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The ACOLYTE

The Magazine of the Archconfraternity of Saint Stephen



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A Word From the Chaplain

Dear Acolytes,

It is with good reason that the primary objective of the Archconfraternity of St. Stephen is the sanctification of those who serve at the Altar. God Himself tells us in the book of Numbers that a Levite was available for the Lord's service from 30 years of age to 50. They couldn't begin before 30, and they were not to continue after 50. The reason is clear: before 30 they were subject to immature puerile behavior, while after 50, their health was in decline. This is why Our Lord started preaching at 30, because it was considered the perfect age. No one who was not yet "perfect" in this legal sense could take on "public" duties for the Church of God. Needless to say, this was to teach the people that God demanded holiness and perfection in His service from all His people, but especially from those who served Him in the sanctuary.

Where do New Testament altar boys of a much younger age come in? In the strict sense, altar boys are substituting for clerics in minor orders. Clerics in minor orders from Porter to Acolyte are in the true and strict sense the "Levites" of the New Testament. They become spiritually 30 years of age when they receive the consecration of the ordination to their minor order by the bishop, who is the consecrator and "perfector" of the most important and sacred things in the New Testament. Thus, the Roman Catholic Church considers that such duties as opening and closing the Church, setting up the Altar, ringing the bells for divine service, carrying lighted candles at Mass, offering the incense during the Sacred Mysteries, are duties so holy and awe inspiring that they require special preparation and deputation by special ordination. Thinking of the great holiness of these things has made many young men fear to take up the duties and responsibilities of the priesthood.

On the other hand, the Church has a great missionary spirit that desires ardently to expand the reign of Christ the King throughout the whole world. The Church strives to have Christ reign in every kingdom, state, city and little country town. The Sacred Heart of Jesus wishes to conquer all men of all places and then nourish them by the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. This great goal can only be accomplished by establishing Churches everywhere around which will be built families and parishes and schools. Who will serve all these Masses? Who will assist at all the necessary sacred ceremonies? This is where altar boys come in. It is easy to see that there can not be a seminary in every parish. Nor can any seminary send clerics out in sufficient numbers to all the different parishes and churches to assure the sacred ceremonies. As a result, the Church allows laymen to stand in for the clerical position and fulfill the levitic functions true clerics are ordained to accomplish.

Not only does the Church allow men to take up this noble task, she actually requires it. In point of fact, Canon Law forbids a priest to say Mass without a server. It may be true that he is not a true and ordained cleric, but he does have a seal set upon his soul by baptism. If he has been confirmed as well, he has received a true mission to work for the "public" good of the Catholic Church in a truly "public" manner.

The fundamental reason the Church requires an altar server is because the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is a "public" act in the strict sense of the word. By "public" is meant an act that is done in the name of Jesus Christ as Head of the Church and by the members of the Catholic Church joined together with Him in solemn service. Such a public act is higher than the act of any single person. Since the priest

holds the place of Jesus Christ the High Priest, someone else must stand in to officially and publicly represent His Church. If no duly ordained cleric is available, a properly trained layman should take his place. Such a properly trained laymen is asked to wear the cassock and surplice as a symbol of his taking the place of the ordained clerics and to represent his “official” capacity of representing the Catholic faithful. This wearing of the cassock and surplice is considered so important by the Church that the Sacred Congregation of Rites stipulated that if a properly trained laymen could not be had, a untrained one could be enlisted for service, but that he had to serve Mass without putting on cassock and surplice.

You may pipe in and ask: “*What about altar girls? Since they are baptized and sometimes confirmed, can’t they serve Mass too?*” The Sacred Congregation of Rites stated that a woman **could answer the prayers** of the Mass **at a distance**, but the priest would have to do all the serving actions himself. The reason that girls can not practically serve Mass is that no girl or woman can represent Jesus Christ nor can they really represent the Church in its public actions, for this boils down to the action of Jesus Christ in it.

Now perhaps a particularly thoughtful reader might object further: “*But I’ve heard many times in sermons that in marriage the woman represents the Church, while the man represents Christ!*” This is indeed true, but remember that the server doesn’t represent the Church as bride of Christ, but as acting in His Name. Furthermore, as we said in the beginning, the altar boy takes the place of minor clerics, but no girl can be ordained to minor orders.

