

A Visit To A Catholic Church

By Rev. Paul Ryan.

Australian Catholic Truth Society No.1286 (1958)

INTRODUCTION.

Many non-Catholics entering a Catholic church for the first time are surprised to find how much it differs from their own churches in its furnishings and arrangement. For this reason, then, it is a very practical part of their instruction (if they are to become Catholics) that the church itself be explained to them, since a great part of the Catholic Faith is expressed in the pictures, windows and furniture that are in the building. Lessons in the Faith thus learnt from personal observation repeat themselves each time the church is visited, and are usually far more lasting than those learnt only from the pages of a book.

This booklet is intended as a guide to converts on their early visits to a Catholic church, and as a help to make them feel more at home in their new church.

The explanations given will also be useful to Catholics who do not fully understand the purposes or the history of various furnishings of the church in which they pray so often.

CHAPTER I.

THE BODY OF THE CHURCH.

Architecture.

The church is a building that is always different from the surrounding buildings and it is recognisable as a church. Its purpose as a meeting place for large assemblies of people demands special architectural construction, and as it belongs to God (it is called the "House of God") we find that there is lavished upon it the best in art and craft that the faithful can give. There is no special Christian style of architecture, the Church of God is spread throughout the world and embraces the architecture of every nation and age. Many of our churches in this country are built in the "Gothic" style, which grew up in Europe as the popular church architecture in the twelfth century and was revived during the reign of Queen Victoria for church building. However, this style is undergoing modifications to suit the climatic conditions and popular needs of Australia; and being fused with styles of architecture such as the Classic, Romanesque and Spanish, we see some very beautiful churches being built that belong to no particular "style" at all, but are a blending of many.

We love our churches, and are proud of them, and all that we desire in their construction is that they be convenient assembly places for all the parishioners and worthy temples of the living God. The church is the dwelling place of God amongst men - "The House of God and the Gate of Heaven!" (Gen. 28:17.)

The Church building is so designed that it shall lead the eye to, and concentrate the attention of the worshipper upon the altar placed at the far end of the church.

Vestibules.

We quite naturally begin our explanation of the Church and its furnishing at the "narthex" or vestibule at the entrance door. The vestibule is not only for the purpose of keeping out the warm or cold draughts of summer or winter, but also it has a religious meaning. It is here that we enter from the noisy business of the world and recollect the presence of God before we enter into that Presence in the church proper. The vestibule or porch reminds us that we are stepping out of a noisy world and stepping into a quiet place of retreat with God. The steps also by which we approach this porch are a reminder that we are leaving below the worries and cares of the world to ascend and be alone with God in the elevation of the Church.

Holy Water Fonts.

As we enter the porch, the first object that we see is a small recess in the wall containing water. It is the holy water font. Before we visit our friends we are always careful to see that we are clean and tidy; we wash and dress according as circumstances and the occasion demand. So, too, when we visit the House of God, immediately before entering we sprinkle ourselves with holy water as an outward gesture of the cleansed heart we wish to present to God.

The Catholic, moreover, sprinkles himself in a special way with this blessed water: he does it in the form of a cross, from the forehead to the breast and then to the left and the right shoulder, saying as he does so: "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen!"

It is a prayer in action and also in word. In the action he professes his belief in the death of Jesus Christ upon a cross for our sins; and in the words he professes his belief in the Three Persons in the one God; in the sprinkling of the water he professes his sinfulness and his need of God's forgiveness that he may be worthy to enter into His presence.

The water is called Holy Water because it is blessed specially by the priest in the name of the Church. As we sprinkle ourselves with it we are reminded of the first cleansing of our souls when water was poured upon us at Baptism, and are helped now by this repeated sprinkling to renew in ourselves that purity of our soul and conscience which we then had.

Pews.

In Australia, our churches are provided with Pews for the convenience of the faithful. In most European countries, however, the Catholic churches are not so furnished but small wicker or wooden chairs may be obtained in the church and taken to that part of the church where the worshipper wishes to be.

During Mass and other sacred functions we sit, kneel and stand during various parts of the service, for we are to worship God not only with our minds, but also with our bodies. Therefore, we pray aloud at times, worshipping Him with the words of our lips; at other times we stand out of honour and respect (as at the reading of the Holy Gospel at Mass); or we kneel in reverence before the greatness of the God whom we worship; or, again, we sit in an attitude of respectful attention when the Word of God is explained to us in the sermon.

Non-Catholics who come to Mass are often puzzled, and at a loss as to how to conduct themselves. A general rule is the etiquette of the place — they, too, are invited to sit, stand or kneel with the other worshippers; or, if they so choose, they may remain seated during their entire stay in the church.

Baptistry.

