INSTRUMENTA SANCTAE MISSAE

What Every Mass Requires

The things the rubrics of the traditional Latin Mass (Missale Romanum, 1962) require on and around the altar, and how each is used. Every detail was made to serve the Holy Sacrifice with reverence and to protect the Most Blessed Sacrament.

"I will go unto the altar of God: to God who giveth joy to my youth." — Psalm 42:4, prayed at the foot of the altar

Sacred Vessels, Books and Vestments



The Altar Crucifix

CRUX ALTARIS

A crucifix with the figure of Christ must stand on the altar, between the candles, where priest and people can see it. The Mass is the same Sacrifice as Calvary, offered in an unbloody manner.

How it is used: The priest bows to it at the Holy Name and raises his eyes to it at the Offertory and Canon.

Altar crosses, MET (CC0)



Altar Candles

CANDELAE

At least two lit candles for Low Mass, six for a sung High Mass, more for a bishop. Rubrics require them to be largely of beeswax: the pure wax made by virgin bees signifies the pure flesh of Christ, the wick His soul, the flame His divinity.

How it is used: Lit by the server before Mass, starting on the Epistle side, nearest the cross.

Altar candlestick, MET (CC0)



The Missal

MISSALE ROMANUM

The book holding all the prayers and readings of the Mass for every day of the year, with the rubrics in red. It rests on a stand or cushion on the altar, open at the Canon.

How it is used: The server moves it from the Epistle (right) to the Gospel (left) side before the Gospel, and back after Communion.

Missale Romanum 1962 (photo: Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0)



The Chalice

CALIX

The sacred cup that holds the Precious Blood. It must be of gold or silver, or at least gilded inside the cup, and consecrated by a bishop with holy chrism. Formerly only those in sacred orders could touch it.

How it is used: At the Offertory the priest pours in wine and a drop of water, and lifts it up: "Offerimus tibi, Domine, calicem salutaris."

Chalice, MET (CC0)



The Paten

PATENA

A small plate of gold or gilded silver, consecrated with the chalice, on which the large Host rests. Its name comes from the Greek for a flat dish.

How it is used: The priest offers the Host on it: "Suscipe, sancte Pater…". At High Mass the subdeacon holds it wrapped in the humeral veil until the Pater noster.

Paten and chalice, MET (CC0)



Cruets

URCEOLI

Two small vessels of glass or metal on the credence table, one for wine, one for water, with a dish and towel for the washing of the fingers.

How it is used: The server presents them at the Offertory. A drop of water is mingled with the wine — our humanity united with Christ's divinity — and at the Lavabo he pours water over the priest's fingers.

Cruets and stands, MET (CC0)



Chalice Veil & Burse

VELUM ET BURSA

The veil, of the colour of the day's vestments, covers the vested chalice on the altar before the Offertory and after Communion. The burse is a stiff square pocket holding the folded corporal, laid on top of the veil.

How it is used: The priest carries the vested chalice to and from the altar, burse on top.

Dolby, Church Vestments, 1868 (PD)



Priestly Vestments

PARAMENTA

The priest vests in six garments, each with its own prayer: **amice** (helmet of salvation), **alb** (purity), **cincture** (chastity), **maniple** (labour and tears), **stole** (immortality and priestly power), and **chasuble** (the yoke of Christ and charity).

How it is used: Kissing each one, he vests in the sacristy before Mass. The chasuble matches the liturgical colour of the day.

Chasuble, stole and maniple, MET (CC0)

How the chalice is prepared (from bottom to top)

1. Purificator laid over the cup
2. Paten with the large Host on top
3. Pall over the paten
4. Veil of the day's colour
5. Burse with the corporal, on top

Also Required

Linens, furnishings and matter of the sacrament

Altar Stone

A consecrated stone, sealed with relics of martyrs, set into the altar table. Without it, Mass may not be offered: it recalls Mass said over the tombs of martyrs in the catacombs.

Three Altar Cloths

Three blessed linen cloths cover the altar, the top one reaching to the ground at both ends, to absorb the Precious Blood should any be spilled.

Altar Cards

Three framed cards with fixed prayers: the centre card (Gloria, Credo, words of Consecration), the Lavabo psalm on the Epistle side, and the Last Gospel on the Gospel side.

Corporal

A square of fine linen unfolded in the centre of the altar, on which the Host and chalice rest. Its name comes from *Corpus*, the Body of Christ.

Purificator

A linen cloth used to wipe the chalice and the priest's lips and fingers at the ablutions after Communion.

Pall

A stiffened square of linen placed over the chalice to keep anything from falling into it.

Altar Bread and Wine

Unleavened wheaten bread (one large Host for the priest, small ones for the faithful) and pure natural wine of the grape. Without these the sacrament is invalid.

Ciborium

A covered cup of precious metal holding the small Hosts for the Communion of the faithful, then reserved in the tabernacle under a little veil.

Altar Bell

Rung by the server at the Sanctus, before the Consecration, at each elevation of Host and chalice, and at the priest's Communion, calling all to adoration.

Communion Plate & Cloth

The faithful kneel at the altar rail, often covered with a white cloth, and receive on the tongue while the server holds a paten beneath the chin.

Lavabo Bowl & Towel

After the Offertory the priest washes his fingers saying Psalm 25: "*Lavabo inter innocentes manus meas*" — I will wash my hands among the innocent.

Server

At least one server (traditionally a boy or man) is needed for Low Mass. He answers the prayers in the people's name, moves the Missal, presents the cruets and rings the bell.

At a Solemn High Mass, add

Thurible and incense boat, for incensing the altar, the Gospel, the gifts and the people. Dalmatic for the deacon and tunicle for the subdeacon. The humeral veil. Six candles, processional cross and torches for the Consecration.

Why so much care?

Every fragment of the Host is Christ Himself. Hence the corporal, the pall, the gilded vessels, the fingers held together after the Consecration, the ablutions. Reverence in outward things teaches and protects faith in the Real Presence.