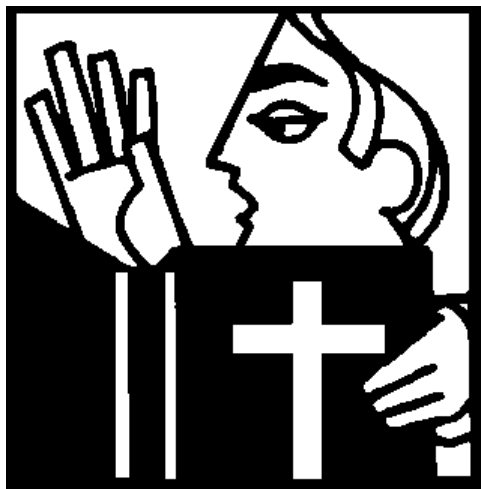


The Role of the Deacon at Mass

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The Role of the Deacon at Mass
based on the
General Instruction of the Roman Missal
as found in the
English Translation According to the Third Typical Edition

(Note: Section citations in parenthesis are from the GIRM)

General Principles

The celebration of Mass, as the action of Christ and of the People of God arrayed hierarchically, is the center of the whole of Christian life for the Church both universal and local, as well as for each of the faithful individually. For in it is found the high point both of the action by which God sanctifies the world in Christ and of the worship that the human race offers to the Father, adoring him through Christ, the Son of God, in the Holy Spirit (16). It is, therefore, of the greatest importance that the celebration of the Mass or the Lord's Supper be so ordered that the sacred ministers and the faithful taking part in it, according to the state proper to each, may draw from it more abundantly those fruits of the Eucharistic Sacrifice of Christ's Body and Blood (17). The entire celebration is to be arranged in such a way that it leads to a conscious, active and full participation of the faithful (18).

The Mass consists of two parts, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, with these being so closely interconnected that they form but one single act of worship. There are also certain rites that open and conclude the celebration (28).

In texts that are to be pronounced in a loud and clear voice, whether by the Priest or the Deacon, by a reader, or by everyone, the voice should correspond to the genre of the text itself (38). The Christian faithful, who come together as one, are to sing together Psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles. Great importance should be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass (39-41). The gestures and bodily posture of the Priest, the Deacon, other ministers, and also of the people, must be conducive to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity, to making clear the true and full meaning of its different parts, and to fostering the participation of all (42-44). Sacred silence also, as part of the celebration, is to be observed at the designated times (45). The parts of the Mass and their purpose are explained in the Individual Parts of the Mass section of the GIRM (46-90).

The duties and ministries in the Mass are found in Chapter III of the GIRM (91-111). All, whether ordained ministers or lay Christian faithful, in fulfilling their function or their duty, should carry out solely but totally that which pertains to them (91). After the Priest, the Deacon, in virtue of the sacred Ordination he has received, holds first place among those who minister in the celebration of the Eucharist. For the sacred Order of the Diaconate has been held in high honor in the Church even from the early time of the Apostles (94).

The different forms of celebrating Mass are noted in Chapter IV of the GIRM. Sections for a Mass without a Deacon and for a Mass with a Deacon are noted. Details for Mass with a Deacon are found in 171-186. Chapters V – IX of the GIRM provide additional important information pertaining to the proper celebration of the Eucharist.

Reflection on the Ministry of the Deacon

A deacon is one ordained to serve the community in charity and justice. That ministry, as in the ministries of bishop and priest and in the Christian witness of all the baptized, is always related to the word and to the altar. The word of God and the sacraments of the Church inform, structure, and give life to the ministry of each person baptized into the death and resurrection of the Lord. Each person participates and shares in the Eucharist according to his or her function and role in the community. No less is true for the deacon. If the deacon's primary ministry is one of service, then his action within the Mass and in all the other rites and celebrations of the Church is modeled on that diakonia. A thorough knowledge and understanding of his functions within the liturgy are important to the deacon's ministry within the community.

