



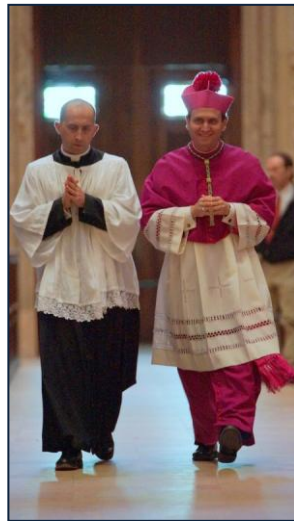
# Seminary Life: the Master of Ceremonies

By Seminarian Alex, from Liverpool, in Fifth Year at Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary in Nebraska

As members of a clerical society of apostolic life, the priests and seminarians of the Fraternity of St Peter live in common, whether in parishes and apostolates or in one of the two international seminaries. In the seminary, this communal life is a fundamental and integral part of the formation of the candidates for the priesthood and helps each member grow in the virtues necessary for life as a priest. In order for the seminary to function efficiently and peacefully, each member naturally play his own part in the day to day running and functioning of the seminary. For there to be peace in the seminary, there must be order; and effective distribution of the day-to-day tasks gives that order and structure.

To this end, each seminarian will have different jobs assigned to him at different times of the month, and year. There are the weekly jobs that the seminarians rotate through; waiter, dishwasher, breakfast set up crew, table lector and such like. Then there are the more permanent jobs that are assigned at the beginning of the semester, and include librarian, infirmarian, sacristan, mechanic and master of ceremonies. It is this last mentioned position, master of ceremonies (MC), that your author has been assigned to, for the last year or so. This role has a broad spectrum, and includes anything from training the new candidates to serve the private low masses, instructing the seminarians in the different weekly liturgical roles (thurifer, acolyte etc) and even co-coordinating the complicated solemn pontifical ceremonies that take place several times during the year. It is these ceremonies, and the implications for the MC, that I would like to elaborate on here.

It is quite common for people to have the impression that, in the development of the liturgy, the more complicated and ornate forms of the Mass have evolved from the simpler form of low Mass, but quite the reverse is true. The low Mass itself is actually a development from the solemn Mass of a bishop. This development has number of causes, but briefly, as the Church's understanding of the propitiatory effects of the sacrifice of the Mass for the living and the deceased deepened over time, there was a greater emphasis placed on the daily celebration of Masses, particularly in the monastic communities, where all the monks would celebrate their own private Mass, and attend the communal Mass. Indeed this practice of the individual celebration of Mass has often come under attack, from the Jansenist Synod of Pistoia of 1786, and even to our own day, and was defended by Pius XII in his great liturgical encyclical *Mediator Dei*. To correctly understand the ceremonies of the



(Three first pictures:  
Seminarian Alex acting as  
Master of Ceremony on three  
different occasions in the  
U.S.A. Last picture:  
Seminarian Emmanuel as MC  
– standing far right – at the  
Confirmations by Bishop  
Philip Egan of Portsmouth at  
St William of York in  
Reading in 2013.)

low Mass, one needs to understand the solemn Mass and, ultimately, the solemn Mass of a bishop.

At the end of this month of November we are lucky to have two solemn pontifical Masses one after the other. One at the seminary in Denton, when the Third and Fourth Year candidates will receive the minor orders of Porter, Lector, Exorcist and Acolyte (including three British candidates, Seth, Thomas and Matthew) – and the following Sunday a final profession of one of the Carmelite sisters at the nearby Carmelite monastery. For these ceremonies, the MC assigned to each Mass is responsible for selecting and training all of the servers needed, liaising with the sacristans regarding the different items and vestments that will be needed, co-coordinating with, and sometimes selecting, the sacred ministers and arranging several practices of the ceremony before the day finally arrives. Before we look at the challenges involved in this work, let us examine the different elements of the liturgical celebration of a pontifical Mass itself.

A local Bishop will celebrate pontifically from his throne, which in his cathedral is traditionally located on the Gospel (left) side of the sanctuary. For this ceremony the Bishop is assisted by two deacons on either side of him

when he is at the throne, an assistant priest in cope, who holds the liturgical books (the missal, episcopal canon, or pontifical) when the Bishop reads from them, a deacon and subdeacon as at solemn Mass, and also a subdeacon who is vested and carries the processional cross. To assist these ministers the Bishop has four chaplains, typically those who have received the clerical tonsure, who carry the book, candle, crozier and mitre. Added to these are the usual two acolytes, a thurifer, and not one but two masters of ceremonies (one to remain with the

Bishop, and one to stay with the deacon, subdeacon and servers). All together that is a total of sixteen people to be co-coordinated through the ceremony. For added solemnity the Bishop may have two *familiars* who, without surplice but wearing a long black cloak, the *ferraiolo*, attend to the Bishop whenever he washes his hands and escort him into the Church upon his arrival. If he arrives wearing the *cappa magna*, a long purple cloak, he has a *train bearer*, who carries the end of the *cappa*.



It sometimes happens that a Bishop may celebrate outside of his own diocese, or in the presence of a higher ranking prelate while in his own diocese, and here the Bishop will not 'pontificate' from the throne, but uses the *faldstool*, an ornate backless seat usually shaped in the form of an x, that sits in front of the altar, this time on the Epistle side of the sanctuary (right). In this ceremony the Bishop does not have the



assistance of two deacons that he has at the throne, their duties being managed by the subdeacon and deacon of the Mass, with the assistance of the MC.

