

Welcoming the ROMAN MISSAL THIRD EDITION

Deepen, Nurture, Celebrate

Ministries and Roles within the Liturgical Assembly at Mass



When the Church comes together in the liturgical assembly to celebrate the Mass, or any other sacrament, her members do not gather simply as a crowd. They gather in a variety of ministries and roles. If we are to understand the significance of these ministries and roles, we must begin with Baptism, for only one who through Baptism has been given a share in the priesthood of Christ is capable of participating in the public worship which is the liturgy of the Church. In fact, the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* of the Second Vatican Council tells us that participation in the liturgy is the **right** and **duty** of all the baptized.

Each time the members of the Church gather to worship, they do so because their baptism demands this of them. While all share in the priesthood of Christ, some members of the Church are called by God to serve in the ministerial priesthood as bishops and priests. Bishops and priests are privileged to act in the liturgy in the very person of Christ, on behalf of his people. A bishop is the chief shepherd, the principal liturgist of his diocese and, in that role, is the successor of the Apostles. Others by God's grace are ordained to the ministry of deacon. In the Mass, deacons proclaim the Gospel and assist the priest at the altar.

In addition to the ordained ministries, there are roles in the liturgy which are exercised by lay people who place their time and talent at the service of the liturgical assembly as acolytes, altar servers, lectors, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, cantors, choir members, instrumentalists, leaders of song and ushers. Others contribute their time and talent to planning and organizing the liturgy, to keeping the church and the vestments, vessels and appointments clean and well-ordered or to providing decorations that reflect the spirit of the liturgical feast or season. The *General Instruction* states: "... all, therefore, whether they are ordained ministers or Christian faithful, in fulfilling their offices or their duty, should carry out solely but completely that which pertains to them." There is a wide variety of duties, and it is desirable that different individuals exercise them so that the talents and gifts God has placed within the Christian community are fully utilized.

Those engaged in liturgical roles need to be well-prepared for those roles and to know how to carry them out with reverence, dignity and understanding. Obtaining the

proper preparation requires a further gift of time on the part of the person being prepared as well as on the part of those in the parish responsible for the training of liturgical ministers. Finally, the practical task of assigning individuals to particular Masses and organizing the distribution of roles is another indispensable element in the fabric of well-ordered liturgical ministry in a parish.

But before individuals can be prepared for liturgical roles, there must first be individuals who are willing to assume those roles. All the baptized need to understand that part of their duty regarding liturgy is to accept some responsibility for the liturgy, to place themselves and their God-given talents at the service of the liturgical community whenever possible. If liturgy is a duty as well as a right, then part of that duty for those able to undertake these tasks is the responsibility to assume such key roles as those of lector, server or acolyte, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, usher, choir member, etc. . Whether one brings up the gifts at the Presentation, reads the Word of God, assists with the distribution of Communion, serves at the altar, provides music that enhances the celebration, or greets the faithful as an usher, he or she is contributing to the worship of the community and fulfilling the responsibility that comes with Baptism. The celebration of liturgy is not just the responsibility of the pastor.

This catalogue of roles might give the impression that those who are not exercising one of these roles are free to sit back passively and simply let the liturgy happen around them. Nothing could be further from the truth. The liturgy is not only the right of those who come together, it is their responsibility. That responsibility includes full engagement throughout the liturgical celebration. The baptized faithful are called to join in praise and thanksgiving in song and spoken word; to listen attentively to God's Word; to add their prayer for the Church, the world, and all in need during the General Intercessions. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, they join their prayer to that of the priest, offering Christ the Victim, *together with him* and offer themselves as well (*GIRM*, 95).

In their sincere efforts to participate, those present also minister to one another. Their attention and active engagement in the celebration can draw from the priest and the other ministers the best they have to offer. Their enthusiastic song and verbal responses made with conviction can encourage others to sing and respond; their very presence at the celebration of Mass supports and reinforces others who have made the same choice.

The liturgy, then, is about the action of God's own people, one body with different gifts. Each office and role, from that of bishop to that of usher, is one of service, not of privilege, a mirror of Christ who washed the feet of his disciples and instructed his followers to imitate his example.

Based upon Roman Missal Formational Materials provided by the Secretariat for the Liturgy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2010.