

**BITS OF
INFORMATION**

for

SACRISTANS

By
**Father
Winfrid
Herbst,
S.D.S.**

Herbst, Winfrid, 1891-
Bits of information for...
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Published by
THE SOCIETY OF THE DIVINE SAVIOR
(Salvatorian Seminary)
PUBLISHING DEPARTMENT
St. Nazianz, Wisconsin
1946

Imprimi Potest:

Bede Friedrich, S. D. S.
Provincial Superior

Nihil Obstat:

N. L. Gross, M. A.
Censor Librorum

Imprimatur:

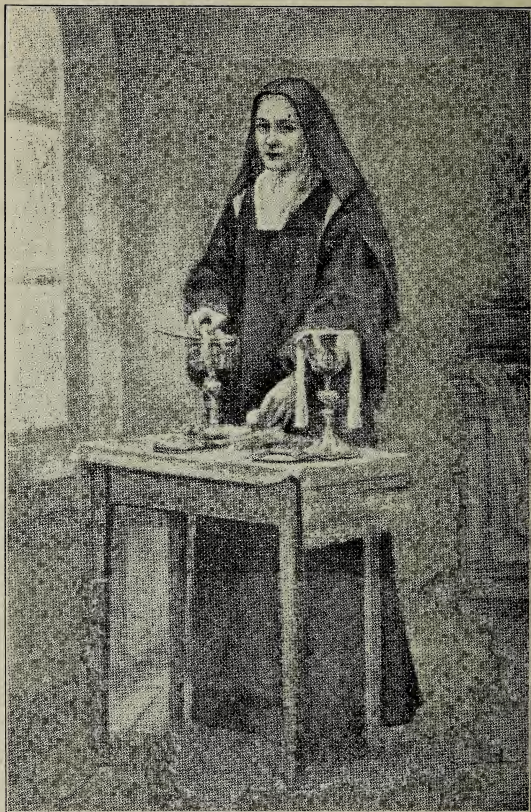
✠ Stanislaus V. Bona
Bishop of Green Bay

Green Bay, Wisconsin
Feb. 5, 1946

ATTENTION, PLEASE!

These Bits of Information are being printed in pamphlet form as a little favor to those who have requested them or who might be helped by them. Countless other questions could be asked, of course. All the answers are not here—far, far from it. The rest can be found in sacristan's manuals or books of ceremonies or compendiums of liturgy. But these few bits will at least save many sacristans the trouble some have been going to of clipping from back issues of *The Savior's Call* and pasting up for ready reference the practical and much appreciated information here given.

(See index at the end.)



St. Teresa of the Child Jesus
in the performance of her
duties as sacristan

Introduction

A sacristan is one whose duty it is to care for the church or chapel, in particular for the altar, the sanctuary, the vestments, etc., preparing the altar for Mass and other services, etc.

From the word sacristan comes the word sacristy, which is a room off the sanctuary, set aside for the retaining of sacred vessels, vestments, etc.

A sacristan may be a cleric, a religious Brother or Sister, or a layman. The sacristan may have one or more assistant sacristans. Both sacristan and assistant sacristans are to be appointed by the pastor, the chaplain, or (in a religious house) by the religious Superior. When appointed by any one of these, the sacristan as well as the assistant sacristans have all the rights and duties mentioned in the following pages—and that as long as their appointment lasts.

“I am a sacristan”—many of the questions I have been asked began just like that. So you are a sacristan. I wonder has anyone ever told you of the virtues in which a sacristan should excel. It is a great honor to be a sacristan or even an assistant sacristan. But honors bring obligations too. One of your obligations is to strive to excel in the virtues that ought especially to distinguish a sacris-

tan, namely, faith, humility, modesty, and piety, or devotion.

