

Spiritual and Human Dimensions of Serving:

Spiritual Dimension: The primary, or spiritual dimension of servers in the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is that of the angels that minister to Our Lord as depicted in the book of the Apocalypse.¹ Each angel that was created, was created with a specific task in mind. Hence, each choir of angels is assigned a specific job to do, which results in the completion of God's providence. Given this reality, the role of the servers is to assist the Priest, the man who stands *In persona Christi* (in the person of Christ), and ensure that he is able to offer the Most Holy Sacrifice in a prayerful and dignified manner. This reality is fulfilled through, and in conjunction with the human dimension of serving.

Human Dimension: The secondary dimension is the human dimension of serving. This involves *knowing* and *understanding* all the parts of your role as a server, arriving in a *timely* manner (at least 20min before Mass), wearing *appropriate* attire (black shoes, and black pants), and being *appropriately disposed* to receiving the sacraments (in a state of grace², and recollected to receive the sacraments in an efficacious manner³).

¹ "11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!'" (taken from the RSV CE translation)

² To be in a state of grace we must not be conscious of any grace (serious) sins that we have committed freely with full knowledge.

³ Since the Eucharist contains the full Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ it contains an infinite amount of grace. In receiving the Eucharist we receive that grace only insofar as we are disposed to receiving it. In Thomas Aquinas' thought this is expressed in the phrase "whatever is received into something is received according to the condition of the receiver." (Quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur)

The Church

“The Church is the house of God, the temple of the King of kings, where public worship is celebrated and the faithful meet to dedicate their praise and prayers to God. It is generally pointed with the altar eastwards, towards the Holy Land, where Christ was born, where He lived, where He suffered, where He died, and from whence He shall come again. Generally the Church is in the form of a cross.

The sanctuary, containing the altar and the choir⁴ represents the Head of our Divine Redeemer. The Transept, His arms. The central nave, His holy Body.

Above the steeple points the cross as a token of our salvation. In the steeple hangs the bells, which call us to the divine office and the spiritual solemnities.”⁵

Glossary of Sacred Items Used in Mass:

Table Altar: “The table altar is generally composed of a table on four columns and was formerly placed above a tomb, as in the first ages of Christianity Mass was celebrated by preference on the burial place of the Martyrs. Nowadays a square flat stone is placed in the middle of the altar table. This altar stone is consecrated by a Bishop. It is adorned with five little carved crosses. The stone contains one or more relics of the saints. It is on this stone that Holy Mass is celebrated.”⁶

Sanctuary Candle: The sanctuary candle is the candle is the red glass located near the tabernacle. It burns day and night, and is replaced regularly. It stands as

⁴ “The choir is where the clergy not ministering are stationed during the liturgical functions” (from *The Roman Catholic Daily Missal*, Angelus Press, 127.

⁵ Taken from *The Roman Catholic Daily Missal*, (Kansas City, 2004) Angelus Press, 127.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

if it were an honor guard to the entrance of a kingly palace, and serves as a reminder to the faithful of the presence of Christ in the tabernacle.⁷

Altar Candles: On the table altar stands six tall candles. These candles represent the Redeemer, the Light of the world, and also faith, hope, and charity. The candles must be made from at least 51% beeswax since they symbolize our Redeemer, and His ultimate sacrifice on the cross; so we too want to make sure we use only the finest elements in worshipping God.

Missal: The Missal is the large red book that the priest uses at the presiders chair and the altar. It contains all the propers and prayers that are said for the Mass.

Chalice: The Chalice is the consecrated vessel that holds the precious Blood.



Paten: The paten is “the small plate in gold or gilded silver, on which the Sacred Host is laid.”⁸

⁷ Ibid., 127.

⁸ Ibid., 128.



Paten: The Paten is a square piece of cloth that is usually placed on the top of the chalice to ensure that nothing will fall into the chalice after the wine has been consecrated. Commonly, there is a stiff piece of plastic that is placed on the inside of the cloth to make sure that it lays flat.



Chalice Veil: The Chalice veil is the small cloth that is the same color as the vestments, and is laid over the top of the chalice in order to veil it. The veil is important because it highlights and draws out attention to the fact that it is a holy object, and is set aside for the most sacred actions.



Burse: The burse is the flat, square cloth container that is placed on top of the chalice. Burse is simply a Latin word which means “envelope”. The burse contains the corporals.



Corporal: The corporal is the square linen cloth that the priest lays down on the altar before beginning the Eucharistic offering.



Purificator: The purificator is the long, rectangular cloth that is used to purify the sacred vessels during Mass. When the chalice is assembled it is placed between the rim of the chalice and the bottom of the paten.



Ciborium: The ciborium is the sacred vessel that holds the bread that will be consecrated during Mass. It resembles the chalice, but is slightly larger and is equipped with a lid.



Cruets: The cruets are the glass or crystal containers that have the water and the wine for the Mass.



Thurible: The thurible is the incensor with the chain on it. The thurible holds charcoals that are lit, and are used to burn incense.



Boat: The boat is the container that filled with incense and is used to fill the thurible.



Processional Crucifix: The processional crucifix is the crucifix that is fixed to a brass pole, and is used in processions and recessions during Mass.

