

PONTIFICAL MASS – EXTRAORDINARY FORM

What is Pontifical Mass?

The general term “Pontifical Mass” refers to a Mass celebrated by a bishop that follows special rubrics that add to the dignity and solemnity of the celebration. It is called “Pontifical” not because the rite is somehow connected with the pope, but rather because it is celebrated by a *pontifex* — the Latin term for a high priest, which the rubrics sometimes use to refer to a bishop or prelate.

There are three usual forms of Pontifical Mass properly speaking:

(1) **Pontifical High Mass at the Throne:** Pontifical Mass is the solemn Mass celebrated by a bishop with the ceremonies prescribed in the *Ceremoniale Episcoporum*, I and II. The full ceremonial is carried out when the bishop celebrates the Mass at the throne in his own cathedral church, or with permission at the throne in another diocese. The Bishop is assisted by an Arch-Priest vested in cope, two deacons of honor, wearing dalmatics over the amice and the surplice or the rochet. In addition a deacon and subdeacon in their regular vestments and a master of ceremonies assist the bishop. Nine acolytes or altar boys minister the book, bugia, mitre, crosier, censer, two acolyte candles, gremiale, and cruets, and four minister in turn at the washing of the bishop's hands. Mention is also made of a train-bearer and of at least four and at most eight torch-bearers at the time of the Elevation. All these servers should wear surplices; the bearers of book, bugia, mitre, and crosier may also wear copes. The ornaments worn or used by the bishop, besides those ordinarily required for Mass, are the buskins and sandals, pectoral cross, tunic, dalmatic, gloves, pallium (if he has a right to use it), mitre, ring, crosier, gremiale, basin and ewer, canon, and bugia. A seventh candle is also placed on the altar besides the usual six.

The bishop vested in the *cappa magna* enters the cathedral or church, visits the Blessed Sacrament, and then goes to the chapel, called the *secretarium*, where he assists at the Office of Terce. During the singing of the psalms he reads the prayers of preparation for Mass and puts on the vestments for Mass as far as the stole, then vested in the cope he sings the prayer of Terce, after which the cope is removed, and he puts on the rest of the vestments. The procession headed by the censer-bearer, cross-bearer, and acolytes then goes to the main altar. The bishop recites the prayers at the foot of the altar, puts on the maniple, and after kissing the altar and the book of gospels and incensing the altar, goes to the throne, where he officiates until the Offertory. His gloves are then removed; having washed his hands, he goes to the altar, and continues the Mass. The ceremonies are practically the same as for a solemn Mass; however, the bishop sings *Pax vobis* instead of *Dominus vobiscum* after the Gloria; he reads the Epistle, Gradual, and Gospel seated on the throne; gives the kiss of peace to each of his five chief ministers; washes his hands after the ablutions; sings a special formula of the Episcopal blessing, making three signs of the cross in giving it, and begins the last Gospel of St. John at the altar and finishes it while returning to the throne or to the vesting-place. In pontifical Requiem Mass the buskins and sandals, gloves, crosier, and seventh candle are not used. The bishop does not read the preparation for Mass and vest during Terce and he puts on the maniple before Mass begins.

(2) **Pontifical High Mass at the Throne:** A titular bishop usually officiates at the faldstool. He has no deacons of honor, their duties being performed by the usual deacon, subdeacon, and master of ceremonies; there is no seventh candle on the altar; he vests in the sacristy or at the faldstool; he recites the entire Gospel of St. John at the altar. The same parts of the Mass are said at the faldstool as at the throne. The ordinary celebrates pontifical Mass at the faldstool, without assistant deacons when he celebrates outside of his diocese unless he has obtained permission from the local Ordinary to celebrate Mass from the Throne.

(3) **Pontifical Low Mass:** The bishop is assisted by one or two chaplains (who stand next to him at the altar), two acolytes, four torchbearers, and (if necessary) a Master of Ceremonies.

The rite is conducted at the altar, and for the most part, follows the rubrics for Low Mass celebrated by a simple priest. The *Canon Episcopale* and the hand-candle are used, and if one of the chaplains is a priest, he assists the bishop by performing some functions of a deacon.

