

The Ministry of Deacons at the Celebration of the Eucharist in the Diocese of Rochester

INTRODUCTION

FIRST OF THE MINISTERS

After the priest, the deacon, in virtue of the sacred ordination he has received, has first place among those who minister in the celebration of the Eucharist. For the sacred Order of the diaconate has been held in high honor in the Church since the time of the Apostles. At Mass the deacon proclaims the gospel reading, at times preaches God's word, announces the intentions of the general intercessions, ministers to the priest, prepares the altar and serves the celebration of the sacrifice, distributes the Eucharist to the faithful, especially under the species of wine, and from time to time gives directions regarding the people's gestures and posture (GIRM 94).

As the first of the ministers at liturgy, it falls to the deacon to remain aware of the needs of the community and its other ministers. In the absence of a master of ceremonies, the deacon serves in this capacity *de facto*. Therefore, if some problem arises during the liturgy, the deacon has the first responsibility to make an effort to resolve the matter quickly and with as little attention as possible.

The deacon's liturgical ministry reflects his role of service in the community.

LOCATION OF THE DEACON AT MASS

At the celebration of the Eucharist, the deacon sits next to the presiding priest. Concelebrating priests sit as a group in another part of the sanctuary. Servers sit in a place in the sanctuary from where they can easily exercise their ministry. Concelebrants and servers do not sit next to the presiding priest.

BEFORE MASS

VESTURE

The vestment proper to the deacon is the dalmatic, worn over the alb and stole; however, the dalmatic may be omitted for some necessity or on account of a lesser grade of solemnity. (GIRM 338).

AGREEMENT ON DIVISION OF LABOR WITH OTHER MINISTERS

The deacon does not exercise his ministry in a vacuum. At the liturgy, the diversity of ministers—cleric and lay—manifests the diversity of the gifts bestowed on the body of Christ. For the smooth execution of the liturgy, it is imperative that all the ministers know their areas of responsibility and perform them well.

ROLE AT MASS

INTRODUCTORY RITES

Entrance Procession

Generally, the deacon carries the Book of the Gospels in the entrance procession. In the procession, the deacon follows the lay ministers and is the first of the clergy. If he is not carrying the book of the Gospels, the deacon walks in procession at the side of the priest.

GIRM 173 states that the deacon carrying the Book of the Gospels does not reverence the altar with a bow. Rather, he goes directly to the altar, where he places the Book of the Gospels.

If, however, he is not carrying the Book of the Gospels, he makes a profound bow to the altar with the priest.

When the presiding priest goes to the altar to kiss it, the deacon does so with him. If incense is used at this time, the deacon assists the priest with the incense.

After the veneration of the altar or after it is incensed, the deacon accompanies the priest to the chairs.

Penitential Act

The deacon may lead the community in the penitential rite. After the priest has introduced the penitential rite, a period of silence follows before the invocations begin. For form C, a set of invocations that is appropriate for the season or sacramental ritual should be chosen from the Roman Missal.

Sprinkling Rite

From time to time, especially during the Season of Easter, the blessing and sprinkling of water to recall baptism may occur in place of the customary act of penitence.

For the blessing of water, either the deacon or a server can hold the water in front of the priest. The deacon or a server, carrying the container of water, accompanies the priest throughout the church as he sprinkles the people.

Upon returning to the sanctuary, the deacon gives the bowl of water and sprinkler to a server, who returns them to the credence table.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gospel

A period of silence should follow the reading (or psalm) before the Gospel procession begins.

If incense is used, the deacon assists the priest when he puts incense in the censer during the singing of the Alleluia or other chant. Then the deacon stands in front of the priest, makes a profound bow, and says in a low voice: *Your blessing, Father.*

The priest blesses him, and the deacon signs himself with the sign of the cross and responds: *Amen.*

After receiving the priest's blessing, the deacon follows the thurifer to the altar. The deacon bows to the altar, approaches it, and picks up the Book of the Gospels. The deacon, following the thurifer and servers with candles, carries the Book of the Gospels to the ambo.

After the Gospel acclamation concludes, the deacons, with hands joined, says the greeting:

"The Lord be with you.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to N."

Please note that this ritual text is not to be changed. After the greeting, the deacon signs the book with his thumb, and then his forehead, lips, and breast. If incense is used, he takes the censer, bows to the book, and incenses it with three single swings. The deacon returns the censer to the server and proclaims the Gospel.

At the conclusion of the Gospel proclamation, the deacon says (without raising the book):
"The Gospel of the Lord"

(Again, a ritual text not to be changed), kisses the book in its place, and says inaudibly:

"Through the words of the gospel may our sins be washed away."