Assisting at Mass

In the celebration of the Eucharist, the deacon's role is clearly one of "assisting" the presider. The deacon assists in all the rites of the Mass and carries out many functions within the Eucharist as part of his ministry.

The deacon assists the Priest as needed and walks and sits at his side. When carrying the Book of the Gospels in procession the Deacon precedes the Priest.

During the Introductory Rites the deacon may proclaim the invocations of the Penitential Rite.

The deacon is a minister of the word of God, especially in proclaiming the gospel, preaching and catechesis. At the direction of the Priest Celebrant, the Deacon may give the homily.

The deacon is to lead the general intercessions at Mass. Writing and presenting intercessions in the name of the assembly has traditionally been a diaconal role because it is the deacon, serving among the people in a ministry of charity, who ought to know well the needs of the community. He can give voice to those needs. The deacon, therefore, has an intercessory function within the Mass. In a sense the general intercessions are the prototype of diaconal prayer.

The deacon ministers at the altar, both as regards the chalice and the book. The deacon prepares the altar and the gifts and assists in the communion rite. The deacon assists the priest celebrant in distributing communion and purifies and arranges the sacred vessels.

Throughout the Eucharistic liturgy, and in other rites at which the deacon assists, the deacon also has the role of calling upon the people to respond to prayer, or to exhort them to prayer. This invitatory function is clear in the Mass when the deacon calls upon the people to exchange the sign of peace. The deacon may also ask the people to assume certain postures as called for in the ritual. The deacon sends the people forth by saying the dismissal.

The deacon carries out the duties of other ministers himself, if necessary, when none of them is present.

The deacon has many other ministries in which service and liturgy intermingle. For example, the deacon has traditionally brought communion to the sick and the dying. Such visitation of those in spiritual need is as much a diakonia of liturgy as it is a ministry of charitable service.

The Ministry of the Deacon at the Celebration of the Mass

(GIRM 171-186 and 46-90)

Vesture

The vestment proper to the deacon is the dalmatic, worn over the alb and stole; however, the dalmatic may be omitted out of necessity or on account of a lesser degree of solemnity (119, 338). It is preferable to wear a dalmatic, if available, for more solemn occasions such as Easter, Christmas, Chrism Mass, Holy Thursday, etc.

Preparation for Mass

Preparations for Mass are of utmost importance to the celebration. Generally the deacon oversees preparation for the Mass. As needs dictate, the deacon fulfills the duties of other ministers if none of them is present. Ordinarily the sacristan, pastoral leader, altar servers, master of ceremonies and other ministers help with the preparations. The deacon should make certain that the necessary liturgical books, vessels and vestments are properly arranged for the celebration. The Lectionary should be properly marked for the readings of the day and placed on the ambo. (117-119)

Introductory Rites

(GIRM 172-174, 46-54)

- Vested and carrying the *Book of the Gospels* with the binding to the right and with the book slightly elevated, the deacon precedes the priest on the way to the altar. If the *Book of the Gospels* is already enshrined on the altar, the deacon walks at the priest's side.
- Upon arriving at the altar, if he is carrying the *Book of the Gospels*, the deacon omits the reverence, walks to the altar and places the book there.
- After placing the *Book of the Gospels* on the altar, the deacon joins the priest and venerates the altar with a kiss. However, if he is not carrying the *Book of the Gospels*, the deacon makes a profound bow to the altar with the priest in the customary way and then with him venerates the altar with a kiss. If the tabernacle is located in the sanctuary, the priest, deacon and other ministers who are not carrying sacred items genuflect to it only when they first approach the altar and when they leave the sanctuary, but not during the celebration of Mass itself (274).
- Finally, if incense is used, the deacon assists the priest in placing incense in the censer and incensing the cross and the altar.
- After the incensation, the deacon goes to the chair with the priest, sits next to him, and assists him as required.
- If the sprinkling is used, the deacon assists the presider.
- If the Penitential Rite C is used, the deacon may announce or sing the invocations. The deacon may lead the Kyrie if the Confiteor is used. See the Order of Mass Introductory Rites in the *Roman Missal* as well as the Sample Invocations for the Penitential Act, Appendix VI.
- The deacon sits next to the priest in order to assist him as necessary.

