

## Vesting for Mass

Deacon Anthony Gooley

The General Instruction on the Roman Missal (GIRM) states clearly that when a deacon is present at Mass, wearing his sacred vestments, he should exercise his diaconal ministry (GIRM 171). The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Guidelines (2005) further add a note of clarification that If there is more than one deacon present at Mass they may distribute the diaconal ministry among themselves (#7).

### Not concelebrating

It is easy to see why it is not the choice of the celebrant. A deacon or lay a person do not concelebrate in the manner of a presbyter; that is priests can share the presidential prayers among themselves at a concelebrated liturgy. Deacons and laity do not pray any of the presidential prayers at Mass.

Deacons and laity participate in the Mass by right and not by permission of the celebrant. A lay person or a deacon offer the Mass, in Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit, with the priest who presides through that same Christ and in that one Spirit. Deacon, priest and lay person each have their distinct role within the liturgy and none of them exercise that ministry with the permission of the other but by right. They participate in the liturgy in the way they do because of their sacramental foundation in the Church, the laity through the sacraments of initiation and the clergy through Holy Orders.

The whole community is the subject of the act of worship. "Father" is not saying Mass while the others passively receive. Full conscious and active participation of the whole Church in worship means that each exercises the ministry proper to his/her place within the body of Christ.

### Every Sunday

If a deacon is appointed to a parish and present at Mass he should exercise his ministry every Sunday. He should also do so at any week day Mass he attends. We no longer have the concept of the low and high Mass. The deacon is not there to add a bit of solemnity or extra dignity to the liturgy but there because God called him to exercise this ministry in the Church. He calls the laity and priest there too.

If a deacon in a parish only exercises his diaconal ministry at Mass sometimes and other times sits in the pew in his own parish what does this say about our theology of baptism and Orders. Would we say that it is OK for the laity to come to Mass but not respond in word or gesture to the people's parts? Could we say it was OK for the parish priest to be present in the pews but not preside?

The ancient rule of *lex orandi, lex credendi*; how we pray is what we believe, applies to this situation. The diaconate was restored as a permanent ministry because there was a shortage of deacons. There was none to permanently witness to the diaconal ministry in the Church. If a deacon only sometimes gets out of the pews when he is there how can he be that permanent sign?



**The question of whether deacon should exercise his ministry within a celebration does not belong to the presiding celebrant (ACBC Guidelines #7).**



## How many Masses

I think it an impossible demand for deacons to attend every Mass on every Sunday. Most deacons have either fulltime secular employment or work in ecclesial organisations which require a 35-40 week and do not get any time in lieu to compensate for additional Masses and other liturgies on weekend. Many priests would take a day off in the week but that option is not available to most deacons.

It would seem most weekends one Mass would be sufficient for the deacon. On weekends where he preaches it makes sense for him to be at all of the Masses if there is only one priest in the parish so that the priest does not have to prepare a homily for just one Mass. Decisions about this are negotiated with the priest.

As the situation of deacons and parishes vary so much it is not easy to establish a definitive ruling about the number of Masses. Deacons, priests and parishes should have realistic and just expectations about the deacon being present at a number of Masses.

This should be negotiated between the priest and the deacon and the parish should be informed about the situation so that they are not left guessing why the deacon may not be at all Masses.

### In any parish?

The GIRM and Guidelines are ambiguous about if this means any time a deacon is present at Mass he should exercise his ministry. We know from the experience of priest that they normally exercise their ministry in one parish and would normally only concelebrate with some prior invitation or by arrangement with the presider. Often times when priest is on holidays or visiting he will sit in the pews if there is a priest celebrant.

The practice of priests may give some further common sense guidelines here. A deacon should participate as a deacon in his own parish whenever present but as a visitor to another parish he might participate either by prior invitation or by making a request to the presider or sit in the pews.

The suggestion that he might not always exercise his diaconal ministry when away from his own parish does not contradict the first statement that he should participate always as deacon. Perhaps also having a connection to a particular ecclesial community is a norm in making the decision to participate as deacon. There is also the practical consideration that the parish may not have deacon vestments or that the presider may be very unfamiliar with what a deacon does in the liturgy.

If we focus on the regular situation, a deacon in his own parish should exercise his diaconal ministry when present at Mass.



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