Near the front entrance there is the baptistry — a small chapel in which stands the baptismal font upon a pedestal. It is situated near the front door, because a part of the ceremonies in the administration of the Sacrament are performed at the church porch, before the candidate for baptism is admitted into the church itself. It is also near the Entrance as a sign that Baptism is our entrance into the living temple of God. [Since Vatican II, many Baptismal fonts or Baptistries are now placed at some place on, or close to the Sanctuary to symbolize the connection between being admitted into Christ's 'family', the Church and being admitted to Christ's table at Holy Communion. The Rite of Baptism still recommends welcoming the new candidate for Baptism at the porch of the Church.]

The baptismal font is called the womb of Holy Mother Church, from which comes forth a new race of men born to live a spiritual and holy life. The water in the font is blessed with great solemnity on the day that immediately precedes Easter and Pentecost Sunday. It is consecrated by the pouring of the holy oils into it and the Church prays: "Do You, O God, bless this pure water: that besides its natural power of cleansing the body, it may also be powerful for purifying the soul. In it may the stains of all sins be washed out; here may human nature created to Your image be cleansed from all the filth of sin; that all who receive this sacrament of new birth may become children of true innocence of life, worthy sons and daughters of their spiritual mother, Holy Church, through Christ our Lord. Amen." [All that is said in this paragraph applies to the rubrics and prayers laid down by Pope Saint Pius V. Under the rubrics of Pope Paul VI the Baptismal water is blessed with great solemnity at a special part of the ceremony of the Easter Vigil, and holy oils are no longer used.]

Stations of the Cross.

Upon the walls of the church we will usually see crosses placed at regular intervals, and beneath them pictures or images. They are fourteen in number, and are called the 'Stations of the Cross!' Each cross is called a "Station," and portrays some event in the Passion of Our Lord, from His condemnation at the palace of Pilate to His burial in the tomb beside Calvary. [In some places there might be fifteen 'stations', the fifteenth being the Resurrection of Our Lord. In addition the Vatican has now permitted an alternative series of stations which embrace the Passion story from the Last Supper of Our Lord to his Glorious Resurrection.]

To visit the Holy Land of Israel and Palestine and pray at the places made holy by the blessed footprints of our Saviour is the privilege of very few. But to encourage the excellent practice of meditation upon the Passion of Our Lord, Holy Church, as it were, brings the Holy Land to our own country, even to our own parish, in a miniature representation. We may move from cross to cross and follow each event of the Passion in regular order at each station. The pictures placed beneath each of the crosses are a great help to our prayer, stimulating us to realise more readily the love that moved the Son of God to deliver Himself up to death on our behalf.

No special forms of prayer or words are prescribed to be recited while we make the Way of the Cross, except that we meditate upon the Passion of Christ. Most prayer books contain short prayers to be recited at each Station, and these will be found helpful for converts or for those who do not often make the "Stations of the Cross"!

During penitential seasons of the year, the Stations are frequently made by large assemblies of the faithful. The congregation remain in their places in the church, while the priest moves from Station to Station reading a suitable prayer at each. The prayers composed by St. Alphonsus Liguori are perhaps the most often read, and each of the Stations begins with the versicle: 'We adore You, O

Christ, and bless You!' At these words all kneel for a moment in adoration of the Son of God crucified for our sins, and rising, reply: 'Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world!'

Sometimes also between each Station the people or choir sing a verse of a hymn, called the "Stabat Mater," in which is told in verse the story of the sufferings of Christ and His Mother Mary. ('Stabat Mater' is the first line of the Latin and literally means 'Was Standing, the Mother'. More elegantly the whole line is translated: 'By the cross, her vigil keeping, Stood the holy Mother, weeping.')

In order that this excellent devotion of the Stations of the Cross may be practised by even the sick, who cannot visit the church, the Bishops of Australia may give power to their priests to bless a crucifix with which the sick person may make the Stations at home and gain all its indulgences. The person holds the crucifix in his hand and, while meditating upon the Passion, recites fourteen times the 'Our Father', 'Hail Mary', and 'Glory be to the Father'.

Pulpit.

Looking down towards the altar at the far end of the church we see the pulpit usually situated upon the left hand, or "Gospel side," of the church. Christ sent His Church to preach the Gospel, and the pulpit is the platform from which Sunday after Sunday the faithful hear proclaimed to them the glad tidings that Christ brought to men of good-will. [Since Vatican II, (and the more general use of modern electronic sound systems,) pulpits are less commonly used or built into new Church buildings. The Preaching of the Homily or Sermon, the explanation or 'breaking open' the Word of God, is now generally given from the Ambo or Lectern from which is also proclaimed the Gospel of the Lord.]

Holy Church has never failed to preach the Gospel, and it is by preaching, and not by writing, that Christ commanded her to bring the message of salvation to the world: "Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature." (Mark, 16:15) And St. Paul, echoing these words of Our Lord, wrote to his disciple, St. Timothy: 'I charge you, in the sight of God, preach the word; be urgent in season and out of season; reprove, entreat, rebuke with all patience and teaching. For there will come a time when they will not listen to the sound doctrine. But do you work as a preacher of the Gospel; fulfil your ministry.' (2 Timothy, 4:5.)

