

## *HOLY REDEEMER PARISH*

### *Guidelines for Liturgical Ministers*

There are many official Church documents that define, describe and regulate the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy, the Mass. Key among these are the documents from the Second Vatican Council, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, the code of Canon Law and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In reviewing these sources there are several things to note in summary. First, the language treats the Eucharist as something distinct and superlative in our Catholic experience. Second, the Eucharist is at the heart of our Catholic life, and therefore the most important thing we do. Without it, nothing else makes sense. Finally, the Mass is an action of Jesus Christ entrusted to His Church. All three of these become reasons why the Church carefully regulates the conduct of the Eucharist and why every detail about how we celebrate the Mass is important. Our conduct of the Liturgy is a value statement to God, our brothers and sisters, and ourselves. To assist us, the Church provides particular texts, prescribes postures and gestures, and assigns particular roles.

While rules about good liturgical participation apply to all who gather for worship, those who fulfill any liturgical ministry assume an even greater responsibility to exemplify the best in worship detail. The attitude and action of liturgical ministers sets the tone and gives example to all worshipers. A variety of qualities or attitudes are called for in worship. These include reverence, order, dignity, nobility, solemnity, faithfulness, authenticity, warmth and joy. All of these must be integrated, even if at first glance there may seem to be tension. Can one event be both solemn and joyful? How can I blend order and dignity with warmth and authenticity?

Throughout our worship experience it is important to remember that in the Eucharist, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is made present in a mystical but real way. This is no simple or casual event, and the manner of our worship should communicate this profound reality to others. In our Catholic teaching, we speak of the Mass as the foretaste of the heavenly liturgy, which is poetically described in the Book of Revelation. On earth, in every Mass, we join Jesus Christ in His solemn prayer to the Father.

We (especially priests) approach the celebration of the liturgy with an obligation to follow the directives given by the Church. This is done with an awareness of options available and specific freedoms granted, some interpretation of those directions, and with matters of taste and preference. Additionally there are the more subtle dimensions of style, attitude and tone. Within the legitimate parameters provided by the Church, every celebration of the Mass will not be exactly alike.

All of the above leads us to some specific practical guidelines for those engaged in liturgical ministry. All liturgical ministers are expected to engage in active and informed participation in the Mass. Their attention to posture and gesture, exemplary use of the Missalettes and hymnals, and praying aloud and singing should be an example to all. They should be attentive to the flow of liturgy, which recognizes their ministry as fitting integrally into a whole. Finally, their attire should bespeak the special dignity of their

roles as well as the Sunday Liturgy itself. This is especially true for those who have a high degree of visibility (readers, extra-ordinary ministers of the Eucharist and music ministers). Our special participation in the “Wedding Feast of the Lamb” ought to be accorded the same degree of attention to dress as would our attendance at the wedding of family or friends. Whereas a jacket and tie on a man, or the equivalent degree of dress on a woman would be commendable, they are not required. On the other hand, clothing more common to labor or recreation is inappropriate (i.e. blue jeans, t-shirts, sweatshirts and shorts). In terms of modesty, the rule is the same for men and women: shoulders and/or underarms should not be exposed, and necklines should not be lower than the clavicle, so as not to expose the upper chest. In other words, no cleavage should be showing.

Liturgical ministers are encouraged to always dress as if they were going to actually serve whenever they come to Sunday Mass. This will enable them to be ready to substitute for someone else. Also the example will raise the clothing standard for all who participate in Mass.

In one sense the Liturgy is the most common thing we do. On a weekly basis we gather to worship according to an established structure and pattern. At the same time it is the most significant action we do. It will always take a greater effort in order to maintain an attitude and style that keeps it distinctive.