The Liturgy of the Word

(GIRM 175-177, 55-71)

- The deacon remains seated at his place for the Liturgy of the Word until the time of the Gospel.
- If incense is used, the deacon assists the priest when he places incense in the censer during the singing of the *Alleluia* or other chant.
- Then the deacon makes a profound bow before the priest and asks for the blessing, saying in a low voice: "**Your blessing, Father.**" The priest blesses him: "*May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips that you may proclaim His Gospel worthily and well, in the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit*" The deacon signs himself with the sign of the cross and responds: **Amen.**
- Then after a bow to the altar, the deacon takes the *Book of the Gospels* which was placed on the altar and processes to the ambo, slightly elevating the book. A thurifer carrying a smoking thurible and ministers with lighted candles may precede him.

- At the ambo the deacon greets the people, with hands joined, saying, "**The Lord be with you.**" After this, he says, "**A reading from the Holy Gospel according to _____**" while signing the book with his thumb and afterwards, signs himself on his forehead, mouth and breast.
- If incense is used, the deacon incenses the book and proclaims the Gospel reading.
- After the reading, the deacon acclaims without raising the book, "**The Gospel of the Lord,**" to which all respond: "*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*"
- Then he venerates the book with a kiss and the deacon says quietly: "**Through the words of the gospel may our sins be wiped away**". (When the deacon is assisting the Bishop, he carries the book to him to be kissed, or else kisses it himself if the Bishop prefers that the deacon do this. In more solemn occasions the Bishop may impart a blessing to the people with the *Book of the Gospels*).
- The deacon then returns to the priest's side. While the priest is the usual homilist, he may delegate the deacon to do so. The deacon may preach the homily or this may be done by the presiding priest.
- If not preaching, the deacon may carry the *Book of the Gospels* to the credence table or to another suitable and dignified place.
- If there is no other qualified reader present, then the deacon may deliver the other readings as well. However, every effort should be made to insure the presence of lectors for the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy.

- After the Creed and after the priest introduces the intercessions, the deacon announces or sings the intentions from the ambo or another suitable place. (See the *Roman Missal*, Appendix V, Examples of Formularies for the Universal Prayer 1-11). He remains at the ambo while the priest concludes the intercessions with a prayer. It is fitting that the deacon composes and reads the petitions of the Prayer of the Faithful (94, 171, 177)

In the absence of a deacon, a cantor, lector or one of the lay faithful may announce the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful (71, 138).

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

(GIRM 178-181, 72-83)

- After the Universal Prayer, while the priest remains at the chair, the deacon prepares the altar, assisted by the acolyte, but it is the deacon's place to take care of the sacred vessels himself. The deacon oversees the arrangement of the corporal, the paten, the vessels and the *Roman Missal*.
- Then the bread and the wine are brought forth by the people to an appropriate place. The deacon assists the priest in accepting the gifts of the people according to the local custom.
- After the gifts are brought to the altar, the deacon hands the priest the paten with the bread to be consecrated. The priest says "Blessed are you..." to which all respond "Blessed be God for ever." Then the deacon pours wine into the primary chalice (and additional cups if they have not already been filled prior to being placed on the altar). He then pours a little water into the primary chalice only, saying quietly: "***By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.***" Then the deacon presents the chalice to the priest who again says the prayer with the peoples' response.
- If incense is used, the deacon assists the priest with the incensation of the gifts, the cross and the altar. Afterward he may incense the priest and the people if the solemnity of the occasion calls for this action.
- During the Eucharistic Prayer, the deacon stands near but slightly behind the priest, so that when necessary he may assist the priest with the chalice or the *Roman Missal*.
- As a general rule when able, the deacon kneels from the epiclesis until the elevation and showing of the chalice by the priest. That is, kneel when the priest extends his hands over the gifts until he says "The mystery of faith." If age or physical condition makes it difficult for the deacon to kneel or the presiding priest needs his assistance because of age or physical condition, the deacon may remain standing. If there are two deacons assisting at a Mass and one is unable to kneel, both should remain standing to maintain a uniform posture.
- When incense is used and if there are several deacons present, one of them may go to place incense in the thurible for the consecration and then incenses the host and the chalice at the elevation.
- At the concluding doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer, the deacon stands next to the priest, and holds the chalice elevated while the priest elevates the paten with the host, until the people have acclaimed, *Amen*. (The doxology is the prayer of the priest alone.)