Now that all of this has been said, can it be that altar boys take their task lightly? Is it not true that they are needed by the Church? Is it not true that if they are so needed, they are all the more obligated to strive to be good, pure and holy? Sometimes a person could be tempted to think: “*Why not take altar girls? They behave better in Church!*” God and the Church demand altar boys, and though it is harder for boys to behave themselves, let us realize that the urge to misbehave only hides a virile nature that could, if properly directed, serve God in a great way later on in life. This is the largest part of your fellowship in the Guild of St. Stephen: to so mold your soul as to serve God worthily on the Altar.

It is true that the majority of our altar boys are well under the perfect age of 30. However, God, when numbering the Levites, told Moses that He would count as a real Levite, any male baby Levite who had attained at least 30 days of life. Now if a baby attained 30 days in those ancient times, this must mean that they had passed the dangerous stage and were very likely to survive unto the levitic age of service of 30 years old. Spiritually, this means that if a young altar server sets firmly in his heart that he will strive to be holy and pleasing to God, that he will wage ceaseless war against his faults and that he will never give up in the combat, God will consider him as 30 days old. Even if he does stupid things that boys do, even so, if his heart is steadfast and set, God will impute the spiritual 30 days to him and will consider him as on his way to 30 years old of spiritual perfection.

So, for the rest, say your prayer daily – and like St. Stephen fight sin wherever you find it, but first and foremost in your own heart and soul.

In Our Lord, Eternal High Priest,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Fr. J. Timothy Pfeiffer'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fr. J. Timothy Pfeiffer

Presidential Tip SNUANCE

Advice for Chapter Presidents

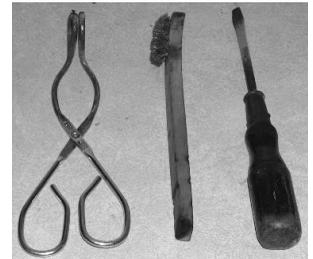
Ever seen this scenario during the solemn moment of imposing incense at Mass? The thurifer approaches the celebrant with the thurible and raises the cover, then the celebrant imposes the incense, but instead of the expectant steady, uprising stream of fragrant smoke, barely a wisp emits from the thurible, despite even the assistance of the thurifer furiously blowing upon the coals. Unfortunately, the majority of us *have* witnessed such a scene, hopefully though, this article will help to prevent such a mishap from occurring in your sanctuary again.

For starters, it ought to be imparted to every new thurifer that his *primary duty* is to ensure that there is a sufficient quantity of prepared charcoals for the various times that incense is imposed during Mass, Benediction or other ceremonies. Hence the importance in training new thurifers in all of the *practical* aspects of this duty, *even before covering the actual position* as performed in the sanctuary.

In the old days when coal was generally used year-round for cooking and in colder seasons for heating, having a fresh supply of charcoals did not necessarily pose a problem. When coals were needed, the thurifer simply went to the nearest stove (perhaps even positioned in the sacristy for heating purposes), pulled out a couple of white hot charcoals, deposited them into his thurible and his job was half-done! Now however, things are a little more complicated (so much for technology!).

Sacristies have the choice of using two types of charcoals, real¹ and the self-lighting type, though no matter which type you elect to use there are some common tools that every sacristy should have for preparing charcoals:

- a medium-size, flathead screwdriver,
- a pair (or two) of tongs,
- and a receptacle for holding the dumped charcoals²



A word of caution about these tools, never allow *any* items used in connection with the thurible to come into contact with wax, otherwise an incredible stink will be made when the piece of wax (or even just its residue) comes into contact with the hot charcoals, thereby ruining your beautiful smelling incense!

There are two other items that I highly recommend for assisting the thurifer in performing his duties efficiently and consistently well:

- an electric heating coil,
- and a charcoal preparation stand made of steel.

Both items are shown in the pictures that accompany this article, and allow me to briefly explain their advantages.