The pulpit is not a platform from which politics are proclaimed, nor secular teaching imparted, but rather from it is proclaimed "Christ crucified and risen from the dead," and the assembled faithful are encouraged and exhorted to persevere upon the road that leads to everlasting life and glory.

In listening to sermons and instructions we should frequently ask God's help to profit by the instruction or exhortation to which we listen. We should listen with attention and in a humble disposition, for the priest speaks to us as the ambassador of Christ delivering His message to us; and to him we listen as if we were attending to the very voice of our Saviour. The words and delivery may be different, but the message is the same as Christ delivered to the Jews of Palestine 2000 years ago.

Confessionals.

Built into, or along the wall of the church, we will see one or more confessionals. The confessional is a room divided generally into three smaller rooms each just large enough for a single person. The priest sits in the middle room and the penitents kneel facing towards him in the other two. Into each of the dividing walls is cut a square opening covered by a firm lattice grating, and across it is a wooden slide. Moreover, the confessional is built upon the principle that the penitent and priest

must hear each other but not necessarily see each other. [Since Vatican II, the structure of some confessional rooms and confessionals has slightly changed. The Church no longer insists, though it highly recommends, that the penitent kneel, as it is aware that the aspect of offering spiritual counsel, which is part of the priest's duty, is often more easily done if both partners are seated during this advice. Also, the Church permits the penitent to make his confession 'face to face' as he might to Our Lord himself, whilst also permitting the custom of making one's reconciliation in an anonymous mode. Thus many confessional rooms now are only a single room divided by a 'half partition'. The penitent, upon entering the room, is free to either kneel at the partition which resembles the older structure, or to go around the partition and sit in a chair facing the priest who is seated on his side of the partition wall.]

The confessional is the court-room of the church, and the priest, as judge, is seated, while the penitent, who is also his own accuser, humbly kneels. The Father Confessor has received from Holy Church the power to forgive and to retain sins according to the words of Christ Himself: "Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain they are retained!" (John 22:23.) And that he may exercise this power wisely it is necessary that he know the sins which he is to forgive or retain. These the penitent confesses, and hence the name given to the place where he kneels for this self-accusation — confessional.

The Father Confessor is not only a judge but also he is to act towards all who come to him as a Physician, prescribing spiritual medicine that will cure the particular spiritual sickness from which the penitent suffers. For the avaricious he will prescribe alms-giving and generosity. For the self indulgent he will prescribe mortification; for the hasty-tempered he will prescribe practices that require patience; and for all, as the universal remedy for all evils, he will prescribe earnest prayer.

The confessor is also truly a father to all who seek his advice and instruction. He is a father to all who seek consolation in difficulties and anxiety, dispensing the mercy of Christ to all who labour and are heavily burdened by the trials of life; for he occupies the place of his Master who said. "Come to Me all you who labour and are heavily burdened and I shall refresh you all." (Matt., 11: 28.) He is also ever ready to help those who are afraid or hesitant or find difficulty in the confession of their sins, as may easily occur in the case of those converted to the Church. In this aspect of his ministry he acts as a father rather than as a judge. He is "all things to all men" that he may gain all for Christ and impart to them the merciful forgiveness and sanctifying grace of the Sacrament of Penance.

Occasionally people may be inclined to ask whether the priest is anxious out of curiosity to hear confessions. No; the priest is anxious to hear confessions not through curiosity, but through zeal that he may restore grace to souls made sorrowful by sin. A great responsibility rests on the priest, for he is responsible before God for the right guidance of each soul that comes to him - and for the priest to neglect to advise or give erroneous advice may lead to the eternal ruin of an immortal soul, his own.

Statues.

Upon the walls or mantelpieces of our homes we frequently place the pictures of those friends or relatives who are dear to us; or of people whose excellence we admire. The church, like our own homes, is God's Home, and in it we will usually find pictures or statues of God's friends the saints. And because the saints are our friends also, each parish will be devoted to some saints in particular. Thus, we will usually find a statue or picture of the patron or guardian saint of the church and parish

in a prominent position in the church. As Our Lady enjoys the love and veneration of all the faithful far beyond any other saint, there are few churches in which there will not be a statue or picture of her.

On the feast days of the saints their images are adorned with flowers or candles as a mark of the special honour we pay them upon that day, much as in the same way we honour by flowers our war memorials on Armistice or Anzac Day.

We do not worship the statue as do the pagans worship their idols, but we pay honour to it because it is the image of the saint whom we honour and love.

Music and Organ.

To the beauty and dignity of our worship of God all the arts render service, and so the words of our prayers are often set to beautiful melodies — that the art of music, too, may pay its homage to God.

