

Mass for Altar Servers

Holy Rosary Cathedral

7 September 2019

Dear Fathers Stan, Paul, and Juan: brothers in the priesthood; dear Serra Club members; but especially this morning dear altar servers gathered here with your parents, families and friends: a very warm welcome to your beautiful Cathedral dedicated to Our Lady of the Holy Rosary:

Introduction

For me it is an annual joy in early September to celebrate with all of you our Mass for Altar Servers and Awards Ceremony. An inspiring sight you are and what hope you give to your parishes and to the whole Church. Your joy and enthusiasm for life, your willingness to make sacrifices to serve faithfully, and your love of Jesus, especially at the time of Holy Mass tell us that Christ is alive among the young people of our parishes. Yes, “Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive!”¹

Thanks to the Serrans and Parents

Dear altar servers: this morning you are receiving an award because you have excelled in your dedicated service by the side of the priest at the altar. But you also should recognize that, in many ways, you are receiving this award on behalf of all the other boys and girls with whom you serve. Your award is an award not only for you but for all the servers in your parish.

¹ Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 1.

Don't forget that everyone is called to serve in the parish. But you are carrying out this responsibility in a special way by serving the priest and the parishioners for the celebration of the Eucharist. Your service at Mass expresses your love for God but it also helps your neighbour by ensuring that the celebration is orderly and reverently.

Others, too, have helped you on your way. On your behalf, I wish to thank the Serrans of Vancouver and Fraser Valley West who not only organize and sponsor this Award Ceremony but also who pray for you, for vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, and who accompany with their encouragement and resources our seminarians. These men and women are a great gift to you and to all of us, and I am so very grateful for their contributions to the Church's life.

And you, like me, owe you dear parents profound gratitude. They witness to the love of Jesus and the Catholic faith in your home. Besides this, they are by your side, driving you to church, often at great sacrifice, and urging you on to fulfill your duty when you are tired or might not feel like it. And so, thank you, mothers and fathers and guardians for all you are doing to foster in your children a great love for the Mass. I know that without your good example and encouragement they would not be here.

Gospel: Eucharist as Bread of Life

Dear young friends: at Holy Mass no one, except for the priest, is closer to Jesus than you are. But what really is this closeness?

In this morning's First Reading, St. Paul tells us what Jesus did at the Last Supper. Over the bread he pronounced the words: "This is my Body that is for you" (1 Cor 11:24); and over the cup of wine on the table, he said: "This cup is the new covenant in my Blood" (1 Cor 11:25). What had been simple bread and wine, Jesus changed into his own Body and Blood. And not only this. This act of changing bread and wine into himself was to continue after his Death and Resurrection: "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24).

Ever since that night, now for nearly 2000 years, the Church has obeyed this command of Jesus. This is what happens at every Mass! And you, dear boys and girls, are so close to Jesus, like those who must have had "servers" too – those who helped to prepare the Last Supper and wait at table.² Even though the pictures of that Last Supper don't portray the servers, they were certainly there!

Some people have claimed – and some even do today – that Jesus is not to be taken literally; they say there isn't a real change in the bread

² Cf. Corinna Laughlin, Robert D. Shaddock, Paul Turner, and D. Todd Williamson, *Guide for Servers*, rev. ed. (Chicago: LTP, 2012), 9.

and wine. They claim Jesus was just using a figure of speech, or that he was saying that after the Consecration the bread and wine are only symbols of his Body and Blood.

But that is not what the Church teaches. They are his Body and Blood; Jesus becomes truly and really present, and gives himself to us in Holy Communion.

In the Eucharist, through sharing in the consecrated bread, now his Body, and the consecrated wine, now his Blood, Jesus makes us one with himself. Listen to what he himself says in the Gospel: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in them” (Jn 6:56). In Holy Communion, Jesus comes to us in order to take us to himself.

Advice to the Altar Servers

Now, dear young people, as your bishop and spiritual father, let me remind you of a couple of things.

When you are serving, people see you perform external actions – and it is important that you learn how to do them well – but these actions only have meaning if they come from inside, from an internal action of prayerfulness, of attention to God.

Remember what you are doing: you are participating at Holy Mass. You hear what the Word of God proclaimed in the Readings is saying to you. You share in Holy Communion with those present at Mass. You

carry Christ with you to others as you leave Mass. One way of making sure you are internally prepared is to pray before Mass with the priest and servers – and to do so not in a rush but thinking about what you are saying.

Also remember that being an altar server means that you are someone very special to Jesus. He lets you serve him. What an honour that is. Just think for a moment. Jesus is the One you are really serving at Mass; the priest is his representative.

At the same time that you serve Jesus, you are also his friend. He knows who you are deep down, even better than you know yourself. He knows you by name, and he knows you just as you are. That’s why there is no need to put on a mask for him, pretending to be someone else. The Pope’s words on the inside cover of today’s program booklet: “I want you to know that, when the Lord thinks of each of you and what he wants to give you, he sees you as his close friend.”³ So, honour that friendship by letting him speak to you daily in silent prayer.

Conclusion

Dear servers, thank you for serving with such care and joy at the Lord’s altar. Be proud of what you do – and do it well, because you are doing it for the Lord. Above all, thank Jesus for letting you serve him at

³ Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 288.

his altar.

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