

The Ministry of Sacristan

An Introduction to the New Words of the Mass

Ashbourne-Donaghmore Parish



The role of the modern sacristan developed from the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, that all members of the Church should: “take a full, conscious, and active part in the liturgical celebrations.....”(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 14). Since the Second Vatican Council the role of the contemporary sacristan in the life of the parish has been an active one involving creative skill, liturgical knowledge, organisational abilities and diplomacy. The “Sacristan” emerged from his/her domain - the sacristy – to become a minister in his/her own right and a member of the liturgical team. The sacristan became someone who knew the purpose and meaning of the liturgy as well as the needs of the liturgical assembly, giving the members the tools that they needed when they needed them and keeping a watchful eye on the house of God and the liturgical environment. The Sacristan works as a member of a team, not only with his/her fellow sacristans but also with the parish clergy, altar servers, lectors and extraordinary ministers, and through these developing relationships and the preparation for the various liturgies helping themselves and others develop their relationship with God.

The words we say and hear at Mass are about to change. The new translation seeks to reclaim the richness of the original Latin texts and will employ a more formal style than we use in ordinary conversation. As with all change, it will take time, but it should help us better appreciate the meaning of the faith we declare at Mass. These changes will involve a certain amount of change for each ministry in the life of our parish. The following is an aid to your ministry.

1. Will I have to change anything I do?

You will need to know the same changes to sung and spoken responses and prayers as everyone else. Sacristans will also need to become used to a different altar missal, and possibly other available booklets/resources during the time of transition from the old missal to the new one.

The new altar missal is due to be published in two formats:

Altar edition.

Study edition.

Apart from the new texts of the Order of Mass, most other things should remain unchanged. There will eventually be a new Lectionary to go with the new Missal, but this will not happen for several years.

2. Are there any texts in the Mass that speak especially to my ministry?

The ‘Berakah’ prayers at the presentation of the gifts:

...through your goodness we have received
the bread we offer you:
fruit of the earth and work of human hands...

the wine we offer you:
fruit of the vine and work of human hands...

We trace the origins of the Eucharistic prayer to a Jewish prayer, known as the “berakah.” For example, the form of the prayer used by Jesus over the cup at the Last Supper began by praising God for all creation, especially the creation of life. God was then praised for his workings in human history. Finally there was a request that God’s creative and redemptive action be continued and renewed. The apostles, gathering for table fellowship after Christ’s resurrection and ascension, did so “in memory” of the Lord a tradition that was used until the new, longer Eucharistic prayers were formulated. The offering of bread and wine is the work of human hands - the hands of the Sacristan—in their preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist, and so they unite their work and prayer to that of the assembly.

Also, in Eucharistic Prayer III:

...from the rising of the sun to its setting
a pure sacrifice may be offered to your name.

3. How can I prepare for the change?

There are many ways in which you can prepare for the changes in the Mass:

- Make a conscious effort to participate more fully in the Mass each week.
- Take advantage of any special catechetical sessions offered by our parish or diocese.
- Visit the Roman Missal Web site (www.usccb.org/romanmissal or www.liturgy-ireland.ie/Romanmissalfinal.htm) to study the new texts and to learn more about the changes.
- Read the new texts of the people’s parts at Mass. Begin to study them so that you will be able to pray them well when the new Roman Missal is implemented.
- Familiarise yourself with the “ribbons” of the New Missal and the various sections to be marked for the celebration of the Mass (For example, the prayers of the Mass, Gloria, Preface etc)
- Pray for a renewal of love for the Liturgy in your parish and in the Church.

4. What other aspects of my ministry could I look at?

Sacristans usually have to work in close collaboration with many other liturgical ministers (Ministers of Holy Communion, Readers, Servers, Musicians etc). It can be useful to examine whether there might be better ways of doing this. Sometimes we end up doing things less efficiently, and even less charitably, than we could do because “we’ve always done it that way” !

Sacristans and ministers of the environment — cleaners, those who do the flowers, those who launder the linens, etc — are often the unsung heroes of what goes on behind the scenes. Other people do not usually see their ministry in action, but only the results of it. .

Useful resources

Irish Bishop’s Conference

<http://www.liturgy-ireland.ie/Romanmissalfinal.htm>

Liturgy Office of England & Wales

<http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Ministry/Readers.pdf>

The Ministry of Liturgical Environment

Joyce Ann Zimmerman, Liturgical Press, ISBN 0-8146-2705-6 [available via Columba]

Guide for Sacristans

Corinna Laughlin and Paul Turner, LTP, ISBN 978-1-56854-746-6 [available from McCrimmons]

Liturgical Ministry: a practical guide to spirituality

Donna M. Cole, Resource Publications, ISBN 0-89390-372-8