Hymns are prayers sung to melody, and no matter how beautiful the melody, how splendid the choral execution — if it be not sung with a prayerful soul it is of no value before God.

It has ever been the tradition of Holy Mother Church that the faithful should take part in the sacred Liturgy, which is arranged somewhat like a drama in which the characters are: the priest, the servers and assistants at the altar, the choir, and the people. Each has a proper part to play and to sing, and it is only during the last few centuries that the part once sung by the people has come to be sung by the choir. This is only a temporary arrangement, and throughout the Church the faithful are learning again the traditional melodies to which their parts have been sung since the earliest Christian times. These beautiful melodies are sung in the music known by the name of Gregorian Chant or plainsong. To those unaccustomed to it, these melodies sound unusual, but once the ear becomes accustomed to its rhythm and cadences it becomes as dear to us of the twentieth century as it has been to all our forefathers throughout the centuries. [Vatican II has hastened many of the changes spoken of in this paragraph. The people now join in much more actively in the responses of the Mass and Liturgy, and the Vatican wants this normatively to be a sung response. (Sadly this is not occurring as often as the Council Fathers envisaged.) The Council actively encourages the singing of the traditional parts of the Mass by the whole congregation. It most warmly desires that the traditional Gregorian Chant and plainsong be quickly learnt and sung by the faithful. It has also permitted a large range of musical compositions in the ordinary or vernacular language of the peoples, while simultaneously encouraging the adoption of Gregorian melodies.]

Gregorian Chant and Plainsong is the model of all church music, and the Holy Father has declared that the suitability of all other music for the church is to be assessed by its nearness to the spirit and beauty of the traditional chant. [This decision of Pius XII was fully endorsed by his successors and by Vatican II.]

To sustain the human voice - so beautiful in itself - the use of the organ is permitted. This is the only musical instrument to be heard in the church unless the Bishop on some special occasion may permit some other instruments. [The Vatican Council has considerably broadened this permission for suitable instrumentation, and today, bishops have permitted a wide range of musical instruments, always with the proviso that they assist the soul to raise its heart and mind to the worship of God.]

CHAPTER II.

THE SANCTUARY.

THE ALTAR.

At the start of our tour through the church we remarked that the building is so designed that it shall lead the eye to, and concentrate the attention of the worshipper upon the altar placed at the far end of the church. For the altar is the most holy and most important furnishing in every Catholic Church.

The altar is a stone table covered by a long cloth reaching to the ground at each side, upon which are placed the bread and wine for the Sacrifice of the Mass. Upon this table of stone the bread and wine are changed into the living Body and Blood of Jesus Christ and offered to God the Father, by Christ Himself, by the priest, and by the faithful. Because this supreme act of worship takes place upon it, we revere the altar as the most sacred place in our church. [The reforms undertaken by Vatican II permit the altar to be made of other worthy materials in addition to stone, and that the altar clothes do not have to, by obligation, reach the ground.]

The altar itself is consecrated by a Bishop, and five crosses are engraved upon it to symbolise the five wounds that Our Lord received upon the Cross. In the centre of the table (or top) of the altar a small square of stone is carved out and in it are laid the relics of two saints, one of whom is a martyr. The use of a stone rather than a wooden altar, as was usual in the first few centuries of the Church, comes to us from the days when Mass was celebrated in the catacombs upon the stone tombs of the martyrs. When freedom was granted to the Church in 313 AD by the Emperor Constantine, the custom of using a stone altar was retained and later established as law by Pope Sylvester I. (337.)

The use of candles, once necessary for light in the catacombs, was also retained.

Moreover, it is a sign of honour and reverence for the Presence of Christ upon the altar. Two wax candles are lit for Mass ordinarily, and six may be used on special festivals. [Four can be used for lesser festivals.] The candle has a beautiful symbolism and is used in the administration of nearly all the Sacraments and blessings of the Church. The wax is a symbol of the sacred human Body of Christ; the wick represents His soul, and the flame the brightness of His Divinity. This symbolism is most ancient and has foundation in the words of Our Lord Himself: 'I am the light of the world.' (John, 8: 12) Between the candles stands a large crucifix that must always be present when the Sacrifice of the Mass is offered, for it is to remind us of the unity of the sacrifice of Calvary with that celebrated day by day upon the altar under the sacramental appearances of bread and wine. [The new rubrics of Paul VI require the presence of a crucifix on the Sanctuary, but not necessarily on the altar itself.]

Upon the altar there is always, in parish churches, a small iron safe with a gilded door; it is placed in the middle of the altar to the edge nearest the wall, and it will be covered by a silken curtain on all sides where its construction makes this possible. It is called the "Tabernacle," and in it is reserved the Sacred Host. [The rubrics of Paul VI allowed altars to stand apart from the wall and so the Tabernacle generally stands apart from the altar, but in a position that is truly prominent and honourable.]

