



# The revised GIRM and the Deacon

## A. What is the role of the Deacon in the General Instruction?

When he is present at the Eucharistic Celebration, a Deacon should exercise his ministry, wearing sacred vestments. For the Deacon: a) assists the Priest and remains at his side; b) ministers at the altar, with the chalice as well as the book; c) proclaims the Gospel and, at the direction of the Priest celebrant, may preach the Homily (cf. no. 66); d) guides the Faithful by appropriate introductions and explanations, and announces the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful; e) assists the Priest celebrant in distributing Communion, and purifies and arranges the sacred vessels; f) as needed, fulfils the duties of other ministers himself if none of them are present. (171)

The duties of the Deacon are outlined in numbers 171-186 of the General Instruction.

## B. What are the main provisions of the General Instruction for the Deacon?

Some of the main points concerning the ministry of the Deacon are:

1. After the Priest, the Deacon, in virtue of the sacred Ordination, holds first place among those who minister in the Eucharistic Celebration. For the sacred Order of the diaconate has been held in high honour in the Church even from the time of the Apostles. At Mass, the Deacon carries out his own particular ministry. (94)
2. If there are several Deacons present, they may perform the different parts of the same ministry, for example, one may be assigned to take the sung parts, another to serve at the Altar. (109)
3. There is greater detail given about use of incense. (150, 276, 277)
4. Increased emphasis is given to the sung parts of the Mass, especially the chants of the Priest and Deacon. (39, 40, 79)

## C. How will the revised GIRM and New Translation affect the Deacon?

2. Only the Book of the Gospels is carried in the Entrance Procession. The Lectionary is placed at the Ambo beforehand. (128) Thus when a Deacon is present, he carries the Book of the Gospels slightly elevated. He precedes the Priest as he approaches the Altar. (172) When he reaches the Altar, he omits the sign of reverence and goes up to the Altar and places the Book of the Gospels on the Altar, after which, together with the Priest, he venerates the Altar with a kiss. If he is not carrying the Book of the Gospels, he walks just before or at the side of the Priest and makes a profound bow to the Altar with the Priest. Lastly, if incense is used, he assists the Priest in putting some into the thurible and in incensing the cross and the Altar. (173)
2. If the Tabernacle is behind Altar in sanctuary, the Ministers, Deacon and Priest genuflect at beginning and end of Mass,; but not during the celebration of Mass. (274)
3. A profound bow made to the Altar. (49)
4. Whenever there is a congregation, the Introductory Rite are lead from the Chair. (50, 124)
5. The Priest's chair to stand out to make it obvious who is presiding. Only the Deacon sits next to the Priest celebrant; the servers and other ministers sit apart from the Priest who presides. (94, 108, 174, 295, 310)

6. When greeting the people at beginning of the Gospel, the Deacon keeps his hands joined. At the words “A reading from the holy Gospel” he signs the book with his thumb and, afterwards, himself on his forehead, mouth, and breast. At the conclusion of the Gospel, he says the acclamation: “The Gospel of the Lord,” and then venerates the Book with a kiss, saying privately: “May the words of the Gospel...” Finally, he returns to the Priest’s side. (175)
7. When assisting the Bishop, the Deacon, after reading the Gospel, may bring the Book to him to be kissed. In more solemn celebrations, a Bishop may impart a blessing to the people with the Book. In this case, the Deacon receives the Book of the Gospels from the Bishop and places it at the credence table or another appropriate and dignified place. (175)
8. During the Eucharistic Prayer, the Deacon stands near the Priest but slightly behind him, to assist the Priest with the Chalice [and pall] or the Missal. From the epiclesis until the Priest shows the Chalice, the Deacon normally remains kneeling. If several Deacons are present, one of them may place incense in the thurible for the consecration and incense the host and the chalice as they are shown to the people. (179)
9. After the Priest’s Communion, the Deacon receives Communion under both kinds from the Priest himself and then assists the Priest in distributing Communion to the other ministers and the people. If Communion is given under both kinds, the Deacon administers the Chalice; and, when the Communion is completed, he immediately consumes at the Altar all of the Blood of Christ that remains, assisted if necessary by other Deacons and Priests. (182)
10. If the Deacon purifies the sacred vessels, he does so at the credence table and not at the Altar. It is also permissible to leave the vessels that need to be purified, suitably covered, at the credence table on a corporal, and to purify them immediately after Mass following the dismissal of the people.
11. The Deacon may make the brief announcements to the people, unless the Priest prefers to do this himself. (184)
12. If a Prayer over the People or a Solemn Blessing is used, the Deacon says: “Bow your heads and pray for God’s blessing.” After the Priest’s blessing, the Deacon, with hands joined, dismisses them with the appropriate formula. (185)
13. Then, together with the Priest, the Deacon venerates the Altar with a kiss, makes a profound bow, and departs in a manner similar to the Entrance Procession. (186)
14. Most of the prayers and interventions of the Deacon have been retranslated.

#### **D. Some Finer Points**

1. The Gospel Procession should be a true one. Moving directly from the Altar to the Ambo may not make for a good procession. The procession may move around the front of the Altar or through part of the assembly. The Gospel Acclamation is sung until the procession reaches the Ambo.
2. The Deacon does not lift up the Book of the Gospels or the Lectionary when he says *The Gospel of the Lord*. Only after the acclamation of the people does the Deacon lift the Book to kiss it. It is better to lift the book to the lips than bend down to kiss it. Inaudibly he says the prayer, May the words of the gospel wipe away our sins.
3. If Communion is to be given under both kinds and many chalices are used, wine may be placed in all the chalices beforehand, except for the main chalice. In this case the Deacon pours a small amount of water into the main chalice alone.
4. The Deacon’s verbal parts are best sung and kept brief, that is, not unduly expanded.

#### **E. Further resources**

A sample set of guidelines for Deacons and other resources may be found at the Archdiocesan website (see Liturgy and Roman Missal).