



# The revised GIRM

## and the Ministry of Sacristans

### **A. What is the role of the Sacristan outlined in the General Instruction?**

1. The sacristan, who is listed as a person with a liturgical role in the General Instruction, is one who carefully arranges the liturgical books, the vestments, and other things necessary in the celebration of Mass. (105a)

### **B. What are the main provisions in the General Instruction for the Sacristan?**

1. Preparation of the Altar: A) The altar is to be covered with at least one white cloth. B) On or next to the altar are to be placed candlesticks with lighted candles: at least two in any celebration, or even four or six, especially for a Sunday Mass or a holy day of obligation. If the diocesan Bishop celebrates, then seven candles should be used. The candles are placed either on or around the altar in a way suited to the design of the altar and the sanctuary so that the whole may be well balanced and not interfere with the Faithful's view of what takes place at the altar or what is placed on it. C) On or close to the altar, there is to be a cross with a figure of Christ crucified, where it is clearly visible to the assembled congregation. It is appropriate that such a cross, which calls to mind for the Faithful the saving Passion of the Lord, remain near the altar even outside of liturgical celebrations. D) The candles and the cross adorned with a figure of Christ crucified may also be carried in the Entrance Procession. On the altar itself may be placed the Book of the Gospels, distinct from the book of other readings, unless it is carried in the Entrance Procession. (117, 304-308)
2. Only what is required for the celebration of the Mass may be placed on the mensa (table) of the altar: A) at the beginning of the Mass only the Book of the Gospels may be placed on the Altar; B) at the Presentation of the Offerings only the chalice with the paten, a ciborium, if necessary, the corporal, the purificator, the pall, and the Missal are placed on the Altar. Microphones should be discreetly arranged. (306)
3. Decoration of the Church and Altar: Church decor should contribute toward the church's noble simplicity rather than ostentation. In the choice of materials for church appointments there should be a concern for genuineness of materials and an intent to foster the instruction of the Faithful and the dignity of the entire sacred place. Moderation should be observed in the decoration of the altar. During Advent the floral decoration of the altar should be marked by a moderation suited to the character of this season, without expressing prematurely the full joy of the Nativity of the Lord. During Lent it is forbidden for the altar to be decorated with flowers. Laetare Sunday (Fourth Sunday of Lent), Solemnities, and Feasts are exceptions. Floral decorations should always be done with moderation and placed around the altar rather than on its mensa. (292, 305)
4. The bread for celebrating the Eucharist must be made only from wheat, must be recently baked, and, according to the ancient tradition of the Latin Church, must be unleavened. The wine for the Eucharistic Celebration must be from the fruit of the grapevine (cf. Lk 22.18), natural, and unadulterated, that is, without admixture of extraneous substances. (320-322)

5. The meaning of the sign demands that the material for the Eucharistic Celebration truly have the appearance of food. It is therefore expedient that the Eucharistic bread, even though unleavened and baked in the traditional shape, be made in such a way that the priest at Mass with a congregation is able in practice to break it into parts for distribution to at least some of the Faithful. Small hosts are, however, in no way ruled out when the number of those receiving Holy Communion or other pastoral needs require it. The action of the fraction or breaking of bread, which gave its name to the Eucharist in apostolic times, will bring out more clearly the force and importance of the sign of unity of all in the one bread, and of the sign of charity by the fact that the one bread is distributed among the brothers and sisters. (321)

### **C. Some Finer Points**

1. Articles to be prepared: A) next to the priest's chair: the Missal and, as needed, a hymnal; B) at the ambo: the Lectionary; C) on the credence table: the chalice, a corporal, a purificator, and, if appropriate, the pall; the paten and, if needed, ciboria; bread for the Communion of the priest who presides, the deacon, the ministers, and the people; cruets containing the wine and the water, unless all of these are presented by the Faithful in procession at the Offertory; the vessel of water to be blessed, if the asperges occurs; the Communion-plate for the Communion of the Faithful; and whatever is needed for the washing of hands. It is a praiseworthy practice to cover the chalice with a veil, which may be either the colour of the day or white. (118)
2. In the sacristy, the sacred vestments for the priest, the deacon, and other ministers are to be prepared according to the various forms of celebration: A) for the priest: the alb, the stole, and the chasuble; B) for the deacon: the alb, the stole, and the dalmatic; the dalmatic may be omitted, however, either out of necessity or on account of a lesser degree of solemnity; C) for the other ministers: albs or other lawfully approved attire. D) for the procession: the Book of the Gospels; the thurible and the boat with incense, if incense is used; the cross to be carried in procession; and candlesticks with lighted candles. (119)
3. In accordance with traditional custom, near the tabernacle a special lamp, fuelled by oil or wax, should be kept alight to indicate and honour the presence of Christ. (316)
4. For the consecration of hosts, a large paten may appropriately be used; on it is placed the bread for the priest and the deacon as well as for the other ministers and for the Faithful. (331)
5. Diligent care should be taken to ensure that the bread and wine intended for the Eucharist are kept in a perfect state of conservation: that is, that the wine does not turn to vinegar nor the bread spoil or become too hard to be broken easily. (323)
6. In a special way, care must be taken that the liturgical books, particularly the Book of the Gospels and the Lectionary, which are intended for the proclamation of the word of God and hence enjoy special veneration, actually serve in a liturgical action as signs and symbols of higher realities and hence are truly worthy, dignified, and beautiful. (349)
7. Furthermore, every care must be taken with respect to those things directly associated with the altar and the Eucharistic celebration, for example, the altar cross and the cross carried in procession. (350)

### **E. Further Resources**

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