After the faithful have received Holy Communion at Mass, whatever Sacred Hosts may remain over are placed in the tabernacle and kept there in case it is necessary at any time during the day or night to bring Holy Communion to the sick or dying. The Sacred Host is reserved thus upon the altar also that people may come to the church to visit Christ in His Eucharistic Presence, and honour Him long after the Sacrifice of the Eucharist has been celebrated. The Church thus becomes not merely a

building consecrated to God and sanctified by the celebration of the sacred liturgy within its walls, but also the dwelling place of Jesus Christ in the very reality of His Human Nature. He really is there.

The reverent behaviour of Catholics in their churches, which so much impresses non-Catholics, is to a considerable part due to their realisation of the actual Presence of Jesus Christ a short distance away from them in the tabernacle.

Before the tabernacle, either hanging from the roof or supported upon a pedestal, a small oil lamp burns day and night as a silent act of reverence towards the Eucharistic Christ.

Non-Catholics visiting a church in company with a Catholic will notice that their companion, and indeed every Catholic entering the church, before he enters a pew, kneels upon one knee for a moment facing towards the altar and tabernacle. This act of reverence is called a "genuflection" and is an act of faith in, and worship of, Jesus Christ the Son of God present in the tabernacle upon the altar. Non-Catholics need feel no obligation to perform this same act of reverence unless they already believe in the Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

Communion Rail.

The sanctuary of the church is separated from the nave, or main part of the church, by a railing called the "Communion Rail," or better, the "Altar Rail," for this rail partly shares in the dignity of the altar itself. Since large numbers of communicants make it extremely difficult for all to approach the altar table, another table, longer and more accessible, is placed at the entrance to the sanctuary, and here the faithful may receive Holy Communion more conveniently and with less delay. This table we call the altar rail, and at the time to receive Holy Communion during the Mass, it is covered by a long, linen cloth. The altar rail is also very useful at other times for the administration of the sacramentals, or blessings of the Church, such as the distribution of ashes upon Ash Wednesday, or of palms upon Palm Sunday or the adoration of the Cross upon Good Friday. [The Rubrics of Paul VI did not abolish the Altar Rail, but they do permit the faithful to receive Holy Communion standing, having approached the sanctuary in a procession. Thus many new Churches were built and it was permitted not to include Altar rails in their design and construction.]

CHAPTER III.

THE SACRISTY.

To the side or rear of the church is built the Sacristy that opens out by a door into the sanctuary. It is here that the priest and his attendants or servers vest for the sacred ceremonies, and here are stored all that is necessary for use in the church.

Vestments.

In a large case in the sacristy are stored the sacred vestments for Mass. Because of the dignity of the Sacrifice of the Mass it is fitting that the celebrant and his assistants should be dressed in clothes of more than usual value. The layfolk, too, put on their "Sunday best" for the occasion. In the first centuries of the Church the priest wore the ordinary clothes of the period, though of the best materials. As years went by, the fashions changed, but the priest still continued to wear the special clothes kept at the church for the celebration of Mass. The clothes were then used only at Mass, and have remained substantially unchanged until our own times, and we call them vestments.

The vestments for Mass are six in number: [The rubrics of Paul VI prescribe five.]

1. The Amice or linen cloth tied across both shoulders and tucked about the neck. It was used in the Middle Ages to keep the neck and head warm.
2. Alb. The Alb is the large white linen vestment reaching from the shoulders to the feet. In its shortened form it is what we know as a man's shirt.
3. Cincture. The Cincture is a linen girdle that gathers the Alb at the waist and causes it to fall in graceful folds to the feet. Our modern equivalent is the belt or girdle.
4. Maniple. The Maniple is the coloured length of vestment that hangs over the wrist on the left arm. It was carried as a handkerchief, in much the same way as people now carry their handkerchief in their sleeve. [The Maniple is no longer used with the Mass celebrated according to the rubrics of Paul VI.]
5. Stole. The Stole is the symbol of priestly ordination, and is worn in the administration of all the Sacraments. It is a long, thin vestment, measuring about 8 feet long by 4 inches wide. The priest, for Mass, wears it around his neck, across his shoulders, crossed upon his chest, and hanging down in front. For the Sacraments he does not cross it in front, but lets it hang over his shoulders and straight down in front. The scarf that we wear in the cool weather to keep the neck and chest warm is a modern equivalent of the stole. [The stole no longer needs to be crossed at the celebration of Mass.]
6. Chasuble. The Chasuble is the largest of the coloured vestment, and is put on last, to cover all the others. It derives its name from the Latin word, "Casula," which means "a little house." It was worn at Rome in the wet weather and was shaped in the form, of a bell with a single opening at the top for the head. It was like the modern sleeveless raincoat that children frequently wear.

