



# What is an Acolyte?

Fr. Todd Angele

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Altar servers are commonly referred to as acolytes. Why is that and what is an acolyte? The Catholic Encyclopedia has the following to say on the subject: An acolyte is a cleric promoted to the fourth and highest minor order in the Latin Church, ranking next to a subdeacon. The chief offices of an acolyte are to light the candles on the altar, to carry them in procession, and during the solemn singing of the Gospel; to prepare wine and water for the sacrifice of the Mass; and to assist the sacred ministers at the Mass, and other public services of the Church. In the ordination of an acolyte the bishop presents him with a candle, extinguished, and an empty cruet, using appropriate words expressive of these duties. Altar boys are often designated as acolytes and perform the duties of such. When a member of the Archconfraternity of St. Stephen is serving the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass or some other liturgical function, he is fulfilling an office which is so important that it is actually one of the minor orders given as a step toward the sacred priesthood. As stated above, the order of acolyte is, in fact, the highest of the minor orders. The next two steps toward the priesthood after the order of acolyte are the sub-deaconate and the deaconate, which together with the priesthood itself form the major orders.

When one considers that the office of serving Holy Mass, the very duty of looking after this sublime mission is conferred by a bishop by means of the highest of the minor orders, one sees more clearly the importance Holy Mother Church places on the service rendered by those who look after the sacred ceremonies of the Catholic liturgy. How does the mind of the Catholic Church on this matter compare to estimation of Guild members in this regard? Isn't it true that all too often those entrusted with the sacred office of the acolyte do not esteem this grand privilege as they should? A few simple questions will help the member of the Guild of St. Stephen examine himself in this regard. Does the Guild member fulfill the promises

he made upon enrolment, that is does he serve reverently, intelligently and punctually? He serves reverently if he pays attention to what he is doing in the sanctuary; if he does so for the glory of God. He serves intelligently when he takes the time and puts out the effort to learn the duties he must perform while serving the liturgical functions. In order for the Guild member to be truly intelligent in his serving of Holy Mass and other functions, he must not be satisfied with mediocrity. Hence, he will continue studying his Latin until he has truly mastered its pronunciation. Too frequently servers are satisfied by putting an "O" at the end of every word in the first half of the Confiteor and an "M" at the end of every word in the second half. The truly conscientious server applies himself to pronouncing the Latin correctly.

Punctuality is such an important attribute for a Mass server that Fr. Hamilton MacDonald included it in the promises the postulants make upon arriving at full membership. Isn't it a truly edifying thing to see servers of all ages who look forward to fulfilling the office entrusted to them in the sanctuary? The Archconfraternity of St. Stephen has many members throughout the world who are thoroughly reliable. When they are scheduled to serve everyone rests at ease, knowing that the servers will arrive, will be on time and will attend to their duties with respect and diligence. These are servers who do not need to be begged or coerced to serve the Holy Sacrifice, for they know how much their service pleases Our Lord and how many blessings it brings down upon themselves and their families. It is true for everyone that from time to time fatigue can set in for a number of reasons, but the diligent server does not let this get in the way. If he knows he will not be able to make it to the church to serve, the responsible Guild member organizes a replacement, and a fervent server considers himself fortunate to have been asked to replace one of his fellow servers. In the Archconfraternity of St. Stephen there are many such good examples. Some of the most fervent members actually lin-

ger around the sacristy hoping that one or another will not turn up and they will be able to replace someone! There are a few other things servers can do that show their respect for the office they fill. Those servers show a greater understanding of the grandeur of their mission when they arrive in the sacristy in a presentable fashion. Clean hands and faces, combed hair and clean shoes are good indications that the server understands the respect owed to the sanctuary. Let members of the Archconfraternity of St. Stephen be keenly aware of the view Holy Mother Church takes of the duties they perform. Are these duties difficult to carry out? No. Is it because of that they are lowly and unimportant? By no means! The highest of the minor orders confers the dignity to look after these duties. It is for this reason that girls do not serve the Holy

Sacrifice. If one ever wondered why girls do not serve Holy Mass, his answer lies in the fact the Mass server is actually performing duties that are attached to one of the steps leading to the sacred priesthood. Now, as is well known, women may not become priests. Therefore it is not fitting that they perform those duties attached to sacred orders. Very often, it is through the serving of Holy Mass that a boy first realizes he is being called to the priesthood. Serving the Holy Sacrifice can awaken such a desire in a person. The fact that girls do not serve the Dread Mysteries helps to teach the faithful the Catholic truth that the priesthood is reserved by Our Lord to men. Let the men who serve, then—whether they be men in fact or men in potency—be truly grateful for the wonderful gift that is theirs; the gift of fulfilling the office of an acolyte.

## Letter to an Altar Boy

Rev. Fr. David E. Rosage

Dear Jimmy,

We have All-American football players and basketball players, All-American executives, and what have you. Why should we not have All-American altar boys? In my opinion they rate as high as any of our other All-Americans.

To be an All-American football player or a first-class basketball player, or to get into the major leagues, requires a lot of hard work, long hours of practice, and years of training. Besides, a player must have special qualifications to begin with. Now what qualifications must a boy have to become an All-American altar boy? The qualities which people like to see in an ideal altar boy are many. I think they could be listed under four headings.

1. An altar boy should be a boy of real character, pure in heart and mind. Yes, a boy who serves Mass must have a good character. He must be better than the average boy. Two qualities should distinguish an altar boy from most other boys. He should have a special love for our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. He should show this love by receiving our Lord frequently in Holy Communion and also by visiting Him often in the Tabernacle.

2. An All-American altar boy should be intelligent. Not only must he learn the Latin prayers, but he must also pronounce the words correctly and with devotion. Likewise, he must be able to recite the Mass prayers from memory. A certain

amount of intelligence is required to know what to do around the altar, to time actions correctly, and to move about with grace and with a certain dignity. An altar boy must also know what to do under certain circumstances which may arise. For example, if the priest should need something at the altar, the server should know where to find it and bring it without causing confusion.

3. To be an All-American altar boy, a server must be trustworthy and reliable. When scheduled to serve an early Mass, he must not only be there, but he must be on time. On certain mornings it may require a great deal of sacrifice to keep an appointment, but a good altar boy makes the sacrifice willingly. "Be on time" is an ironclad rule for an All-American altar boy.

4. The last qualification is very important. When performing his duties as an altar boy, a young man must be neat and clean in appearance. Never should he venture into the sanctuary with dirty shoes. His hands and face must be clean. His hair must be combed and brushed.

Jimmy, these are some of the standards which an altar boy must meet. Any altar boy who has these qualifications is listed as an All-American altar boy in my books.

Check yourself carefully and see how well you measure up to these standards. What is your batting average, Jimmy? Are you likely to be voted an All-American altar boy?