

Knights of the Altar Handbook

VOCATION MINISTRY

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St. Tarcisius



Patron Saint of Altar Servers

The moving account of the life of Saint Tarcisius, a young boy who gave his life to protect the Holy Eucharist, was vividly recounted by Pope Benedict XVI when he addressed a gathering of altar servers in Rome in 2010.

Tarcisius lived in the third century under the cruel reign of Emperor Valerian. Historical documents suggest that the emperor, who ruled from 253-260, relentlessly persecuted Christians including ordering the executions of the bishops of Carthage and Rome.

Holy Eucharist had to be delivered secretly, hidden from the Roman guards, at great risk to the bearer.

One day, the priest asked who was prepared to take the Holy Eucharist to the sick. Up stood Tarcisius. “Send me.”

Little is known of Tarcisius. It is said he was an altar server. The priest was concerned about sending a young boy for such a dangerous task, but Tarcisius persisted, saying: 'My youth will be the best shield for the Eucharist.'

Touched by his bravery, the priest overcame his own doubts and relented. "Tarcisius, remember that a heavenly treasure has been entrusted to your weak hands," the priest said.

"Avoid crowded streets and remember that holy things must never be thrown to dogs nor pearls to pigs." He asked the young altar server if he would guard the sacred mysteries faithfully and safely. "I would die," Tarcisius replied without hesitation, "rather than let go of them."

Along the way, he was met by some young friends who asked him to join them in their play. Suspicious at his stubborn refusal, the young pagans noticed he was clutching something to his breast as if it were precious treasure.

They jumped on him and brutally attacked him to find out what he was protecting with his life. Realizing he was a Christian; their attacks grew more ferocious. They kicked him; they threw stones at him, but he was unbowed.

When he was close to death, a Praetorian guard who had secretly become Christian, intervened, and carried the dying boy back to the priest. Sadly, Tarcisius was already dead by the time they arrived. But he was still clutching a small linen bag which contained the Holy Eucharist.

Tarcisius was immediately buried in the catacombs of St Calixtus.

Based on an inscription on his grave ordered by Pope Damasus, Tarcisius died in 257. There is an oral tradition, says Pope Benedict, which claims that the most Blessed Sacrament was never found on St Tarcisius' body -either in his hands or in his clothing.

This, tradition has it, means that the consecrated Host, which the little martyr had defended with his life, had become flesh of his flesh, thereby forming, together with his body, a single immaculate host offered to God.

Pope Benedict said the life of St Tarcisius reminds us that love can make us give our lives for an authentic good.

Source: EWTN.com

Knights of the Altar

Throughout His public ministry, The Lord Jesus invited and accepted the cooperation of many people, including the young. Among those who helped Jesus was a young boy, who provided five loaves of bread and two fish, which Jesus used to perform a miracle, anticipating the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist (see John 6:1-14).

The Knights of the Altar continue this spirit of service to Christ. Serving at the altar of God is a great privilege, and this manual will help you to learn the responsibilities, expectations, and procedures of the Knights of the Altar.

Objectives

- To draw closer to God through the privilege of serving Mass.
- To acquire a deeper understanding of the ceremonies of the Mass and their meaning.
- To cultivate a spirit of reverence, both for the server's own sake and for the edification of others.

Qualifications

- Young men, ages seven and over, who have already received their First Holy Communion, may become Knights of the Altar.
- Young men, age seven and over who have not received their First Holy Communion but are currently enrolled in Sacramental Preparation or OCIA may join the Knights of the Altar as Squires.
- At least one parent of the candidate must read and sign the parent agreement.
- High School-aged Knights are invited to join the ***Templars*** fraternal discipleship group, which meets once a month, during ***Encounter Youth Ministry***.

Requirements

- Punctuality and faithfulness to the monthly schedule.
- Adherence to the dress code and personal cleanliness.
- Following the instructions of the clergy, the acolytes, and the Knight Commanders assigned to each Mass.

Dress Code

Mass is not routine. The altar server's appearance should reflect this. Our posture, silence, and even our clothing reflects our understanding of the holiness of the Mass.

- Hair should be clean, combed, and neatly cut.

- Hands and fingernails should be clean. Your hands will touch the sacred objects used for Mass.
- Young men should wear long pants of a dark color. No jeans unless they are black.
- Black dress shoes or boots are required. Tennis shoes (unless 100% black), sandals, flipflops, etc....are not permitted.
- Socks should be dark and long enough to cover the ankles and lower legs.
- Anklets are not permitted.
- Young men are discouraged from wearing any type of jewelry (rings, watches, bracelets) while serving.
- Anyone who does not observe the dress code will not be allowed to serve that day, even if they are scheduled.