In the course of centuries, the inconvenience of having no sleeves, and the corresponding necessity of having to lift up the vestment from the lower end to free the arms during the sacred ceremonies, led to a cutting away of the vestment at each side, so that now the sides have completely vanished and back and front alone remain. [Since Vatican II a compromise style between the two just described has generally been in favour. It retains the bell shape but is shortened at the sides to allow free arm movements. With his arms extended, the priest wearing this vestment makes it appear as a semi-circular garment.]

In more recent times there has been a tendency to return to the original shape and to put back the sides. Thus, a little diversity exists from one church to another, according to the preference of the local clergy, for the one or the other style. Both are approved of by the Church.

The colours of the vestments may be either White (on feast days of Christ, Our Lady, and saints who are not martyrs); Red (on feast days of the martyrs and Mass at Pentecost); Green (on Sundays after Pentecost); Violet (at times of Penance-e.g., Lent); Black (for Masses offered for the dead); Rose (on the fourth Sunday of Lent and the third Sunday of Advent). According to the colour demanded by the festival day, the Chasuble, Stole and Maniple are worn to suit. [White is now worn during the seasons of Christmas and Easter, as well as the occasions mentioned. Red is used as well for Palm Sunday, Good Friday and on any Mass for the Holy Spirit. Green is also worn during 'Ordinary Time'. Violet is used during Advent and Lent. Rose is unchanged. At Masses for the dead the Church permits either Black, Violet or White.]

The sacred vestments lend dignity and splendour to the sacred liturgy, and their beauty gives glory to the God in Whose honour they are worn.

CHALICE.

The Chalice and the paten are the cup and plate used in the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The cup is to contain the wine.

The plate is to receive the bread, that is changed into the Blood and Body of Our Saviour. As these sacred vessels are in such intimate contact with the Eucharist it is the law of the Church that the Chalice shall be at least plated with gold on the inside, and the paten on the upper or concave side. Only those in Holy Orders may touch the Chalice and Paten, unless for some good reason they give permission to another to do so. Generally, the Chalice is made of silver or gold, and it has been the delight of the goldsmiths and designers of all ages to construct graceful and beautifully ornamented chalices, for no cup can be too beautiful to contain the very Blood of the Son of God. [Both Chalice and paten may now be made in other 'dignified' materials, though the traditional custom is the most highly recommended. While the greatest respect and reverence should be shown to these sacred vessels, the rubrics now allow these vessels to be respectfully handled by others who have a good reason to do so, such as Acolytes, responsible servers, and others.]

At the beginning of Mass the priest enters the sanctuary carrying the chalice, which is covered by a veil, the same colour as the vestment he wears. The chalice remains veiled until it is used at the Offertory. [The Rubrics of Paul VI changed this. The sacred vessels – the recommendation is that they should be veiled as a sign of respect – are placed near the altar at the credence table and are brought to the altar to be unveiled and used at the Offertory or the time of the Preparation of the Gifts.]

Holy Oils.

At the side of the sanctuary is a small cupboard or ambry, and locked in this are the Holy Oils. The Holy Oils are blessed with great solemnity by the Bishop on Holy Thursday, and then given to every church in the diocese. There are three different Holy Oils: the oil for the sick used for the Sacrament of the last anointing; the Holy Chrism used in solemn consecrations, at Confirmation and for the anointing immediately following Baptism; the Oil of Catechumens used for anointing in the ceremonies immediately before Baptism, and also in solemn consecrations.

The Oil of the Sick and the Oil of Catechumens is pure olive oil, while the Holy Chrism is a mixture of olive oil and balsam. Sometimes for more convenience the Holy Oils are reserved in the sacristy.

Missal.

The large prayer book from which the priest reads the prayers of the Mass is called the Missal, or Mass-book. Of the prayers read at Mass each day some are always the same, while others change.

The Missal contains both the fixed and the variable prayers for every day of the year. It is written in Latin, for Latin was the language used by the Church of Rome at the time that the prayers for Mass were composed. The Prayers recited during the "Canon" of the Mass; i.e., the prayers just before and after the Consecration, are in substance, as ancient as the first century, and they are the same for each day of the year. [The rubrics of Paul VI authorized the celebration of the Mass in the spoken languages of the various peoples – the vernacular. Thus the modern Missal will contain these authorized translations of the various fixed and variable prayers along with their relevant instructions – the rubrics, of 'red letters' since this is the colour of their print. The Latin version of this Mass is known as the Novus Ordo Mass – the 'New Order' Mass. Pope Paul authorized the

publication and use of several alternate 'Canons', or Eucharistic Prayers, for use at the Mass. Eucharistic Prayer One is an authentic revision of the Canon spoken of in this paragraph and is known as 'the Roman Canon'.]

The other prayers and lessons from the Holy Bible read each day have remained the same since the days of St. Gregory the Great (604). New prayers and lessons have been added for the feast days, of new saints, but substantially the greater Part of the Missal as we have it today has been prayed and read by Priests and faithful for fourteen centuries or more. [Considerable revision was undertaken by Pope Paul VI, but always with an eye to maintain the traditions of the Church and to restore, where appropriate ancient texts of various Mass prayers, often dating before even Saint Gregory the Great.]