Procession Candles: The procession candles are the candles that are carried during processions at the beginning and end of Mass, as well as during the gospel. They symbolize the light of faith and the light of the gospel.

Credence Table: The credence table is the table to the left of the sanctuary where the most important items are placed for use in the Mass.

Postures During Mass:

Folded Hands: During Mass server's hands are to be folded together with the palms together. The left thumb is to be under the right thumb, and the hands are to be held at a 45 degree angle in the sternum of the chest.

Position of the hands when holding something: Place free hand on sternum, with your thumb apart from your fingers facing up toward your chin.

Giving and receiving: When you give something to Father, try to use your right hand. When you receive something from Father, try to use your left hand. (Remember to place your free hand on your sternum.)

Position when kneeling: Back straight, head up, and hands folded in prayer

Bowing your head: At the name of Jesus, the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the saint that is celebrated that Day.⁹ Please note that this is a simple bow of the head alone. It should be done slowly and reverently so as not to draw unwanted attention to oneself.

Bowing to Father after completing a task for him: After you complete a task for Father, you should reverently make a simple bow to him with you head and shoulders. Bowing is not a race. Carefully and purposefully execute a bow. If you are completing a task with another server, bow together.

Turning: When turning you should do so slowly. When there are two altar servers turn together, and inward, towards each other. When turning alone turn to the right.

Genuflecting to the Tabernacle: When you cross in front of the Tabernacle outside of Mass¹⁰ genuflect to the tabernacle. When you genuflect you should

⁹ C.f. *General Instructions of the Roman Rite*, paragraph 275a.

¹⁰ Mass begins at the sign of the Cross, and ends at the "Ite missa est" (Mass is ended, go in peace).

stop, bring your right knee down to the floor close to your left foot. Remember to keep your head and back straight.

Sitting: When sitting, sit with feet flat on the floor, back straight, and palms down flat, resting on your legs. Do your best not to move around too much.

Brief Overview and Explanation of Server Roles:

MC: The Master of Ceremonies or MC is the head server. He is to make sure that the liturgy goes smoothly, and that the priest as well as the servers know what they are doing.

Thurifer: The Thurifer is the server who uses the thurible. If there is no deacon he will incense the people after the incensing of the altar.

Boat: This is an optional role for less experienced servers. Principally, the boat simply follows the Thurifer around, and holds the boat for the liturgy. If incense is used at the consecration then this server imposes incense during the Epiclesis.

Crucifer: The crucifer processes in with the crucifix, and also holds the book open to the appropriate pages for the priest while he is at the presider's chair.

Acolytes: There will be two acolytes at every Mass. Their role involves knowing when the processional candles will be used, as well as assisting at the reception of the gifts, and all duties involved with the water and the wine at the altar (e.g. at the offertory and the hand washing).

Expectations of Servers:

Parents and boys must understand that serving at Mass is a great privilege that demands that the altar server display model behavior, manners and most especially reverence.

From the moment that you arrive in the servers sacristy to the moment that you divest you should begin to focus on your duties for the day. This means that you should be focusing on what you will be doing, and who you are going to be serving, the priest who stands *in Persona Christi*, in the person of Christ.

Remember that when you are an altar server you are closer to the Tabernacle than anyone except the Priest and the Deacon. Jesus is only a few feet from you.

One of the main way differences between a good server and a poor server is how noticeable they are. A good server disappears into the background of the Mass, and is not noticed. A poor server is noticed often and becomes a distraction to others, rather than a source of prayer.

Rules for Altar Servers to Learn, Remember and Follow:

1. There is to be absolute silence in the Sanctuary and the Sacristy unless you have a pressing question.
2. There should not be any horseplay in the Church building. Period.
3. There is no reason that there should be more than three servers at the credence table for any reason.
4. You must be dressed appropriately to serve (black dress shoes and black pants). No exceptions.
5. Remember you are obligated to keep the Eucharistic fast- which precludes chewing gum.
6. Servers are to arrive a minimum of 20min before each Mass to ensure that they know their roles for that day.

The Mass: Principle Parts

- I. Introductory Rite
 - a. Procession
 - b. Greeting/Penitential Rite/Gloria/Opening Prayer
2. Liturgy of the Word
 - a. First Reading/Psalm/Second Reading
 - b. Alleluia and Gospel
 - c. Creed/Prayers of the Faithful
3. Liturgy of the Eucharist
 - a. Procession of the gifts
 - b. Offertory
 - c. Eucharistic Prayer
4. Communion Rite
 - a. Lords Prayer
 - b. Sign of Peace
 - c. Communion
 - d. Post Communion Prayer
5. Concluding Rite
 - a. Blessing and Dismissal
 - b. Recession

Key for Abbreviations:

The abbreviations that are used in the diagrams are as follows:

T – Thurifer

C – Crucifer

ACI – Acolyte I

AC2 – Acolyte 2

MC – Master of Ceremonies

D – Deacon

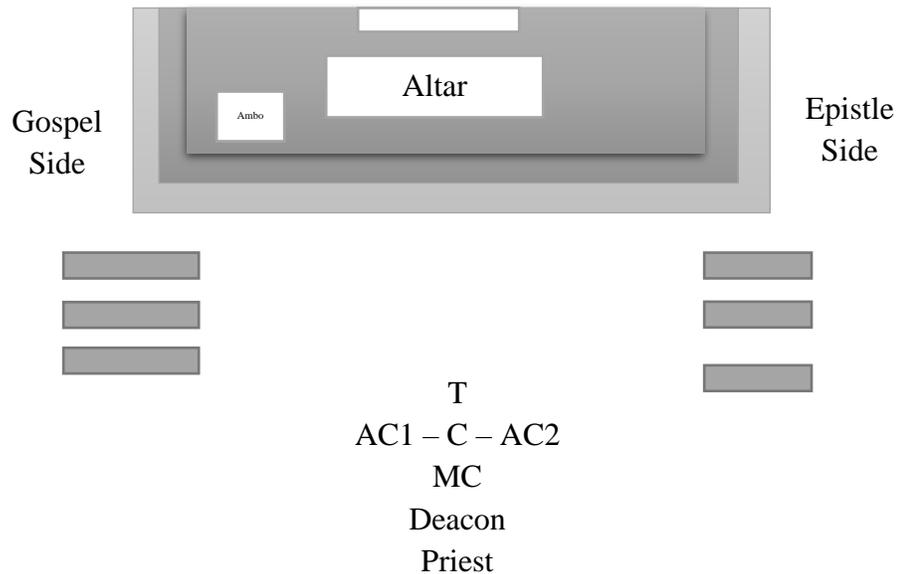
P – Priest

CT – Credence Table

I. Introductory Rite

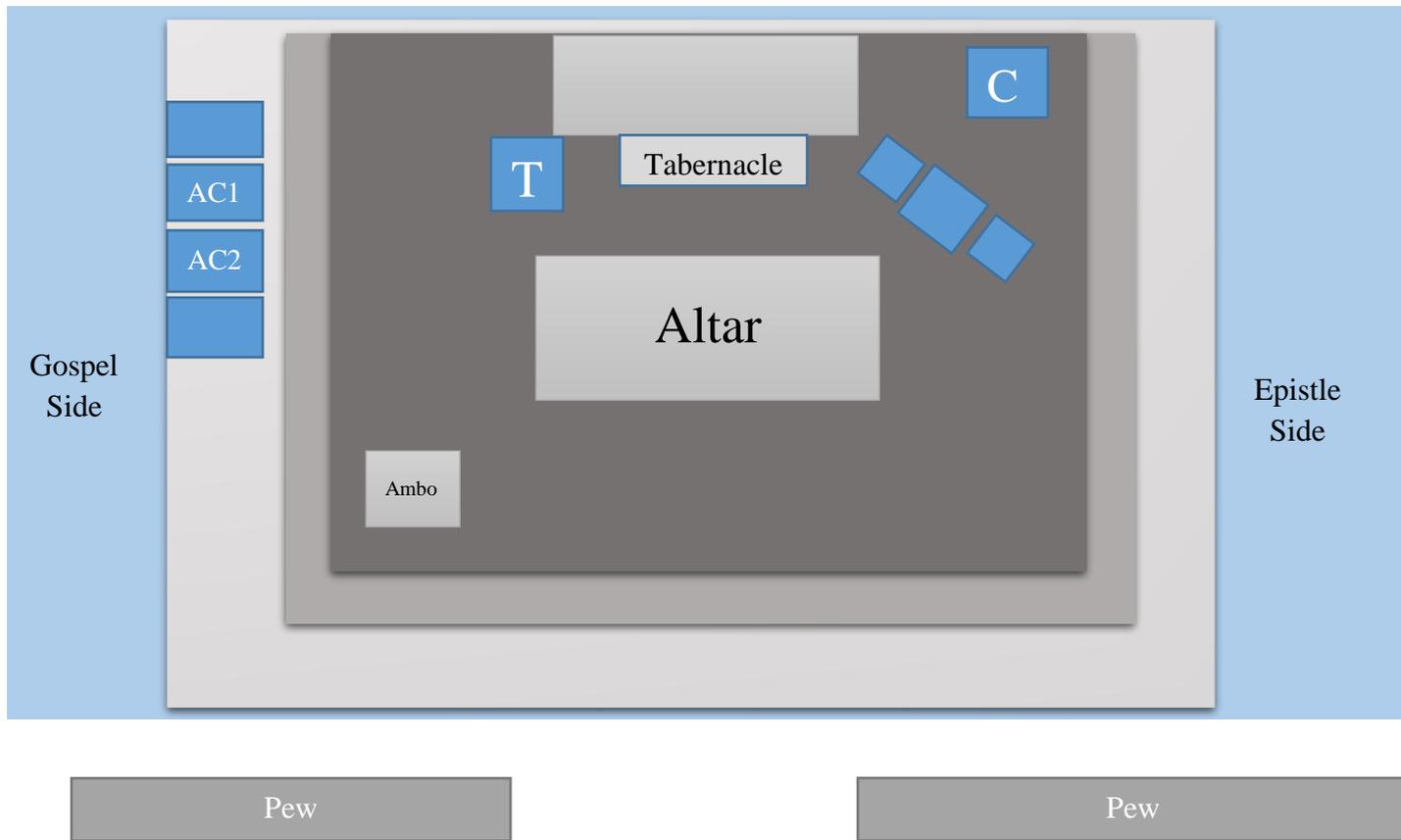
a. Procession

- i. The procession begins after the prayer before Mass is recited with the priest or deacon. The ordering of the procession is as follows:



- ii. Acolyte 1 (AC1) & Acolyte 2 (AC2) will be holding the processional candles.
- iii. As each server approaches the bottom step they will give a head bow to the tabernacle if they are carrying anything, or they will genuflect if they are not carrying anything.
- iv. The Thurifer will wait at the designated area (just to the left of the tabernacle).
- v. The Crucifer will place the processional cross in the holder, and will go to their chair.
- vi. The Acolytes will put the candles in the back, making sure that they are still lit, and then they will return to their chairs.