An electric coil allows the thurifer to rapidly, effectively and safely heat up charcoals, both the real and self-lighting types. Such a unit costs about \$15.00 and rids the inefficient approach most often taken in lighting charcoals (*e.g.*, with wooden or wax tapers, candles, matches, etc.) which gives

inconsistent and usually poor results. Here is the method of using such a coil:



1. When the thurifer first walks into the sacristy (20 minutes before Mass) he should immediately turn the unit on “high” before doing anything else, as it will generally take the coil five minutes to warm up.
2. Do not lay the charcoals on the coil until it is red hot, otherwise, the increasing heat will be absorbed by the cold charcoals, causing the coil to take longer to heat up to its maximum temperature.
3. Lay the charcoals close together (touching in fact), and prepare in this fashion:
 - Real charcoals: when completely gray on the bottom side, flip them over until completely gray on the other, then remove the charcoals from the coil and with a flat-head screwdriver, chop the charcoals into *quarters* (this is easily done by striking the top of the vertically-held screwdriver, which is centered on top of the charcoal, with the palm of one’s hand).
 - Self-lighting charcoals: put on the coil with the “star” or “rim” side (*i.e.*, the side with the self-igniting material) *facing down*. When the “star” or “rim” side is completely gray, transfer the charcoals to the thurible’s firepot and cut into *halves*³ with a screwdriver.
4. Leave the coil on the “high” setting throughout the entire Mass until the last batch of charcoals have been lighted so that the coil is immediately ready for preparing the next batch.
5. After heating up each batch of charcoals, make sure to brush off the carbon residue (which can act as an insulator) from the coil with a small brass brush.

In the place of a coil, the following items can also be used to light the self-lighting charcoals:

- a propane torch (though this must be done on a metallic surface and in a protected area); at the turn of the century, sacristies in the United States often had such a countertop version for this very purpose (real charcoals may be lighted this way too),
- a lighter-fluid stick (sometimes called a “fire-stick”; these red, plastic handled devices are often used for lighting Weber grills),
- a wooden taper (do not use wax ones, for the reason stated above),
- or even just a wooden match or two skillfully wielded can do the trick.

Again though, ensure that the “star” or “rim” side is completely gray (and some amount of vigorous blowing⁴ on the charcoals might be necessary to accomplish this).

As for the steel charcoal preparation stand⁵, this is essentially a box into which the coil is placed (made of rather thick-gauged steel to dissipate heat), resting on metal legs, a vertical shaft from which to hang the thurible, a shelf for holding the dumped charcoals receptacle⁶ and if a thurible cabinet is lacking, for any of the thurible tools mentioned in this article. Such a stand provides an efficient and safe place for all of the tasks associated with preparing charcoals, from lighting (*e.g.*, no more burnt countertops), to chopping⁷, to finally transferring them to the firepot (*e.g.*, no more burnt sacristy floors).

If such a stand is not available, a thick-walled, metal baker’s pan can be used on a countertop. However,

it is advisable that a wooden or stone cutting-board be put underneath as a heat dispenser.

A quick word about charcoals: I highly recommend the use of real charcoals over the self-lighting type, and for these reasons:

- An entire bag of real charcoals is cheaper than a box of 100 self-lights (compare less than \$10.00 versus \$20.00)
- Real charcoals burn hotter and longer than self-lighting charcoal (which have a tendency to burn out easily or rapidly), thereby requiring very little maintenance to keep them burning.
- The unburned and dumped portions of real charcoals can almost always be reused; simply retrieve them from the receptacle and relight.
- Finally, real charcoals do not have the tendency to explode, as do self-lights charcoals.⁸



So not only are real charcoals more economical, but also more effective.

Before concluding, two other tips related to this topic:

1. Ensure the charcoal pieces are laid evenly within the thurible's firepot and with the hot spots facing up to make maximum use of the burning area in the firepot. This also guarantees that the expensive incense imposed will be completely burnt up and not wasted, thereby making good use of the sacristy's (perhaps meager) coffers.
2. Never wear a surplice (or allow anyone wearing one around the area) while lighting or tending charcoals. An inerrant spark will create a hole in the fabric, which usually cannot be repaired. Considering that the average surplice costs over \$30.00, this is an added expense that ought to be avoided by the use of good habits and some common sense.