Although the text used by the priest at Mass is in Latin, translations of the mass are easily obtainable for the use of the faithful. The ideal way of assisting at the Holy Mass is to follow the priest in every prayer he recites -- he is praying for us and we will best join in that prayer by reciting the same words as he. [This advice still holds good, especially if you are attending a Mass in Latin or in a vernacular with which you are not familiar. However, Pope Paul VI solved this overall problem by permitting the Mass to be celebrated in the vernacular. Thus the Catholic in the pew, even without a Mass book -- which is still highly recommended -- can easily follow and fully participate, actively, consciously and fully, in the drama of the Mass.]

The Missal also provides us with an abundance of Prayers that we may recite, even when not assisting at Mass - as for example, at our morning or night prayers, at visits to the Blessed Sacrament, etc. {This is still excellent advice!}

CHAPTER IV.

CHURCH MANNERS.

It is to be expected that in the Church of God there should be some special customs and ceremonies for those entering into God's House, just as when we visit the Pope or the King, the Prime Minister or the Queen, there are special forms of conduct to be observed. The following should be observed if we would conduct ourselves worthily in so holy a building as the Church.

LOW MASS.

[Low Mass is the term used in the liturgy of Saint Pius V for Mass celebrated without incense or singing. What is said here applies to the liturgy of Pius V.] Stand as the celebrant enters and leaves the sanctuary, and for the First and Last Gospels, and for the Creed. Sit for the sermon and Offertory and Preface. Kneel for all other parts of the Mass.

Sung Mass (Missa Cantata).

[Again, this is a term used in the rubrics of Saint Pius V. The following applies to 'Sung Masses' which follow that liturgy.]

1. Stand as the celebrant enters.
2. Kneel during the prayers at the foot of the altar.
3. Stand as the celebrant ascends the altar steps.
4. Sit (if the celebrant does so) during the singing of the "Kyrie." (Lord, have mercy.)

5. Stand when the celebrant returns to the altar.
6. Sit when the celebrant sits during the "Gloria". (Glory to God.)
7. Stand as the celebrant returns to the altar and while he sings the Collects (the opening prayers).
8. Sit for the Epistle.
9. Stand for the Gospel.
10. Sit for the sermon.
11. Stand while the celebrant says the Creed and genuflect with the celebrant. Sit when he sits for the singing of the Creed.
12. Stand as he returns to the altar.
13. Sit during the Offertory.
14. Stand for the Preface.
15. Kneel for the Sanctus (Holy, Holy) and until after the Consecration
16. Stand after the Consecration till after the Communion.
17. If there are some people to receive Holy Communion kneel when the priest opens the tabernacle and remain kneeling until he closes it.
18. Sit after the communion
19. Stand when the celebrant has read the Communion Antiphon
20. Kneel for the blessing
21. Stand for the Last Gospel and genuflect with the celebrant.
22. Remain standing until the priest has left the sanctuary.

High Mass.

[Again, this is a term used in the rubrics of Saint Pius V. What follows applies to 'High Masses' which follow that liturgy.]

The same as for Missa Cantata except, stand after the priest is incensed at the Offertory and remain standing until the Sanctus. (Holy, Holy.)

[The Novus Ordo Mass.]

[For the sake of completeness, we should outline the postures to be adopted during the Mass celebrated according to the rubrics of Pope Paul VI. This will be the Mass that most non-Catholic visitors will see, and at which most Catholics will participate.

1. Stand when the priest enters the Church or Sanctuary and remain standing until the end of the Opening Prayer.
2. Immediately sit for the Epistle or First Reading of the Word of God (from the Holy Scriptures). Remain seated.
3. Stand for the singing of the Alleluia verse which immediately precedes the Proclamation of the Gospel for which we remain standing.

4. Sit for the homily or sermon and remain seated for the time of reflection.
5. If there is to be a recitation of the creed, please stand, (and bow at the words 'by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary and was made man' – unless a genuflection is required.) Remain standing for the Prayers of the Faithful, if they are said.
6. Sit for the Offertory and preparation of Gifts.
7. Stand for the Prayer 'Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable' and remain standing for the Preface and for the Sanctus (Holy, Holy). If Incense has been used, you will need to stand a little earlier. After the priest has offered the bread and wine he will use incense over the gifts. The minister will then incense the priest or priests present. He will then come to the front of the Sanctuary to incense the People of God. When he arrives at this position the congregation stands and remains standing.
8. Kneel for the Canon, or Eucharistic Prayer, and for the Consecration.
9. Stand for the 'Our Father' and remain standing until the end of the 'Lamb of God' Prayer and the Fraction of the Host. It is customary to offer your neighbours a sign of Peace when invited to do so, just before this.
10. We kneel at the end of the 'Lamb of God' prayer until Communion time.
11. We may kneel or sit to offer our own thanksgiving after Communion.
12. We stand for the Prayer after Communion, said by the priest and remain standing for the Blessing and Dismissal and until the priest has left the Sanctuary and the final hymn has been sung.]

