

Defined Terms for Altar Servers

The Sanctuary: The raised area in the front of the church. It is considered a holy and special area because this is where the sacrifice of the Mass is offered and where the word of God is read. It should be approached with great respect.

The following articles are located in the sanctuary.

Altar - The large stone table in the center of the sanctuary. The Altar represents two parts of the same mystery, the table on which a sacrifice is offered and the table which Jesus celebrated the Last Supper.

Altar Stone - A small flat stone containing the relics of at least two canonized martyrs or saints. The stone, consecrated by the bishop, is placed in a carved out area on the Altar. The hosts and chalice are placed on the stone during the sacrifice of the Mass. The custom of the stone and putting relics in the stone reminds us of the early church when the Mass was offered in the catacombs. These early Altars were simply a stone placed over the tomb of a martyr. The altar at St. Alban's contains the relics of Saints Clement, Irenaeus and Aurelius.

Altar Candles – The candles located on each end of the Altar. They symbolize the triumph of light over darkness (good over evil).

Tabernacle - A safe-like box, made of metal and sometimes covered inside and out with wood, where the Eucharist is kept. The doors to the tabernacle lock with a key.

Sanctuary Lamp - A single candle in its own stand, or it may be mounted on a wall. It is always located next to the tabernacle. When the candle is burning it signifies that the Eucharist is present within it.

Credence Table – The table located to the left of the Altar, used to hold the purificators, chalices, and other items needed for the celebration of Mass.

Lectern (Ambo) – The platform where the readings and homily take place.

Baptismal Font - The structure containing holy water, used to baptize. Typically the font is an immersion pool or bowl on a pedestal.

Paschal Candle – A large candle, generally found in church by the baptismal pool/font. It is lit for the first time at the Easter Vigil and is used throughout the Christian year to remind us that Christ is our light

Presidential Chair – The chair, located near the altar, where the priest leads the prayers and rites of the church.

Sacristy - The room where the priests dress and where Mass items are kept.

Chalice - The metal cup (either gold or silver) used to hold the wine that will be consecrated and distributed to the assembly at Mass.

Main Chalice – The chalice the priest uses during Mass, which is usually more prominent than the other chalices.

Ciborium - A metal container with a lid used to store consecrated hosts in the tabernacle.

Book of the Gospels - A large ceremonial book containing the Sunday Gospels.

Sacramentary - The book of prayers and instructions used by the priest during the liturgy.

Pall - A piece of cardboard, covered with linen and embroidered on one side; -- used to put over the chalice. It is also the name of the large cloth placed over the casket during funerals.

Flagon (Pitcher) - The pitcher used to hold the wine which will become the Blood of Christ during the consecration.

Paten - The Paten is the plate used to hold the hosts which will become the consecrated body of Jesus.

Purificator - A long narrow piece of folded linen cloth, which sometimes has a small cross sewn on. It is used by the priest and Eucharistic Minister to wipe the chalice after a person takes a drink from it.

Corporal - A square piece of linen folded four times and has a cross sewn on it. The word “corporal” comes from the Latin word "corpus", meaning body. It is called a corporal because the body of Jesus rests on it.

Bowl and Cruet - A small bowl is used to wash the fingers of the priest during Mass. The cruet is a small container which looks like a tiny pitcher and is used to pour water over the priest’s fingertips during the offertory. It is also used when the priests mixes water and wine during the consecration. Water is mixed with the wine depicting the blood and water which poured from the side of Jesus when He died on the cross.

Hand Towel - Used by the priest to dry his fingers after the ceremonial washing at the offertory..

Items Used During Mass

Vestments

Vestments are what the priest and altar servers wear during Mass.

Alb - A long white linen robe worn by the priest and altar servers. The alb is a symbolic of the garment which Jesus wore and illustrates that the one wearing it is serving others. Its color symbolizes the purity to which a servant is called.

Cincture - A cord made of silk or cotton with tassels on the ends. It is used around the waist to secure the alb so that it will not interfere with walking. The cincture reminds us of the cord that was used to tie Jesus to the pillar. It symbolizes the binding of ones self against evil and preparing to do good.

Stole - A long strip of cloth worn by the priest around his neck and shoulders. It is a symbol of the clerical office, immortality, and the yoke of Christ (complete dependence upon him).