Scheduling and Punctuality

- Normally, two to five servers will be scheduled for Sunday Mass, together with at least one Knight Commander or Instituted Acolyte. Parents may indicate the Masses at which their sons may be scheduled.
- Servers may **always** volunteer to serve Mass, even if they are not scheduled.
- Please be in the sacristy at least **fifteen minutes** before Mass.

Care of Vesture

- Servers should always hang up their cassocks and surplices carefully after Mass.
- Coat hangers, jackets, and other personal items may not be left out in the sacristy.
- Vesture will be washed and mended by parents when needed. Bleach should never be used on these vestments.

Rules to Learn, Remember and Follow

- Remember that you can teach others by your example of reverence and attention at Mass. People are watching you, so give them a good example!
- When you are serving Mass, you ought to participate by saying, chanting, or singing the appropriate prayers and responses in a reverent manner.
- There is to be absolute silence in the Sanctuary and Sacristy unless you have a pressing question to ask either a Knight or Father or Deacon.
- If you cannot pay attention or refrain from goofing off, please do not serve that day.
- You should not be in the Sacristy during Mass unless you have a particular job that needs to be done at that very moment.
- There should never be any horseplay in the Church building.

- You must be dressed appropriately to serve. No exceptions.
- Remember, you are obligated to keep the Eucharistic fast—which means no food or drink—except water—for **at least an hour** before receiving Holy Communion. This includes no chewing gum.
- Follow the directions of the priest, deacon, and Knight Commanders.
- Any altar server who criticizes the way another server serves or in any way acts uncharitably toward a fellow server risks having his privileges to serve taken away.
- It is the Knight's job to correct any mistakes, but always with charity and kindness.
- If you cannot serve at your assigned Mass, please contact a replacement.

Pillars of Altar Service

- **Decorum** – (from the Latin: "right, proper") behavior that is controlled, calm, and polite. Young men are expected to always conduct themselves in a manner that does not draw attention to themselves and away from Our Eucharistic Lord

- **Discipline** – self-control that is gained by obedience to the rubrics of the liturgy, valuing hard work, overcoming that which is difficult, diligence to detail, anticipating the next step, and seeking advancement in ranks of promotion

- **Piety** – a special virtue springing from justice. A loving obedience to God and a desire to please Him with devoted service. Disposes the server to show due deference, honor, respect, and reverence, first to God, then to His sacred ministers, and to fellow servers.

System of Promotion

The Knights of the Altar are young men, between the ages of seven and twenty-one, who have made a special commitment to leadership and service. The Knights of the Altar undergo more rigorous training than other liturgical ministers, and they are expected to exercise greater responsibility among their fellow servers.

The Knights of the Altar program provides for various ranks of service, each of which requires a correspondingly higher level of skill and responsibility. Servers move through the ranks based upon their personal efforts and abilities. The rank system ensures that each Knight is highly trained and confident in carrying out his duties.

Promotion tests and ceremonies will be held as often as a candidate is ready.

The Ranks of the Knights of the Altar are:

Novice. The altar server begins with the rank of Novice. It is open to young men seven years of age (second grade) and older. It is also open to young men currently enrolled in Sacramental Preparation for First Holy Communion or in OCIA. In time, the Novice who has received his First Holy Communion will begin to assume some of the simpler duties of the altar server, under the guidance of the Knight Commanders. The Novitiate lasts at least three months.

- The vesture of a Novice is the white alb and cincture.

Squire. After a period of service as a Squire, the server may test to become a Squire. A Squire must be at least men seven years of age (second grade) and have made his First Holy Communion. In time, the Squire will begin to assume some of the more advanced duties of the altar server, under the guidance of the Knight Commanders. The Squireship lasts at least six months.

- The vesture of a Squire is the black cassock and surplice.

Knight. After a period of service as a Squire, the server may be invited to become a Knight. Promotion to the rank of Knight is open to young men nine years of age (fourth grade) or older, who have been Squires for at least three months, and who have fulfilled their duties with responsibility.

- The vesture of a Knight is the black cassock and surplice, and wooden crucifix on a brown cord worn around the neck.

Knight Commander. After having served as a Knight for at least one year, a Knight may be promoted to the rank of Knight Commander. This rank is open to young men in sixth grade or above who have shown exceptional dedication and competence in the performance of their duties. Punctuality, personal neatness, and generosity in serving Masses on special occasions are critical factors in promotion to the rank of Knight Commander.

- The vesture of a Knight Commander is the black cassock, surplice, and silver crucifix worn on a black cord around the neck.

Senior Knight Commander. After serving for at least two years as a Knight Commander, a Knight may be promoted to Senior Knight Commander. These servers will be given the first chance to serve on special occasions such as Holy Week and Easter, Christmas, Confirmation, and Pontifical Masses (with the Bishop).