GENERAL CONDUCT.

[Some contemporary habits have changed since this was first written, not always for the better. It is a useful thing for today's Catholics to review the high standards expected of our co-religionists of a former generation to see if we can match their reverence and respect. I have added some exclamation marks against some of these 'rules of thumb' that I believe today's generation ought especially to examine its conscience.]

When in doubt as to the correct procedure at a liturgical ceremony, follow the "altar servers"; i.e. stand, kneel, or sit when they do so.

Strict silence should be observed at all times within the church. Do not talk, even in the porch or vestibule of the church. [Well!!!]

Take Holy Water when entering the church for it is intended to remind you to cleanse your mind of all other thoughts save of God.

Do not throw confetti in the church grounds, it is like dumping rubbish in a neighbour's garden, but in this case it is God's garden. [Most parishes have no objection to rice, as it can later be eaten by the birds. In some places the well-wishers have been issued with soap-bubble blowers.]

Respect for God's House forbids the customary signs of affection and congratulation to be indulged in, as a bride and bridegroom are walking out of the church. (Wait till they are outside.) [Well!!!]

While waiting for a wedding, the faithful should engage in talk with God and not with one another: "My House is a House of Prayer," said Our Lord. [Well!!!]

Do not leave your place in the church until the priest has left the sanctuary. [Well!!]

When entering or leaving your seat, genuflect; i.e., let your right knee touch the floor.

Do not walk up the aisle while the priest is speaking from the pulpit.

Do not stand if there are seats available. [Well!!]

Do not make others crawl over you.

Do not read anything but a prayer book in the church, religious papers should not be read in the church. [Well!!]

Don't put wet umbrellas or wet coats on the seats that others will have to use at a later Mass.

Parents, do not let your children scratch the polished seats; never let them stand on them. [Well!!]

Do not drop things on the floor. If you see anything on the floor, pick it up. Prove to God that you love the beauty and tidiness of His House as much as your own. [Well!!]

Do not rattle your rosary beads unnecessarily.

Do not pray in solo; keep together with all the others who are answering the prayers. [Well!!]

At the Last Gospel all kneel when the priest reads the words, "And the Word was made Flesh" — arise and stand with him until he has completed the Gospel: "And we saw His glory — the glory as of the Only Begotten Son of God full of grace and truth." [This applies only to the Liturgy of Saint Pius V.]

In approaching the altar rails for Holy Communion go slowly and reverently, with joined hands; do not hasten. [Well!!]

After receiving Holy Communion, close your mouth slowly — do not snap it shut.

When receiving Holy Communion keep your eyes downcast or closed and hold the communion plate under your chin.

Remember that the priest is forbidden to give Holy Communion before Mass unless there is some special reason for doing so. There is a corresponding obligation for the faithful not to receive before Mass unless there is some special reason. Those who can remain till the end, of Mass should not receive Holy Communion before Mass.

In going to Holy Communion please approach, if possible, via the middle aisle and leave via the side aisle.

Always kneel for the whole time during which Holy Communion is being distributed at the altar rails. Sit only if you are unwell. [Well!!]

The proper ending of the Our Father is, "deliver us from evil" not "deliver us from all evil."

Those who have a true reverence and love of God do not come habitually late for Mass. [Well!!]

Leave the admiration of ladies' hats, furs, frocks, etc., until you have left the church. Never turn around in church. [Well!! Turning around during Mass shows that one isn't really conscious of what the Mass is for — the worship of God!]

The sacristan is the only one permitted to place and arrange flowers on our shrines; leave your flowers at the foot of the statue or just inside the shrine. [Habits have changed. It is usually acceptable to leave flowers with the flower sacristan at the 'work sacristy' – the little room next to the priest's sacristy.]

If you enter the church when the sanctuary bell is ringing, (for this is the time of the Consecration) or Holy Communion is being given — stop and kneel immediately. [Well!!]

Always stand as the funeral procession leaves the church.

Await your correct turn to enter the confessional. Do not jump other people's claims.

If you are inspecting pamphlets in the rack at the end of the church — do so quietly; please put each one back neatly in the place from which you took it.

Do not talk in the church while waiting for Baptisms. Come punctually at the appointed time. [Well!!]

Please walk quietly in the church, and do not hasten.

Men remove their hats before they enter the church; women should never enter unless their heads are covered. [The Vatican has now permitted women, according to local custom, to enter churches with uncovered heads.]

Do not park your motor car in front of the church driveway.

[How did YOUR examination of conscience go on this list? I did very poorly. May God grant me the grace to do better from now on! This I am resolved to do!]