Acolytes should be sure to leave the seat closest to the sacristy for the Thurifer. It should look like this:



vii. As the Sacred Ministers (priest and deacon) are about to reverence the altar the Thurifer may move in and wait until they reverence it. After they do, the Thurifer hands the boat to the deacon and has the priest impose incense. The priest then incenses the altar. As he is doing this, the Crucifer may retrieve the side missal and open it to the introductory rites.

viii. After the priest incenses the altar the, the Thurifer takes the thurible and returns it to the sacristy, making sure that the charcoals are well lit for the gospel.

b. Greeting

i. The Crucifer should stand with the missal open to the right page, and hold it for the priest as he begins Mass in the usual

manner. If the server is able, or if there is an MC, the pages should be turned to the correct places for the priest, so that he may pray the prayers appropriately and reverently.

- ii. At the conclusion of the opening prayer the Crucifer (and MC) return to their seats and sit.

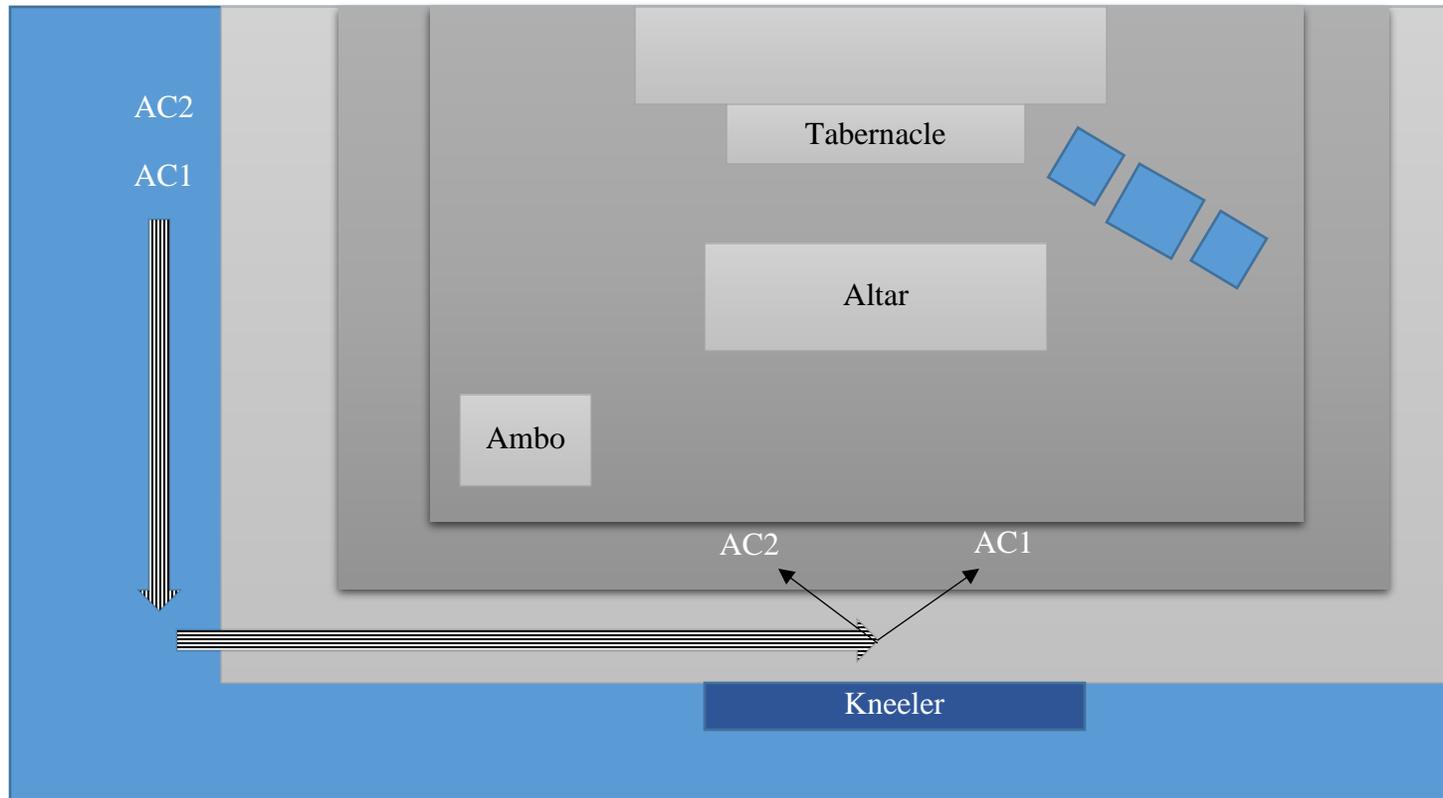
2. Liturgy of the Word

a. First Reading/Psalm/Second Reading

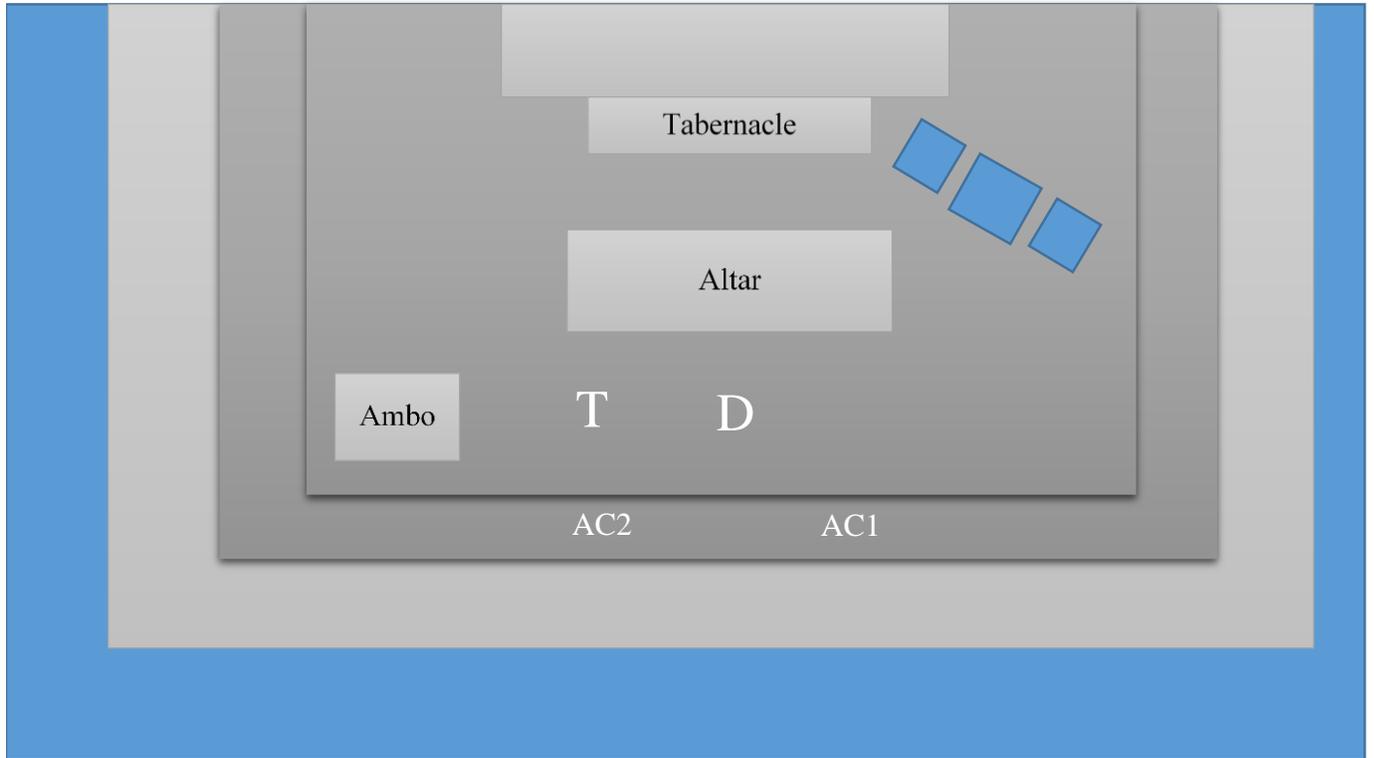
- i. All Servers remain seated and attentive during the First reading and the Psalm.
- ii. At the conclusion of the Psalm and before the second reading, both Acolytes and the Thurifer should stand and go to the back to prepare for the gospel procession.
- iii. At the conclusion of the second reading, the Thurifer may open the door and exit on the epistle side of the altar just before the alleluia. Be mindful not to make the door slam, or to make too much noise in opening it.

