

10 Things Every Altar Server Should Know

1. **You Are More Than Useful** – The priest and the deacon could do all the stuff you do at Mass. What this means is that you are doing something in the liturgy which is MORE than just useful. Read these other nine things to find out what they are.

2. **You Are a Silent Witness** - As soon as you come to church twenty minutes before Mass starts and you put on your vestments and start setting up for Mass, you are saying by your actions to everyone at church, “Look, it’s important to come early. It’s important to prepare for Mass reverently. It’s important to take time and take care.” Remember, everything you do people are watching. They love to see you serving. So, do what you do reverently and carefully.

3. **Actions Speak Louder Than Words** - You should look good for Mass. You don’t have to wear dressy clothes because your cassock will cover that, but what people can see should look good. Wear black shoes. Sneakers? Day Glo running shoes? Big boots? Flip Flops?? Come on. You’re better than that! Nothing about your appearance should draw attention to itself. No large, dangly earrings or jewelry please – that means you too boys! Crazy nail polish or an extreme hair do? Wild tattoos and piercings? Uh uh. That draws attention to yourself. Everything you do should focus attention on the altar not the altar server. Girls tie your hair back neatly. Boys comb or brush your hair – and will you please make sure that your hands and face are clean?

4. **Body Language Speaks Volumes** - As you set up for Mass move a bit more slowly. In the procession, move at a stately pace. This is because we are live in a very fast paced life and to hear God we have to be silent and to go at God’s pace we have to slow down. God saunters. He takes it easy. He’s in it for the long run. So, have good posture and move easily and slowly. Never rush. Believe it or not that helps people to get into the right, reverent frame of mind for worship.

5. **The procession is more than just walking into church** - The procession is an ancient religious ceremony in itself. As you process into church you are leading everyone into the presence of God. This goes back to the Old Testament when they used to go into procession up the hill to Jerusalem and into the temple of God. The procession is you leading the people of God through the wilderness into the promised land. The procession is the royal triumph of the king going into his city. The procession should therefore be done at a stately pace with solemnity and dignity. Don’t just go galumphing into your place. Take pride in being a servant of the altar of the king! When you carry the cross solemnly at the head of the procession you are saying to all the faithful, “See, we all are called to take up our cross and follow Christ. This is our banner for battle. This is our rallying sign!” So you carry the cross silently and solemnly like a soldier in parade, but for a different reason.

6. **Being a candle or book bearer has more meaning than you thought** - Do you carry the candles? You are saying, “We all bear within our hearts the light of Christ we received at Baptism. We are the lights in the dark, the bright stars of the universe.” The candles accompany the cross and the Gospel because the Gospel and the cross bring light to the world. Do you hold or carry the book? You represent the evangelists and apostles who bore the word of God to the world. You also remind each one of us that we are called to bear the good news of God’s love to the whole world.

7. You are the Angels before the Throne - At the Holy, Holy, Holy you should go to the step of the altar and kneel for the consecration prayer. At this point you represent the angels of God bowing before the throne of God in adoration. I said this once to my altar servers in training and one of the moms said, “You’ve got to be kidding!” She was joking, but makes the point that you ordinary boys and girls represent the angels before the throne of God. Bow low at the consecration. Ring the bell with care and beauty. The way you worship will raise the hearts and minds of all the people. If you are reverent and silent (that means no chit-chatting) and sincere, you will help everyone else worship more deeply.

8. Serve the altar with ritual actions - Make a bow before the altar. Make a little bow to the priest and deacon after they take the elements or wash their hands. These little ritual acts take the people into the ritual mindset. Ritual transcends our own personalities and makes us bigger than our ordinary little lives. When you serve in a ritual manner you therefore help everyone’s hearts and minds to be lifted. Do the actions with solemnity and dignity. This visual language helps raise people’s minds to God. It works without them even being aware of it.

9. Take pride in what you do - Be faithful in your duties for God is faithful to you. Pay attention to the details for God is in the details. Turn your actions into prayer for everything can lead to God, if we allow. What you are doing is service to God and it will open your heart and lead you close to him even when you are not aware of it. If you take pride in serving well you’ll be surprised how this will start to affect your whole life. You’ll soon take more pride in your appearance, your schoolwork, your sports and your relationships.

10. You Are Very Necessary – You are in fact MORE than necessary. You’re vital because you are performing not just a functional role but a symbolic role and symbolism is the language of worship. Think about it: you represent all the faithful of the Parish in the Sacred Liturgy! They also look at you as their guide in how to behave and participate. Your actions in the Mass are symbolic of much more than you think and the way you serve can lead people closer to God. You are more than necessary because beauty is more than necessary and what you are doing is beautiful. Sometimes there is too little beauty in our human world and by taking time to do something beautiful for God you are making the world a better place. Don’t be ashamed of that, and don’t underestimate your importance!