The Communion Rite

(GIRM 181-183, 84-89 and Norms for Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion found in the *Roman Missal following the GIRM*)

- After the priest has said the prayer for peace and the greeting "*The peace of the Lord be with you always*" and the people have made the response "*And with your spirit,*" the deacon may invite all to exchange the sign of peace, saying, with hands joined and facing the people: "***Let us offer each other the sign of peace***". He himself receives the sign of peace from the priest and may offer it to the other ministers near him.
- As the *Agnus Dei* or *Lamb of God* is begun, the priest alone or with the assistance of the deacon, and if necessary of concelebrating priests, breaks the Eucharistic Bread. Other empty ciboria are then brought to the altar if this is necessary. The deacon or priest places the consecrated bread in several ciboria or patens for the distribution of Holy Communion. If it is not possible to accomplish this distribution in a reasonable time, the celebrant may call upon the assistance of other deacons or concelebrating priests. (*Norms Part II, No. 37*)
- After the priest's communion, the deacon receives under both kinds from the priest himself. When communion is given under both kinds, the deacon ministers the chalice.
- If extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are required by pastoral need, they approach the altar after the priest receives Communion. After the priest has concluded his own Communion, he distributes Communion to the extraordinary ministers, assisted by the deacon, and then hands the sacred vessels to them for distribution of Holy Communion to the people. (*Norms Part II, No. 38*)
- When the distribution is completed, the deacon immediately and reverently consumes at the altar all of the Blood of Christ which remains. He may be assisted, if needs dictate, by other deacons and priests or by Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion who consume what remains of the Precious Blood after distribution of Holy Communion. (*Norms No. 52*)
- After communion, the deacon returns to the altar with the priest and collects any remaining fragments. The deacon then takes the chalice and other vessels to the side table, where he purifies and arranges them in the usual way while the priest returns to the chair. It is permissible to leave the vessels, suitably covered and at a side table on a corporal, to be purified immediately after Mass following the dismissal of the people. The deacon is to ensure that this important matter is tended to with reverence. The deacon may be assisted by an instituted acolyte for the purifying. (*Norms No. 53*) After Mass, Extraordinary Ministers may assist with further cleaning of the vessels already purified.



Concluding Rite

(GIRM 184-186, 90)

- Following the *Prayer after Communion*, if there are any brief announcements, the deacon may make them, unless the priest prefers to do so himself.
- If a solemn formula for the blessing or a prayer over the people is used, the deacon says: "***Bow down for the blessing.***"
- After the priest's blessing, the deacon, with hands joined and facing the people, dismisses them, saying one of the following dismissals:

"Go forth, the Mass is ended."

OR

"Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord."

OR

"Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life."

OR

"Go in peace."

- Together with the priest, the deacon venerates the altar with a kiss, makes a profound bow, (if there is a tabernacle in the sanctuary, all genuflect) and leaves in a manner similar to the entrance procession.
- The above procedure for a Mass with a deacon is also followed in the usual way for a concelebrated Mass. A concelebrating priest does not assume the diaconal functions at the Mass when a deacon is present. (116, 171, 208, 215)

Assisting at Mass with a Bishop

In the reformed liturgy of the Roman Rite, especially as outlined in the Roman Pontifical, the deacon always assists the bishop, whether in the cathedral or in a parish church. Deacons assist the bishop in all the rites of ordination, not just those of deacons but also in the ordinations of bishops and priests. Deacons assist the bishop at the altar even if priests are present for it is not the role of priests to assist at the altar unless a deacon is absent. (116)