b. Alleluia and Gospel

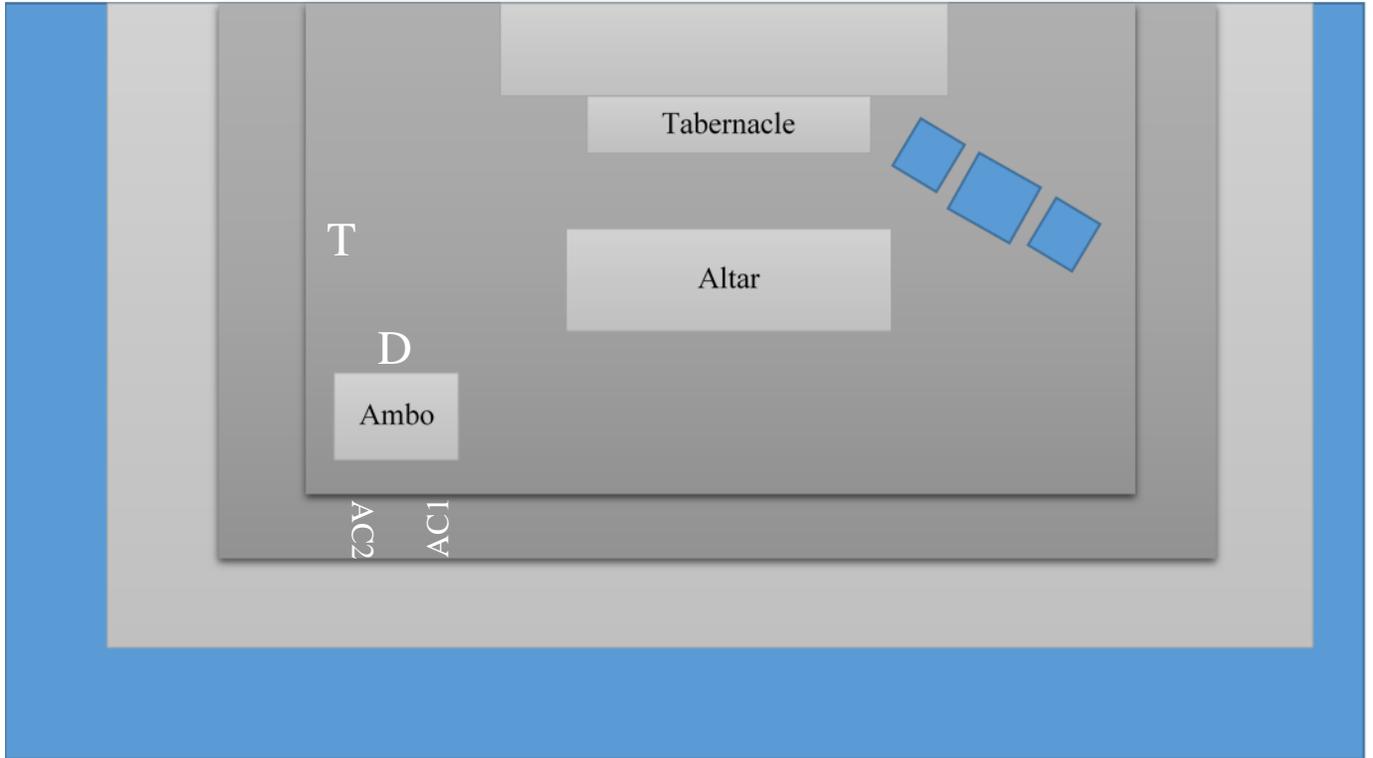
- i. As the Alleluia begins both Acolytes exit the gospel side of the altar, step onto the first step, proceed to the middle, and then stand on the second step facing the altar with each Acolyte standing parallel to the inside edge of the altar:



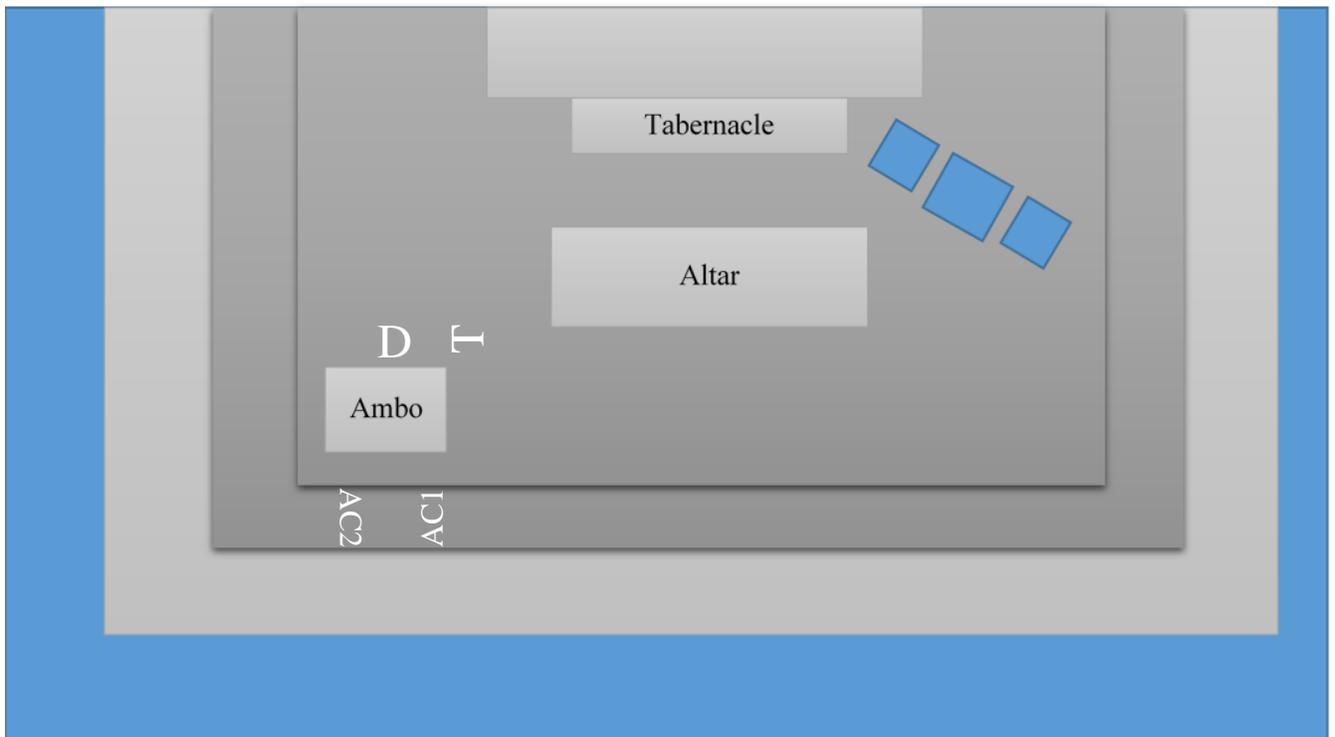
- ii. Again, the boat is handed to the deacon and the priest imposes incense at the presider's chair. After incense is imposed the Thurifer may head over to the front of the altar, and stand just to the left and inside the altar. However, they should take care not to stand in the middle and block the deacon.