Chasuble - A very large piece of cloth worn over the alb and stole by the priest. The origin of its name comes from the Latin word “chasuble” meaning “little house.” It was originally a cone- shaped, all weather cloak in Roman times, with only an opening for the head and a little hood. In later years it was heavily decorated and became every cumbersome, so the sides were cut out. The chasubles worn today reflect the Liturgical colors (white, red, green, and violet). Most chasubles have stoles which match them. The symbol of the chasuble, as is the stole, is the yoke of Christ (complete dependence upon him). It is also symbolizes charity.

Color of Vestments and Altar Cloth

The color of vestments give expression to the mysteries of our faith and is like a calendar for the church year.

White - Masses of Easter, Christmas season, Feasts and Memorials of Jesus, Mary, the Angels, Saints who were not martyrs, Weddings, and Funerals, symbolizes Purity, Holiness, Joy, Triumph, and the Resurrection.

Red - Used on Passion Sunday (Palm Sunday), Good Friday, Pentecost, feasts of the Apostles, Evangelists and Martyrs. Red symbolizes the Holy Spirit and the blood of martyrs.

Green - Used during Ordinary time, symbolizing Life, Growth and Hope.

Violet - Used during Lent and Advent, symbolizing Penance, Atonement and Expiation.

Gold - More festive than white, which may be used on more solemn days such as Easter and Christmas, and also symbolizes Joy, Triumph and the Resurrection.

Items Used for Special Celebrations

The Monstrance - The Monstrance looks like a sun burst with a glass center. The back of the Monstrance has a small door. The inside holds a glass container called the Luna.

The priest puts a consecrated host in the Luna, and places the Luna in the Monstrance. The Monstrance is then placed on the Altar for Benediction or Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

Incense, Incense Boat, Censer - Incense is perfumed grains that are burned during special occasions. An Incense Boat is the container that holds the unburned incense. The Censer is a metal container that holds hot coals. It has a top with air vents and a long chain so that it can be carried. Incense is scooped out of the incense boat and sprinkled on the hot coals in the censer. When the incense is burned it makes smoke. Incense symbolizes our prayers ascending to God, it is used as a blessing and it reminds us of the gifts frankincense and myrrh given to baby Jesus by the Magi.

The Processional Cross - A Cross on a long handle or stick. It is carried at the front of a procession during special celebrations.

The Aspergillum and Container - the Aspergillum, or sprinkler, usually looks like a ball on a handle. The priest puts the Aspergillum in a container of Holy Water, so that water will get inside the Aspergillum through little holes. The priest then walks through the church and blesses everyone by sprinkling them using the Aspergillum. This is used on special celebrations.

The Hand Bells - There are usually three bells attached to a single handle. The ringing of the bells let people know that something important is happening. Bells are used during special celebrations.

The Ministers at Mass

Priest - Specially ordained men who consecrate and offer the Body and Blood of Jesus at Mass. They forgive sins, perform baptisms, marriages, funerals, run the parish and lead the people closer to God. Their ordination to the priesthood can be traced to the Apostles who were the first priests after Jesus.

Deacon - A Deacon is like a priest in training. He can assist in preaching, perform baptism, marriages, and help run the parish. He does not offer mass or hear confessions.

Altar Servers - A young boy or girl, or an adult who is specially trained to assist the priest at mass.

Eucharistic Minister - A person who is specially conferred by the Bishop to assist the priest in giving communion. There are usually three Eucharistic Ministers assisting at mass, two Ministers of the Blood of Christ and one Minister of the Body of Christ. They also can bring communion to people who are sick at home or in the hospital.

Lector - The person who reads the Epistles (first and second readings) and the Prayers of the Faithful at mass. He or she walks at the head of the procession into and out of church carrying the Book of the Gospels.

Sacristan - The person who takes care of the sacristy. He or she helps the priest keep track of all the church supplies, sets up for mass, takes care of all the vessels, linens, laundry, and cleans the church.

Bishop - A Bishop is higher than a priest, he's like their boss. He has the authority to ordain priests. This authority is given to him by the Pope.

Cardinal - A Cardinal is a high church official ranking next in line to the Pope. He assists and advises the Pope, consecrates Bishops and elects the Pope.

Pope - The Pope is the supreme authority of the Catholic Church. He is sometime called "Pontiff" and "Holy See", and will be the leader of the church until he dies.

Most of the information above was gathered with permission from the following web site:
http://holytrinity-saintmary.org/altar_server_training_manual.htm.