In addition to the Mass vestments worn by a simple priest, the bishop wears a purple zucchetto (skull-cap), pectoral cross and his everyday ring. If a bishop confers Major Orders during Pontifical Low Mass, however, he is obliged to wear the same vestments as prescribed for Pontifical High Mass.

II. The Bishop's Choir Dress.

A bishop who is to celebrate Pontifical High Mass ceremonially recites the prayers of preparation for Mass and is solemnly vested for Mass by the deacon and subdeacon, either in the sacristy or in the sanctuary of the church itself.

For this, the Bishop does not wear his usual black cassock trimmed with red. Rather, the rubrics assume that he arrives for the vesting ceremony wearing the more formal "choir habit," which for a bishop consists of the following:

1. Purple choir cassock.
2. Purple choir cincture with fringe.
3. Zuchetto.
4. Rochet.
5. Mozzetta (Ordinary of a Diocese) or Mantelletta (Titular Bishops)
6. Pectoral cross on a green and gold cord.
7. Ring.
8. Purple socks.
9. Roman clerical shoes with buckles.
10. Purple biretta.

III. Vestments Required for Pontifical Mass.

Attired in his choir habit, the bishop reads the Psalms of Preparation, during which the Master of Ceremonies invests the bishop with the special footgear (items 1, 2). The bishop then recites several prayers that recount the symbolism of the vestments and has his hands washed. After this the Deacon, Subdeacon and Assistant Priest solemnly vest him with the rest of the items.

Above and beyond the particular symbolism of each vestment, moreover, the vestments for Pontifical High Mass represent another truth when taken together. Unlike a simple priest vested for Mass, a bishop who pontificates is "covered" from head to foot, immersed, as it were, in the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ. One bishop told me that, the first time he was being vested for Pontifical Mass, he felt like a lamb being dressed for slaughter.

Here is what is required:

1. Buskins and sandals

Buskins are loose-fitting leggings in the liturgical color of the day that the Master of Ceremonies puts on the bishop's legs and then ties. Episcopal sandals, also in the color of the day, are put with the assistance of the Master of Ceremonies. According to the medieval liturgist Durandus, the buskins and sandals serve as an allusion to the verse that the liturgy applies to the Apostles themselves: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace." (Nabuco, *Inc. Pont.*, 179)

2. Amice.

The amice is a liturgical vestment consisting of an oblong piece of white linen that is worn around the neck and shoulders and partly under the alb. It measures 36" x 24" with two 36" strings of twill tape. Originally, the purpose of the amice was as a neckcloth to protect the valuable chasuble and stole. Until 1972, the amice was an obligatory vestment. Now it is optional, provided that the alb worn by the priest does cover all of his clothes underneath. If his clothes is not all covered, an amice must still be used. The amice is associated with the "helm of salvation." While putting it on, the priest would say, "Lord, give me strength to conquer the temptations of the devil."

3. Alb.

The alb is a long, white linen liturgical vestment with tapered sleeves. It is a garment (or robe) that is worn by the priest during the Holy Mass. It symbolizes the innocence and purity that should adorn the soul of the priest who ascends the altar.

4. Cincture.

The cincture is the cord used as a belt to gird the Alb. It symbolizes the virtues of chastity and continence (meaning "the exercise of self constraint in sexual matters") required of the priest. It comes in many colors.

5. Pectoral cross on a green and gold cord. (Strength against enemies; the victories of the Cross and the martyrs.)

6. Tunic.

This is made of light silk, the color of the day, and is a garment of a subdeacon, symbolizing joy.)