FOOTNOTES

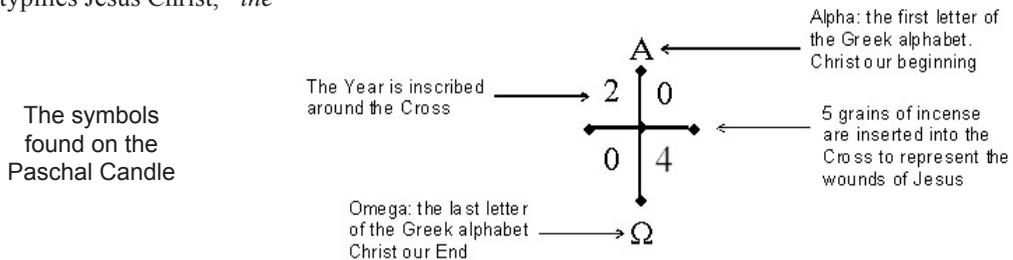
1. The plain type, and not the "self-lighting" type (impregnated with lighter fluid) should be used. Also, steer away from generic brands, as these tend to not light as quickly, nor as evenly; the Kingsford brand tends to give the best results.
2. A baker's pan or a coffee can with its bottom lined with sand (to prevent the wasted charcoals from rusting the pan) will work nicely.
3. Due to their thin size and density, self-lighting charcoals burn up much faster than real charcoals, so lighting them on both sides and chopping them into quarters is not generally a good idea unless you plan to use 4 to 5 charcoals in the firepot.
4. Swinging the thurible in an arc or wildly side to side in the sacristy to speed up the lighting of the charcoals is *not* recommended (and in fact, in some churches this is actually forbidden), as this is just a fiery accident waiting to happen (and more often than not, they do).
5. A person with basic welding skills can easily construct one of these.
6. It is best to place the dumped charcoals receptacle *outside* during the ceremonies so that the sacristy does not become smoked up. This also allows one to place the coil on the shelf when it comes time to chop the charcoals, which is a safer approach.
7. For real charcoals at least. It is best to chop self-lighting charcoals in the firepot, as they tend to shatter into minute pieces which are difficult to transfer to the firepot.
8. This is because the self-lighting type are formed under pressure, and so air bubbles can sometimes become trapped inside. As the temperature of the heating-up coal rises, the air expands and since it has no where to go... the charcoal explodes thereby wrecking havoc.

per brevior **OR** *per longior* **INCENSE**

“... by instructing him the manner of observing the rites and ceremonies of the Church according to the rubrics and to the decrees of the Sacred Congregation of Rites and the interpretations of the most generally accepted authorities . . .”

The Paschal Candle

The blessing of the “paschal candle”, which is a column of wax of exceptional size, usually fixed in a great candlestick specially destined for that purpose, is a notable feature of the service on Holy Saturday. The blessing is performed by the deacon, wearing a white dalmatic. A long prayer, the “*Præconium paschali*” or “*Exultet*”, is chanted by him, and in the course of this chanting the candle is first ornamented with five grains of incense and then lighted with the newly blessed fire. At a later stage in the service, during the blessing of the font, the same candle is plunged three times into the water with the words: “*Descendat in hanc plenitudinem fontis virtus Spiritus Sancti*” (“*May the power of the Holy Ghost come down into the fullness of this fountain*”). From Holy Saturday until Ascension Day the paschal candle is left with its candlestick in the sanctuary, standing upon the Gospel side of the altar, and it is lighted during high Mass¹ and solemn Vespers on Sundays. It is extinguished after the Gospel on Ascension Day and is then removed.”...the paschal candle typifies Jesus Christ, “*the*



true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world”, surrounded by His illuminated, *i.e.*, newly baptized disciples, each holding a smaller light. In the virgin wax a later symbolism recognized the most pure flesh which Christ derived from His blessed Mother, in the wick the human soul of Christ, and in the flame the divinity of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Moreover, the five grains of incense set cross-wise in the candle recalled the sacred wounds retained in Christ’s glorified body and the lighting of the candle with new fire itself served as a lively image of the resurrection. Excerpted from *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1913 edition), Herbert Thurston.

