- *The servers should arrive early to make the necessary preparations for the Liturgy.*

# Vesture

- Wearing the appropriate vesture, the servers join in the procession to the altar with the other ministers.
- The alb is the vestment common to all ministers, ordained and lay (see no.336).
- Acolytes, readers and other lay ministers wear the alb or other vestment that is approved by the Conference of Bishops (see no. 339).

# Entrance Procession

The order of procession is:

- A server with smoking censer, if incense is used;
- The servers carrying lighted candles, and between them an acolyte or server with the cross;
- The acolytes and other ministers;
- The readers, one of whom, if no deacon is present, may carry the Book of the Gospels, slightly elevated;
- The deacon, who may carry the Book of the Gospels;
- The priest who is to celebrate the Mass. (120)

# Approaching the Altar

- When they arrive at the altar the servers and ministers make a profound bow to the altar.
- *They may do this either as they arrive at the altar or as a group. In the latter case, they line up in front of the altar and wait for all the other ministers and the priest to arrive; then together all make a profound bow to altar.*
- There are two kinds of bows: (1) a bow of the head (slight bow), and (2) a bow of the body (profound bow) (275).



# Reverences

- If there is a tabernacle in the sanctuary, the priest, deacon and other ministers genuflect to it when they approach or leave the altar, **but not during the celebration of Mass itself.**
- Ministers who carry the cross or candles bow their heads in place of a genuflection (274).

# In the Sanctuary

- The server with the censer waits at the side of the altar for the priest and deacon and the incensing of the cross and altar.
- The acolyte places the cross near the altar so that it may be used as the altar cross during Mass; otherwise, he places it in a dignified place.
- Those carrying the candles place them on/near the altar.  
(49, 122)

# Taking their Places in the Sanctuary

- Then the servers go to their places in the sanctuary.
- The servers do not sit with the presiding priest, but in a distinct place nearby. The priest's chair ought to stand out as a symbol of his function of presiding over the assembly and directing prayer. (310)
- The chair for the deacon should be placed near that of the celebrant. (189)
- Chairs for the other ministers should be arranged so that they are clearly distinguished from the seats for the clergy, and so that they can conveniently carry out their ministry both at the chair and at the altar. (189, 310)

# Incensing

- *When incense is used, the server with the thurible and boat approaches the priest at the altar. If there is a deacon, the server hands him the boat; otherwise the server hands it to another server or the priest.*
- *After incense has been placed in the thurible, the server hands the thurible to the priest and receives the boat from the deacon or server. (If there is no deacon or other server, the server receives the boat from the priest before handing him the thurible.)*
- *Then the server steps to the side while the priest walks around the altar, incensing the cross and the altar.*
- *Afterwards, the priest hands the thurible to the server, who returns it to its place. (The priest is not incensed at this time.) (49, 123, 276)*

# Collect Prayer

- A server brings the missal to the priest at the chair and holds the book for the Penitential Act, if needed, and for the Collect Prayer. (189)
- The server waits for the people to respond with the acclamation “Amen” before leaving with the missal.

# Liturgy of the Word

- After the Collect Prayer, all sit and listen with reverence to the readings. They join in singing the refrain to the responsorial psalm and the gospel acclamation. (128, 29)

# Gospel Procession

- After the period of silence following the Second Reading, a server brings the boat and thurible to the priest at the chair, if incense is used. After the priest places incense in the thurible, the servers lead the deacon or priest to the altar.
- Meanwhile two other servers take the candles from their places, go to the altar and wait for the priest or deacon. When the priest or deacon comes to the altar and picks up the Book of the Gospels, the servers with the incense and candles lead him in procession to ambo for the reading of the Gospel. (132, 175)

# Gospel Procession

- The procession to the ambo should be a true one. Moving from the altar to the ambo by a direct route may not necessarily make for a good procession. The procession may move around the front of the altar or through part of the assembly.
- The Gospel Acclamation is sung until the procession reaches the ambo. When the Book of the Gospels is not used, the servers with the candles take up their places at the ambo without a formal procession.