Universal Prayer

After the priest introduces the universal prayer, the deacon announces the intentions from the ambo or another suitable place (177).

If a response will be sung by the assembly, the deacon should be aware if the cantor will intone the invitation to prayer, or if the deacon will say this.

He remains at the ambo while the priest concludes the general intercessions with prayer.

At the conclusion of this prayer, the deacon begins the preparation of the altar, assisted by the servers.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Preparation of the Altar and Gifts

Ordinarily, it is the deacon's role to prepare the altar by placing the corporal, chalice, purificator, and Roman Missal on it during the Preparation of the Altar and Gifts. The servers assist in this rite by bringing the items from the credence table to the deacon at the altar. Prior to Mass, the deacon who prepares the altar should ask the presiding priest where he wants the Roman Missal positioned on the altar and the place he wants it opened to.

The deacon receives the gifts, either alone with the servers or with the servers and the priest. In Masses with the Bishop, the gifts are received by the Bishop at the chair. To the extent possible, the deacon gives the paten of bread to the priest at the altar. The deacon then pours wine and a drop of water into the chalice, saying quietly: *"By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity."* Please note the drop of water is poured only into the main chalice, not into a flagon before it is poured, or into auxiliary chalices. It is about symbolism, not chemistry. To the extent possible, the deacon then gives the chalice to the priest.

If incense is used, the deacon assists the priest with the incensation of the gifts and the altar, and afterwards, the deacon incenses the priest and the people.

Eucharistic Prayer

During the Eucharistic Prayer, the deacon stands near but slightly behind the presider.

The GIRM specifies that, as a general rule, the deacon kneels from the epiclesis through the showing of the chalice. For practical purposes, this means kneeling following the "Holy, Holy" until the Memorial Acclamation.

If a presider needs the deacon to be ready to help with the book, or if any physical difficulties or space limitations prevent a deacon from kneeling, the deacon may remain standing for the entire Eucharistic Prayer. In accord with GIRM 43, those who do not kneel ought to make a profound bow when the presider genuflects after the consecration.

Except for approved acclamations, only the priest proclaims the text of the Eucharistic Prayer. This includes the invitation to the memorial acclamation and the doxology.

Just prior to the doxology, the deacon approaches the altar and takes the chalice. He elevates it while the priest elevates the consecrated bread. After the Great Amen, the deacon places the chalice on the corporal and returns to his place.

Sign of Peace

After the priest offers the assembly Christ's peace, the deacon faces the faithful and says (with hands joined):

"Let us offer each other the sign of peace."

After receiving the sign of peace from the presider, the deacon offers it to ministers near him.

Fraction Rite

When the *Agnus Dei* begins, the deacon may assist the priest with breaking the bread. When the number of concelebrants is large, the deacon passes a ciborium of Eucharistic bread among them.

Communion

The priest ministers communion under both forms to the deacon.

If communion is to be distributed under both kinds, the deacon ministers the cup to the faithful with the words:

“The blood of Christ.”

After communion is finished, the deacon returns to the credence table with his cup. He consumes any Precious Blood remaining. He should also ensure that any remaining Precious Blood in other cups is also consumed, either by himself or by other ministers.

The purification of the communion vessels most appropriately happens at the credence table.

CONCLUDING RITES

Announcements

If there are any announcements, they are to be made at this time, following the Prayer after Communion. The proper place for announcements is at a location other than the ambo, which is reserved for the proclamation of God's word.

Blessing

The blessing begins with the priest's greeting, *The Lord be with you*. After the people respond, and if a solemn blessing or a prayer over the people is used, the deacon immediately says:

“Bow down for the blessing.”

The deacon assists the assembly in its response by emphasizing the *Amen* at the conclusion of each invocation.

Dismissal

After the priest blesses the people, the deacon dismisses the assembly (with hands joined) using one of the approved formulas.

- A. Go forth, the Mass is ended.
- B. Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.
- C. Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.
- D. Go in peace.

During the Easter octave and on Pentecost, the dismissal with double alleluia is sung.

The deacon is to say these and only these words, neither adding nor subtracting to them (GIRM 24).

Procession

The priest and deacon venerate the altar with a kiss. He and the priest reverence the altar with a bow. Since the Book of the Gospels is not carried in the procession out of the church, the deacon walks out next to the priest following the other ministers.

AFTER MASS

PURIFICATION OF THE VESSELS

It is the deacon's responsibility to make sure the vessels are purified and washed after Mass.