Besides the various ministers that are required for a Bishop to celebrate pontifically, there are many fascinating and symbolical elements unique to pontifical ceremonies that are worth noting. The Bishop uses all of the usual items used in the celebration of Holy Mass but also extra items that belong to his dignity as a Bishop, referred to as *pontificalia*. By decree of Pope Pius VII, *Decretum Romanorum* (1823) these include buskins, pontifical shoes, gloves, pontifical dalmatic and tunicle, ring, pectoral cross and mitre. Added to these items are the crozier, bugia (hand candle) and episcopal Canon (the book containing the ordinary prayers of the Mass). It is interesting to note that historically other members of the clergy have been allowed the use of pontificalia, including Abbots and certain Canons, but always with restrictions. There also has been permission for clergy who are not Bishops to confer First Tonsure and the Minor Orders on their candidates. Indeed traditionally Abbesses in some monasteries have been granted the privilege of the mitre and crozier also.

We turn now to the ceremony of solemn pontifical Mass itself, for a brief examination of the differences between it and the Mass of a simple priest. Depending on different circumstances the Bishop may put on his vestments in a separate chapel called the *sextarium* or at the throne or faldstool itself. This vesting is indeed ceremonial, and not a mere donning of the required items, with a set of prayers in the episcopal Canon read specifically for each item, with rich theological and spiritual symbolism.

On arrival at the church the Bishop goes with his attendants to the place where the Blessed Sacrament is kept (It is removed from the tabernacle on the high altar) and prays for a short time. He then goes to the place where he will vest (as described above) and, assisted by the deacon, subdeacon, assistant priest and MC, he puts on the vestments already described, reading the vesting prayers from the book. The bishop then processes with his entourage, to the high altar with mitre and crozier, if he did not vest there.

The Bishop does not put on the maniple (an ornamental band that is wrapped around the left arm) when he vests but after he says the *Confiteor* and *Indugentiam* prayers. The preparatory prayers of psalm 42 being joyful, the Bishop first confesses his sinfulness and implores God's mercy, before putting on the maniple that represents the toil of the priesthood. He then incenses the altar as the priest at solemn Mass, but receives the mitre before he himself is incensed by the deacon. He does not stay at the altar to read the prayers of the Mass of the Catechumens, but instead goes to the throne (or faldstool) where he reads everything, from the Introit through to the Offertory. The assistant priest holds the book whenever the Bishop sings anything looking at it (for example the Gloria and Credo). The Bishop and his ministers will then sit during the parts sung by the choir, as at solemn Mass. From the Consecration to the Communion, the ceremonies are largely

the same as those of the Mass by a mere priest, except that the assistant priest will attend to the book and also the ring when the Bishop washes his hands. All five of his sacred ministers receive the *pax*, or kiss of peace, from him.

After the Communion, with the deacon attending to the ablutions, the Bishop washes his hands again, while wearing the mitre, and then reads the remaining proper prayers, the Communion and Post Communion, before giving the pontifical blessing.

If the Bishop has use of the crozier, that is, if he is in his own diocese or for ceremonies that require it (e.g. ordination or confirmation), he receives it and the mitre before giving the blessing. He finishes with the last gospel and will unvest either at the throne or faldstool, or in the sextarium, as at the beginning of Mass.

It is worth mentioning here the role that psychology plays in the external elements of the liturgy. Founded on the teachings of Aristotle, and the later expounding of St Thomas

Aquinas, the Church's perennial philosophy has always taught the importance of man's use of signs, as external visible signs point to the invisible realities behind them. With this in mind, and against a prevailing criticism of the Church's liturgical patrimony, it is proved by these teachings that the external elements of liturgical worship are not any empty pomp. All of the items and ceremonies mentioned above have at their core a deep theological and philosophical significance. As varied signs, symbols and rites, they help the sacred ministers and faithful to achieve their common end in the execution of their respective roles in the liturgy. This end is the raising of the heart and mind to Almighty God, through the sacrifice of His Son on the Cross.

All these different elements having been discussed, the ministers, items, vestments, symbolism and psychology, it seems obvious that the role of the master of ceremonies has many facets, and challenges. The MC must be well versed in

*all* of the different roles of *all* the ministers, even of the Bishop himself. He must be able to co-ordinate all of the ministers through the ceremony with as much calm as possible and without drawing attention to himself. If there is a problem or error in the ceremony he must decide whether to let the error slip by without undue fuss or to try and repair an error as diplomatically as possible. An MC travelling to a new parish or location may have the issue of having to direct ministers who themselves are not well versed in the ceremonies, and this can create new challenges. Along with all of these different elements we must mention perhaps the most important quality the MC needs, and that is humility. As humility is learned and cultivated in the

common life of the seminary during his formation, so it is also cultivated in the one place that is the goal of that formation, the sanctuary. The future priest will be the minister of Jesus Christ nowhere more importantly than in the sanctuary, and it is in the seminary and in the sanctuary that he must lose himself and put on Christ. This is only possible with true humility. May God grant it to us in His mercy. □