- iii. After the deacon receives the blessing and bows at the middle of the altar, the procession then turns to the left, and is led by the Thurifer. The Acolytes stand just in front of the ambo, and face one another, with candles at the same height. The Thurifer stands to the left and behind the ambo (be sure to leave the boat with another server, or on the credence table).



- iv. At the words, “A reading from the Holy Gospel...” the Thurifer may move to the right side of the ambo and face the deacon to hand him the thurible.



- v. After the thurible is handed to the deacon the Thurifer takes a step back towards the back-right side of the ambo and bows with the deacon.
- vi. When the book of the gospels is incensed, the Thurifer steps forward and receives the thurible from the deacon. They then go and stand in their original position (to the left-and behind the ambo).
- vii. At the conclusion of the gospel, the Acolytes and Thurifer return to the sacristy and place their items in their respective positions. N.B. Now would be a good opportunity to add extra charcoal.

c. Creed/Prayers of the Faithful

- i. At the conclusion of the homily the Crucifer may stand and open the missal to the Creed, and wait near the chair. When the priest stands, the server should move in hold the book for the duration of the Creed. NB: be sure to bow your head at the words “...by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man”.¹¹ This is a bow from the waist, not a simple head bow.
- ii. At the conclusion of the Creed the Crucifer returns the missal to the table, and stands in front of their chair.

3. Liturgy of the Eucharist

- a. At the conclusion of the Prayers of the Faithful the Crucifer is to take the Crucifix and proceed down the epistle side of the altar.
- b. At the same time the Acolytes are to begin assisting the Deacon with dressing the altar. AC2 bring should take the missal, and AC1 should take the Chalice. Both are to proceed over and place them

¹¹ See *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* paragraph 275b.

on the altar at the same time, step back, bow, and then turn to the right and go back.

c. Procession of the gifts

- i. At the appropriate time the Crucifer will begin to process down the center aisle in a reverent, but timely manner. The Sacred Ministers, and both Acolytes will meet them at the bottom of the steps.
- ii. As the Crucifer approaches the Sacred Ministers he should offer a brief head bow and then return the processional cross to the appropriate place, and head over to the gospel side of the altar by going around the back (through the sacristy). NB: Please make sure that the door does not slam, and that this is done in a quiet manner.
- iii. The Crucifer may then take the seat closest to the sacristy so that he may ring the bells at the appropriate time during the Consecration.
- iv. During this time the Thurifer should be preparing the thurible for the incensing of the altar.

d. Offertory

- i. The servers should receive the wine, and immediately go back to the credence table to retrieve the water. They should then immediately go to the altar and give the water and wine to the deacon. The wine should be closest to the altar, since it is the first used.
- ii. After the wine has been elevated, and the priest offers it, the Thurifer with the boat should step forward and hand the boat to the deacon.
- iii. After the priest is done offering the wine, he will say a short prayer and then move over to begin imposing incense into the

thurible. The Thurifer will then hand the thurible to the deacon while taking the boat back, and then stand in the position that they were in at the beginning of Mass (to the left of the tabernacle).

- iv. As the priest comes back around after incensing the altar, the deacon should move forward and receive the thurible from the priest. In the event that there is no deacon, the Thurifer will do this. First the Deacon should bow, and then the priest should then be incensed with three swings beginning in the middle, then to the left, and finally to the right. The act is then ended with another bow. The deacon should then move around to the front of the altar and incense the people in the same manner that he incensed the priest. (NB: There is no need to turn 90 degrees to the left and right to incense the people in the transepts. A slight turn is all that is required.)
 - v. After the priest is incensed Acolyte 1 should have the water and the lavabo bowl, while Acolyte 2 holds the towel. The lavabo towel should be held at the top of the towel between the thumb and index finger with hands folded together. As the time approaches to dry the priest's hands the server may open their hands and present the towel to the priest.
 - vi. After the priests hands are washed, the servers bow in unison and turn inwards. The lavabo items may be returned to the credence table.
 - vii. Both Acolytes then return to server sacristy and retrieve their candles. They are joined by the Thurifer who ensures that the thurible is well lit. If there is no Boat Bearer then incense should be put into the thurible before leaving.
- e. Eucharistic Prayer