Lighting of the Paschal Candle

It is lighted at solemn Mass and Vespers: on Easter Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Saturday; on all Sundays and Holydays; on the feast of the Ascension up to the Gospel of the principle Mass inclusively; on other days before the Ascension where such is the custom (Sacred Congregation of Rites 235, XI)². The candle may never be lighted for Masses in black or violet vestments, except where this is customary in the case of a conventual Mass (Sacred Congregation of Rites 3697, XI); neither may it be lighted for Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, unless the Exposition is held in immediate connection with some other function (Mass or Vespers) during which the lighting of the candle is allowed (Sacred Congregation of Rites 3479, III; 4383, I—II). *Matters Liturgical*, Wuest, Mullaney and Barry; Nos. 505 & 414, 1.

Rule of Precedence to Remember

Due to its symbolic importance, the Paschal Candle is the **first candle lit**, and the **last candle to be extinguished** in the sanctuary.

FOOTNOTES

1. Or more properly speaking, the: Coventual Mass: The daily community Mass which must be said or sung in all conventual churches of regulars [*i.e.*, Canons, secular clerks regular, and monastic communities] who are bound to the public recitation of the Divine Office. *A Catholic Dictionary*, Attwater. If the Coventual Mass is a Low Mass, the Paschal Candle is lit for this too.
 2. In the United States, this includes all days after Easter until the Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord, unless prohibited as aforementioned.
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Letters to an Altar Boy

Originally written by Fr. David E. Rosage and printed in 1963
under the same title by Bruce Publishing Co., this letter continues the series

YOU DO RATE

Dear Jimmy,

Do you know that as an altar boy you are one of the most important people in the whole parish? At Mass you rate higher than the janitor and the ushers. Yes, you are even more important than the choir.

“Why is my role so important?” you ask. Let us go way back in history to the time of St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary to find the answer. Our Lord wanted to come into the world. God sent the Angel Gabriel to ask Mary if she would become the Mother of Jesus. That was the way Jesus wished to come into the world.

Mary paused, and all heaven waited eagerly. Then, humbly, Mary said *“Yes”* in the most beautiful way anyone could have said it: *“Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to Thy word.”* Because Mary gave her consent, our Lord was able to come into the world and do so much for us.

Today, our Lord wants to come to live with us. Each day He wants to come into our hearts in Holy Communion so that He may help us to be good; so that He may help us to live and work as we should. Now, the way our Lord comes into the world today is through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. At each Mass our Lord comes into the world again just as truly as He was born at Bethlehem. Therefore, the Mass is the most important action which can take place in the whole world.

The Mass is much more important than the baseball game which will decide the world series. It is far more important than the touchdown which may determine who will win the conference pennant.

You are so important, Jimmy, because you are helping the priest to offer Mass; to bring our Lord into the world each morning. You are the priest’s first assistant. In fact, the Church considers you so important that the law of the Church requires a priest to have an altar boy before he may say Mass. A priest must have special reason or permission to say Mass without a server. That’s how important the Church considers you.

Whether you realize it or not, you are more important at Mass than your own dear mother, or Sister Superior at school, or a princess in a royal castle, or the mother of a bishop, or even the sister of the Holy Father. Why? Well, you see, Jimmy, these good and holy women may answer the prayers of the priest at Mass. And they must do this sometimes when you oversleep, but they are never permitted to leave their pews and come into the sanctuary while Mass is being offered. They may not walk up the altar steps during the Mass to change the Missal from the Epistle to the Gospel side of the altar. Neither may they bring the water and wine up to the priest. That privilege is reserved only for altar boys. Yes, you are the only person who may come so close to our Lord during Mass.

So, you see, Jimmy, as an altar boy you are very important. More important, I'll bet, than you thought. Our Lord depends on you to help Him come into the world. Isn't that strange and wonderful? Our Lord, who is the Master of heaven and earth, asks you to help Him come down among men.

Each day when you serve Mass, you can look up at the Sacred Host at the *Elevation* and smile as you say to our Lord: "*Jesus, I have helped You in my own small way to come into the world this morning. I hope my serving Holy Mass has pleased You. Thank You, Jesus, for giving me this wonderful privilege.*"

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Cui Servire Regnare Est

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