7. Dalmatic.

The dalmatic is an outer, sleeved tunic that came to Rome from Dalmatia, whence its name. It is worn in place of the chasuble, by the deacon and sub-deacon during Solemn Mass. It symbolizes the joy and happiness that are the fruit of dedication to God. The Pontifical Dalmatic is a garment made of light silk, and slightly shorter than the tunic, this is the garment of a deacon, symbolizing salvation and justice. At Pontifical Mass Bishops must wear the vestments of a subdeacon and deacon because in bishops, said the medieval liturgist Durandus, "the degrees of all the Major Orders are most eminently present." (Nabuco, *Ius Pont.*, 182)

8. Gloves.

The Pontifical Gloves are made for the color of the day, and are beautifully embroidered with crosses, so symbolize the Bishop's acceptance of sacrifice. The vesting prayer for the gloves contains an Old Testament allusion: Jacob covering his hands when he presented his offering to his father to obtain a blessing; the bishop prays that through his sacrifice he may likewise receive a blessing, that of divine grace.

9. Skull cap

The zucchetto is the silk skullcap worn by the Catholic clergy. It was first adopted for practical reasons — to keep the clergy's tonsured heads warm in cold, damp churches — and has survived as a traditional item of dress. It consists of eight panels sewn together, with a stem at the top.

10. Pectoral Cross

In the earliest times, the pectoral cross contained a relic of the True Cross or even of a saint. While not all pectoral crosses today continue to contain a relic, the tradition remains. Interestingly, in 1889, the Holy See recommended that the pectoral cross of a deceased bishop which contained a relic of the True Cross be given to his successor. When putting on the pectoral cross, traditionally the bishop says, *Munire me digneris*, asking the Lord for strength and protection against all evil and all enemies, and to be mindful of His passion and cross.

11. Chasuble.

The chasuble is the vestment that is put on over all the others during Liturgical services. Originally this was a very full garment, shaped like a bell and reaching almost to the feet all the way round. During a bad artistic period, the 18th and 19th century especially, the Chasuble suffered much from a process of shortening a stiffening. Today there is a return to the historical and beautiful, ample, nicely draping Chasubles. The Chasuble symbolizes the virtue of charity, and the yoke of unselfish service for the Lord, which the priest assumes at ordination.

12. Miter.

Two types are used at the same Mass: a precious miter with jewels and gold embroidery that is worn in procession and for shorter periods of time during Mass, and a golden miter that is worn when the bishop sits for longer periods of time. The Miter is a sign that reminds the Bishops to put on the helmet of salvation against the snares of the enemy. As a whole the miter was seen as a helmet of salvation (Eph. 6:17, Thess. 5:8). The two folded peaks symbolized the Old and the New Testaments, and the two lappets were reminders to keep both the spirit and letter of the Bible. The Catholic Church is a visible church. Where the bishop is, there is the Church, and the miter makes the presence of the bishop clear. It's a symbol of the episcopate, an enduring office instituted by Christ himself to teach, sanctify, and govern. The miter symbolizes our belief in God's promise: "Because you have kept my message of endurance, I will keep you safe in the time of trial that is going to come to the whole world to test the inhabitants of the Earth. I am coming quickly. Hold fast to what you have, so that no one may take your crown" (Rev. 3:10-11).

13. Pontifical ring.

This symbolizes the sevenfold gift of the Holy Ghost. The Bishop's ring is a symbol of his fidelity to and nuptial bond with the church, his spouse. It signifies the bishop's symbolic marriage to the church or Christ. A pontifical ring is usually made of gold with an amethyst.

14. Crozier.

The Crozier symbolizes the relationship of a shepherd to his flock. The pointed *ferrule* at the base symbolizes the obligation of the prelate to goad the spiritually lazy; the crook at the top, his obligation to draw back those who stray from the faith; and the staff itself his obligation to stand as a firm support for the faithful. It is considered to be both a rod and a staff (Psalm 23:4): a rod for punishing the recalcitrant, and a staff for leading the faithful.

15. Maniple.

The maniple is an ornamental vestment of colored silk or damask over the left forearms. Originally this vestment was a handkerchief carried in the left hand or thrown over the left arm. It symbolizes the labor and hardship the priest must expect in his ardent apostolate. Except at the Requiem Mass, this is not put on until the prayer *Indulgentiam* during the Prayers at the Foot of the Altar.

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