- i. At the beginning of the *Sanctus*, AC1 followed by the Thurifer and AC2 process out of the server sacristy to the foot of the altar. They kneel down on the kneeler at the conclusion of the *Sanctus*.
- ii. Meanwhile, the Crucifer kneels with the bells, and rings them at the Epiclesis. NB: You can easily memorize when the epiclesis is, but if you get confused you can look at the priest's hands. He should extend them over the gifts with his palms down. If you cannot see the priest, then simply ring the bells when the deacon kneels.
- iii. At the words of the Epiclesis incense may be imposed into the Thurible if a Boat Bearer is present. Make sure that a good and temperate amount is added (about 3 spoon fills).
- iv. At the Elevation of the Host and the Chalice the Crucifer rings the bells in three sets of three rings (nine rings total). Simultaneously, the Thurifer incenses the sacred species with three sets of three swings (also nine in total).
- v. All servers remain attentive and prayerful throughout the canon of the Mass.

4. Communion Rite

a. Lord's Prayer

- i. At the beginning of the *Our Father* the Acolytes and Thurifer rise in unison, turn to the left, and process back to the server sacristy. Upon arriving, they may deposit the various items in the appropriate places and then go back to receive the sign of peace.

b. Sign of Peace

- i. At the Sign of Peace all servers ascend to the altar and receive the sign of peace from the priest first, and then the deacon.

- ii. After receiving the sign of peace, the two Acolytes and the Crucifer go to retrieve the patens for the distribution of the Eucharist. Once they have the patens they may return to the server chairs and wait.
 - iii. At the end of the *Agnus Dei* the servers kneel down.
 - iv. After the priest has received from the chalice the Crucifer rings the bells once.¹²
- c. Communion
- i. After the bell has been rung, all the servers rise together and proceed to the gospel side of the altar to receive Communion.
 - ii. After the servers have received, those with patens follow the Sacred Ministers to the designated areas where they will be distributing Communion.
 - iii. Those holding patens should hold the paten in their right hand, and follow under the Sacred Host as it is distributed to the lay faithful so that not even a single particle of the Sacred Species may be profaned. The left hand should be placed on the sternum.
 - iv. After assisting with the patens, the servers may return to the altar. As they are walking along they should place their left hand in front of the paten to ensure that any particles that may have fallen on the paten will not fall off.
 - v. Attentive care should be given to make sure that the paten arrives on one of the corporals.
 - vi. Acolyte I should then go and retrieve the water and wait by the credence table. Acolyte 2 and the Crucifer may genuflect

¹² The ringing of the bells here has two main purposes. First to tell the faithful that the time for receiving the Eucharist is near. Also, it is to commemorate that the fact that the Holy Sacrifice has been consumed, and offered.

together with the priest and deacon as the tabernacle door is shut. They should then turn and leave.

- vii. Acolyte 1 should attentively watch and make sure that he will arrive just before the priest will need the water. Meanwhile, Acolyte 2 may assist in removing the paten.
- viii. The Crucifer may return to his chair by means of the sacristy, just as before.
- ix. The Thurifer may return to the back and ensure that the thurible is well lit.
- x. Acolytes 1 and 2 then remove any of the items on the altar.
- xi. When it comes time to remove the chalice, AC1 holds the burse and AC2 holds the chalice veil. AC1 stands closest to the altar and AC2 stands to his left.
- xii. After the chalice veil has been placed on the chalice the deacon should leave the altar. Then AC2 should move across the altar and stand in front of the missal. AC1 and AC2 will then pick up the missal and chalice at the same time, step back, bow to the altar, turn right, and then place the items on the credence table.
- xiii. The Acolytes may then return to the back and retrieve their candles and wait with the Thurifer for the procession.

d. Prayer after Communion

- i. After the priest returns to his seat after purifying, the Crucifer should have the missal ready for the Post Communion Prayer.
- ii. The Crucifer may wait near by the presiders chair so that he may arrive in an appropriate time for the prayer.
- iii. When the priest stands the Crucifer moves around with the book and presents the prayer to the priest.

- iv. At the conclusion of the prayer, the Crucifer places the missal back down and stands in front of his chair.

5. Concluding Rite

a. Blessing & Dismissal

- i. After the final blessing the Crucifer may move to retrieve the Processional Cross.
- ii. At the beginning of the St. Michael's prayer the servers may begin to form up the recession.

b. Recession

- i. The recession should be as follows: Thurifer, Crucifer flanked by Acolytes I & 2, followed by MC and Sacred Ministers.
- ii. At the end of the aisle the procession forms up for the *Prosit*. The Thurifer stands in the middle, facing the altar. The Crucifer stands directly in front of him, and is flanked on both sides by the Acolytes who stand shoulder to shoulder with the Crucifer. The Sacred Ministers arrive and the priest says "Prosit."¹³ To which the servers respond, "Pro omnibus, et singulis."¹⁴
- iii. This concludes Mass. Servers should return to the sacristy and assist in bringing back to the priest's sacristy all the items that are returned. After that they may devest and hang their cassocks and surplices up neatly.

¹³ "Prosit" means "May it (the Mass) be for your benefit."

¹⁴ "Pro omnibus et singulis" means "for all and for each."