

On Sunday, the altar boy was expected to serve at the Mass he attended. It was common to have 10 or 15 altar boys at each Sunday Mass! God help you if Father came to church and there were no altar boys!

Then, of course were the duties of adoration, two altar boys to kneel before the Blessed Sacrament from Holy Thursday after Mass until Midnight, and then all day Good Friday and Holy Saturday. NO EXCUSES— Father assigned you an hour and you were expected to be there, to kneel, pray, adore and Keep Jesus company during those holy days.

For every wedding or funeral, at least two altar boys were there — even if they had to miss school! IMAGINE THAT!!

Finally, for special feasts there were mandatory practices —For Holy Week, Christmas, Confirmation, 40 Hours, etc. Being an altar boy was like being in the Army—each duty had to be performed smoothly, on time, gracefully and with full reverence to God.

Serving was fun, and not just work. Father had various picnics and events for the boys and even contests during the year—especially Lent, where a list was kept to see how many boys would serve at EVERY Mass for the full 40 days. He always gave out simple presents for good performance.

We enjoyed being altar boys. It was a sign of pride to endure the training, learn the strange words in Latin and to serve God. Many altar servers were blessed and became Priests, some even became Popes!!

Altar serving is a ministry, a calling to serve Jesus and His Church in a special way. It is not too difficult, but requires study, dedication and a desire to do your best. Working together as a group, servers are in close contact with the priest and with each other, forming close bonds and social friendships.



**COMMITMENT:** To be or become an altar server is a commitment. There are people counting on you. First, the priest depends on you. He needs to know you will be there on time. He needs to know you are prepared. You help the priest ensure things to go smoothly. Remember also the people in the assembly count on you. Without you an important part of prayer leadership is missing. You have been called to serve. Your parish is grateful that you have responded to God's call.       +++

#### ***ALTAR SERVER'S PRAYER***

Loving Father, Creator of the universe,

You call Your people to worship,  
to be with You and each other at Mass.

Help me, for You have called me also.

Keep me prayerful and alert.

Help me to help others in prayer.

Thank you for the trust You've placed in me.

Keep me true to that trust.

I make my prayer in Jesus' name,  
Who is with us in the Holy Ghost. Amen.

\*(excerpted from [www.altarservers.org](http://www.altarservers.org))

## **ALTAR SERVERS**



***SAINT TARCISIUS, PATRON OF ALTAR SERVERS,***

***PRAY FOR ME AND FOR ALL SERVERS.***

## ***ALTAR SERVING***

\*For hundreds of years, the usage of altar servers has brought about countless priestly vocations. In the words of the Archbishop of Westminster, Bernard Cardinal Griffin, "To serve at the altar, as to sing in the choir, is next to the priesthood the highest privilege which a human can enjoy. He represents the faithful and takes a most intimate part in the rich treasures of the church's liturgy and ceremonial. Those sacred ceremonies should be carried out with devotion, dignity and attention to detail."

### ***WHO INVENTED ALTAR SERVERS***

Altar servers have a rich heritage, going back to Jesus himself. In preparation for the Last Supper, Jesus sent two of his disciples to prepare the Passover for Himself and the Twelve. Over the centuries, as ceremonies became more complex and Latin became the language of the Church, specially trained assistants called Acolytes became common. Eventually this evolved to today's altar servers who love Jesus, love the Mass, and want to give their time and talents in the service of God and his Church.

### ***WHAT ARE THE DUTIES OF ALTAR SERVERS?***

Servers carry the cross and the processional candles, hold the book for the priest celebrant when he is not at the altar, carry the incense and censer, present the bread, wine, and water to the priest during the preparation of the gifts and assist him when he receives the gifts from the people, wash the hands of the priest, assist the priest celebrant and deacon as necessary.

Servers respond to the prayers and dialogues of the priest along with the congregation. They also join in singing the hymns and other chants of the liturgy.

Acolyte was one of the seven levels of ordained ministry in the Latin Rite that culminated with Deacon and finally, Priest.

In later times, up to the reforms of Vatican II, which changed the language of the Mass from Latin to English, the role of altar boy became a solemn duty of dedicated youth to serve before the altar of God before reaching adulthood and marriage (if not becoming a priest). The duties were serious and involved lots of study.

If you think altar serving today is a chore, let me tell you about how things were in the recent past, the 1950's and 60's - what an altar boy had to learn to serve at God's table:

First, all boys who made their first communion were expected to

become altar boys. Parents expected that their boys would go to the altar. On Sundays, you saw only girls with their parents in the pews. The boys always served if they attended Mass.

Altar boys were expected to serve from the age of 7 or 8 up to the age of 19. In this way, each church had consistently 20-30 altar boys on duty. When older boys went to college or got married, new ones were always there to take their place.

You just didn't show up and expect to serve that Sunday. First, there came summer school. There, the boys studied Latin and woe to the altar boy who could not learn his Latin responses, he would have to come before the pastor and recite them from memory over and over again!

### **The candidates practiced the many complex duties the altar boy had to perform:**

- How to stand with hands folded,
- How to lift the priest's chasuble at the consecration,
- How to change the Missal from the Epistle (first reading) side to the Gospel side of the altar
- How to prepare the incense and the proper way to swing the thuriber (incense burner), so that the sweet smoke came out in clouds at Benediction or during Solemn Masses.
- How to properly hold the cruets of water and wine and to pour the water over the fingers of the priest, and always
- How to bow properly after performing their tasks.

In the fall, once they were accepted, new altar boys were given a cassock (long black garment like a priest wears, but with no collar) and a starched crisp white surplice to wear over it. Each boy had a place to hang it and was expected to take them home frequently to be laundered and starched by their parents. God help you if Father saw you in a sloppy dirty cassock or surplice!

The new altar boy was assigned to a team with a partner (or two).

Depending upon the number of altar boys, every 6 or 7 weeks throughout the year, each team was assigned a week of daily masses, Monday through Saturday, that they had to serve –NO EXCUSES!! Despite snow, rain, or summer vacation, we came, because Father expected it, our parents expected it, and we wanted to because it was our duty. In this way, every daily Mass had 2 or 3 altar boys.

Before every Mass the altar boy had to prepare the altar: light the 6 high candles at the main altar, remove the altar cover which covered the altar, lay out the vestments for the chalice (veil and burse) and help the priest dress (after the alb, hand the priest the amice, then the cincture, then the maniple worn on his left arm, then the stole, then the chasuble). Then he would hand the priest his biretta. Now, father was ready to begin Mass.