# Gospel Procession

- At the ambo, the server with the incense stands behind the ambo, while the servers with candles stand one on each side of it. All face the ambo as a sign of respect. (133)

# Gospel

- After the greeting ***The Lord be with you*** and ***A reading from the gospel according to N.***, the server hands the thurible to the deacon or priest who incenses the Book of the Gospels. Then he returns the thurible to the server.
- After the gospel, the servers return the thurible and candles to their places and go to their seats. (134)

# Profession of Faith - Intercessions

- A server brings the missal to the priest at the chair and holds it for the creed and the intercessions. (137-138)

# Preparation of the Altar

- As the collection begins, an acolyte or the servers prepare the altar.
- They go to the side (credence) table and bring the missal, corporal, pall and purificator to the altar. (139, 73-74. 190, 178)
- If there is a deacon, the servers bring the corporal, pall and purificator to him (178).

# Preparation of the Altar

- The corporal is placed in the centre of the altar.
- The missal is placed on the left side of the corporal.
- The chalice is either placed on the right side of the altar.
- As a rule, the servers never place any object on the corporal in the centre of the altar. They either hand them to the priest or deacon or place them on the side of the altar. (140 and 73)

# Preparation of the Altar

- If Communion is to be given under both kinds, additional chalices may be brought to the altar at this time and placed at the sides of the altar.

# Procession of Gifts

- After the collection has been gathered, the servers assist the priest and deacon in receiving the gifts of bread, wine and money from the people. The gifts are received by the priest then handed to the deacon or servers.
- The server who receives the collection places it at the side (credence) table or another appropriate place and then brings the cruet (pitcher) of water and the chalice to the deacon or priest at the altar. (140, 73-74)

# Procession of Gifts

- The server who receives the cruet of wine follows the priest or deacon to the altar, joins the server with the water and chalice. They hold these until the priest or deacon needs it.
- After the cruets of wine and water are given back to the servers, they get the water, basin (bowl) and towel for the washing of hands and return to the altar.
- They remain at the side of the altar until the priest washes his hands.



# Incensing

- *If incense is used, the server brings the boat and thurible to the altar as the gifts are received and waits.*
- *After the wine and water has been placed in the chalice, the server approaches the priest. If there is a deacon, the server hands him the boat, otherwise he hands it to another server or to the priest.*
- *After incense has been placed in the thurible, the server hands the thurible to the priest and receives the boat from the deacon or the server . (If there is no deacon or other server, the server receives the boat from the priest before handing him the thurible.)*
- *Then the server steps to the side while the priest incenses the gifts, the cross and the altar. Afterward the priests hands the thurible to the deacon or the acolyte or server who incenses the priest and the people.*

# Washing of Hands

- Then the priest washes his hands, and both servers return the pitcher of water, the basin and the towel to the side table and go to their seats. (76, 145)

# Eucharistic Prayer

- A server may ring the bell a little before the consecration and at the showing (elevation) of the consecrated Host and Chalice to the people. The deacon or acolyte or server may incense the consecrated Host and Chalice as the priest shows them to the people.  
(150, 179)

# Eucharistic Prayer

- During the Eucharistic Prayer the servers remain at their places; they do not stand or kneel behind the altar or at the side of the priest.

# Communion

- *In order not to delay the communion of the faithful by the communion of the ministers, it is recommended that only the extraordinary ministers of communion receive communion at the altar. If possible the servers and other ministers should join in the communion procession of the faithful.*
- *During communion of the people, a server may remove the missal from the altar and return it to the side table. If the prayer after communion will be said at the altar, the missal remains on the altar.*

# Purification of the Vessels

- After communion the sacred vessels may be cleansed at the side of the altar or at the credence table.
- If the sacred vessels are cleansed after Communion, either at the altar or the credence table, the servers bring the cruet of water to the deacon or priest.
- An instituted acolyte may help the deacon or priest to cleanse the sacred vessels. In the absence of the deacon, the instituted acolyte may purify them. (279, 183)

# Silent Prayer

- Afterwards, all sit and observe a time of silent prayer.

# Prayer after Communion

- After the time of silent prayer following communion, a server brings the missal to the priest at the chair and holds it for the ***Prayer After Communion*** and, if needed, for the solemn Blessing. (164-5)



# Preparing for the Procession

- After the blessing and dismissal, the servers take the thurible, candles and cross and stand ready at the side of the altar for the procession to begin.

# Procession

- After the priest and deacon kiss the altar, the servers join with him and the other ministers in making a profound bow to the altar.
- Then the servers lead the other ministers in the procession and carry the thurible, candles and cross to the main entrance or sacristy of the church as they did in the entrance. (169, 193, 186)



**Amen**

***The End***