



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In our celebration of the Eucharistic Revival, we have been looking at the Eucharist as Presence, as Sacrifice, and as Communion. Currently, as we examine the Eucharist as Sacrifice, we are making our way into the Mass and how to get more out of it. The last couple of weeks, I have looked at how to prepare for Mass. Today, we'll look at how the Mass begins.

The priest vests for Mass in various robes. Some might look at this as "Father dressing up," but the reality is that the priest is purposely covering himself. There is only one priest – Jesus Christ. The priest at the Mass is ordained by a bishop and is ontologically (on the level of his very being) changed. He now is an *alter Christus* – another Christ – and, during the sacraments, he acts *in persona Christi capatis* – in the person of Christ, the head. In this ontological change, it is not Fr. Von or Fr. Kelley celebrating the Mass, but Jesus Christ, the High Priest. He puts on the vestments so that people don't look at him, but look at Christ.

The first vestment he dons in the alb. Alb means white, and this white garment is a symbol of how each of us put on Christ in Baptism. Here at St. Patrick Parish, the servers also wear albs (in other places, they might, instead, wear a cassock and surplis), as a reminder of their Christian dignity – they have put on Christ Jesus. It is a reminder of the words of St. Augustine (which I will paraphrase) – *with* you I am a Christian; *for* you I am a bishop. First and foremost, priests are part of the people of God, saved by Christ.

The priest, then, can put on the cincture – a rope like belt. This is a reminder of the call to purity – purity of body, mind and heart. The stole goes on after this. The stole is the symbol of the priestly authority – much like the badge of a police officer – it identifies the priest as priest participating in the liturgies of the Church. The priest stole hands over the neck of the priest as a type of "yoke," showing that the priest is yoked to Christ. (A deacon also wears a stole, but this is over the left shoulder and attached at the right hip. This is a symbol of service – much like an apron.) Finally, the priest puts on the chasuble, which symbolizes the virtue of charity – the call to love.

The chasuble and stole are primarily green, violet, rose, white (or off-white) or gold, and red. These are not randomly chosen, but point to the season or feast day on which they are worn. Green symbolizes hope and is worn during Ordinary Time. Violet symbolizes humility and penance, and is used in Advent and Lent (and may be worn at funerals). Rose symbolizes joy and love and may be worn on the third Sunday of Advent and the fourth Sunday in Lent. White or gold symbolizes glory, joy and innocence, and is worn during Christmas, Easter, funerals, feast days of Jesus, Mary and the saints that were not martyred. Red symbolizes the fire and blood and is worn on Pentecost, Passion Sunday, Good Friday and the feast of martyrs.

The Mass begins with a hymn and a procession. St. Augustine said that singing well is praying twice. As we enter into the Mass, we join our voices in praise of God. This is not just something to keep you busy while the priest walks in, but is an integral part of the liturgy – uniting hearts and minds. We take ourselves out of the "pop music" of the world and sing praises to God. The procession is also important. It is not merely for getting the priest from point A to point B. Rather, it speaks to a different form of celebration. We enter together into the mystery of the Mass, coming with reverence into the presence of Almighty God.