- The vesture of a Senior Knight Commander is the black cassock, surplice, and gold Jerusalem Cross worn on a black cord around the neck.

Master Knight. Up to three Senior Knight Commanders may be designated as Master Knights. They will serve as Masters of Ceremonies for important liturgical celebrations. Promotion to this rank is limited to experienced servers who are in High School. This office includes responsibility for training servers and leading the corps of altar servers. The Master Knights will also assist in coordinating special practices for Christmas and Holy Week, and in helping to plan social events for the altar servers and sacristans.

- The vesture of a Master Knight is the red cassock, surplice, and gold Jerusalem Cross worn on a black cord around the neck.

Expectations for Each Rank of the Knights of the Altar

Squire

The Squire must be able to recite the following prayers from memory:

- The Lord's Prayer
- Lamb of God
- Holy, Holy, Holy

Following training, the Squire must be able to identify the following parts of the church:

- Altar
- Ambo
- Sanctuary
- Tabernacle
- Sacristy

Following training, the Squire must be able to identify the following objects:

- Roman Missal
- Lectionary
- Chalice
- Ciborium
- Cruets
- Lavabo and basin
- Alb
- Cincture

Knight

The Knight will meet the requirements for the rank of Squire. In addition, they must be able to recite the following prayers from memory:

- Gloria
- "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands…"
- "Lord, I am not worthy…"

The Knight must be able to identify the following liturgical objects:

- The Book of the Gospels
- Corporal
- Purificator
- Pall
- Paten
- Lavabo towel
- Chasuble
- Stole
- How to use the lavabo with one server and with two servers

Knight Commander

The Knight Commander will meet all of the requirements for the rank of Knight and Squire. In addition, the must be able to recite the following prayers from memory:

- Nicene Creed
- Confiteor ("I confess to almighty God…")

The Knight Commander must be able to identify the following parts of the church:

- Ambry
- Narthex
- Baptistery

The Knight Commander must be able to identify the following liturgical objects:

- Aspergillum
- Aspersorium
- Boat
- Thurible
- Cope
- Humeral veil

The Knight must be able to show the following skills and gestures:

- Genuflection
- Head bow
- "Praying" hands
- How to light candles on the altar
- How to carry the processional cross and candles
- Monstrance
- Luna
- Pyx
- Dalmatic

Senior Knight Commander

Knights of this rank will have mastered the requirements of the other ranks.

In addition, they will have served as a Knight Commander with distinction for at least two years.

Master Knight

The Master Knight will meet the requirements for all preceding ranks. In addition, he will have shown the qualities of leadership, responsibility, and dependability.

The Master Knight will be chosen by the pastor of the parish after consultation with other clergy and others who are involved in guiding the Knights of the Altar.

Prayers

Altar Server's Prayer Before Serving Holy Mass

Open my mouth, O Lord, to bless your Holy Name. Cleanse my heart from all evil and distracting thoughts. Enlighten my understanding and inflame my will that I may serve more worthily at your holy Altar.

O Mary, Mother of Christ the High Priest, obtain for me the most important grace of knowing my vocation in life. Grant me a true spirit of faith and humble obedience so that I may ever behold the priest as a representative of God and be willing follow him in the Way, the Truth, and the Life of Christ. Amen.

Prayer to St. Tarcisius (Patron Saint of Altar Servers)

O God, You have graciously called me to serve You at Your Altar. Grant me the graces that I need to serve You faithfully and wholeheartedly. Grant too that while serving You, may I follow the example of St. Tarcisius, who died protecting the Eucharist, and walk the same path that led him to Heaven. St. Tarcisius, pray for me and for all servers. Amen.

***A**ltar Server's Prayer of Thanksgiving After Holy Mass*

O Lord, Jesus Christ, Eternal High Priest, I thank You for the privilege of having served at the holy altar of Your sacrifice. Now, as I put aside the garments of that service, I ask that I may always think of You, and always act accordingly, as a privileged altar server.

May I ever seek You and find You; may I always follow You; may Your priestly spirit be my guide, and Your service of love be my example. May Your Holy Name always be on my lips, and to Your praise and glory may every work of mine be done.

Ever ready in Your service, may I always know and do Your holy will in all things. May I remain pure and blameless and be found worthy to be Your servant, and by Your grace may I persevere to the end. Amen.

Prayer for Vocations

O God, Who wish all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of Your truth: send, we beg You, laborers into Your harvest, and grant them grace to speak Your word with all boldness; So that Your word may spread and be glorified, and all nations may know You, the only God, and Him Whom You have sent, Jesus Christ Your Son, Our Lord, Who lives and reigns world without end. Amen.

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