Your faith, dear sacristan, should be very strong and lively because you so often have in your hands things holy and consecrated to God. Without the true spirit of faith you would soon become too familiar with those objects and would treat them as common and ordinary. That must never happen; for that would not be for God's glory and your own good. So you must strengthen your faith by remembering each time you touch the sacred vessels or linens that they belong to God. Salute with respect the pictures and statues of Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Virgin, and of the saints, calling to mind the many favors which those who are represented by the pictures or statues have granted and will grant to those who invoke them. But above all be most careful to renew your acts of faith in the real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Address Him with fervent ejaculations as you move about in the church or chapel. Let every genuflection be an act of devout adoration, never hastily and ever properly made. Kneel from time to time for a brief adoration, to converse sweetly with Him at the foot of the altar. Beg of Him to receive your heart and your love. This you can do very often and yet find time for everything. The sure result of such lively faith will be that order, perfect neatness, and cleanliness will always shine forth in the holy place entrusted to your charge. And who would not be happy to keep things perfectly tidy in Jesus' house? In the Office of the Dedication of a Church you

read: "Holiness becometh the house of God: in her let us adore Christ her Bridegroom. This is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven."

In your privileged assignment, dear sacristan, you should also practice humility. There are many ways in which you can do that. Look upon yourself as being quite unworthy of being engaged in the house of God, so near His Divine Majesty. Devote yourself with all fervor to the lowest and most humble work, that at least which appears such, for no work is really humbling which is done in the place of God our King. Sweep, dust, remove cobwebs, wash the altars, keep the sanctuary lamp in good condition, etc. Practice humility likewise by obeying the priest in everything that regards your office. Never murmur or complain in the least. Never say that what you have been ordered to do is too hard for you or that there is too much to do. And remember that to respect and honor all priests is a rule that should be observed in a special way by the sacristan. If you have the privilege of serving the priest's Mass, or answering the prayers, do so with attention and lively faith and consider yourself highly favored indeed.

Another virtue that you, dear sacristan, must practice is the virtue of modesty, or reserve, or recollection. If you have not that, you will give but little edification to anyone who may see you. Never speak in the church or chapel or in the sacristy except when you must, and then do so in a whisper. Your example in this matter will do more than anything else to

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How often should I, as sacristan, have a fresh corporal, purificator, amice, and finger towel laid out for the priest who says Mass daily in our chapel?

The sacred linens, and others less sacred, should always be spotlessly clean; and hence you should renew them as often as they are not so. In general we would say that, considering daily use, the corporal might well be renewed every two weeks, the purificator twice a week, and the amice and finger towel once a week. The corporal should not be put away with the burse, always keeping a different corporal in each burse of different color; for in this way it may not be renewed for months and, even if clean, is certainly not fresh; but the same corporal should be used, say for two weeks, and then renewed. When not in use it may be kept in an extra burse or placed with the pall on the top of the paten on the chalice, when this is put into the safe. For special guests, e. g., a Bishop, a fresh purificator should be provided every day. When the priest has used the purificator to purify also a ciborium during Mass a fresh purificator should always be provided for the next Mass.

Now that we are in this matter we give a few additional hints to sacristans,—answers to various questions.

1. See to it that the altar cloths are always white and very clean, even though their wash-

ing entails much labor. Nothing is too good or too much for the Lord. Keep a dust cloth (vesperale) extended over the altar table outside of services. Remove the altar cards and book stand outside the time of Mass. It looks ugly and clumsy and bumpy when you place the altar covering over everything.

2. The upper altar cloth need not hang down in front; but if it does care should be taken that the lace, which is tolerated, should not, if pointed, be so short that it is repeatedly pushed up over the altar table. If there be such ornamentation let it hang down, say six inches or so. When the lace hangs over the edge only two or three inches, it is easily disarranged when the priest brushes against it and its appearance is then often untidy.

3. If the altar platform rumbles or creaks when the priest moves about on it, call in a carpenter at once and remedy the painful situation.

4. If the candlesticks or the crucifix rattle because of the uneven surface of the candlebar cut out of some soft heavy cloth a neat base and place it underneath them.

5. Never tolerate cruets that are not spotlessly clean. The same is to be said of the glass dish or basin that receives the water used in washing the priest's fingers,—also of the ablution cup. Crystal clear and clean, remember!

6. Fill the water cruet almost to the top. If you do that it will be easier for the priest to shake out a few drops than when the neck of the cruet is empty.

7. It is a pity, and meaningless, and even absurd, to see the act of incensation being per-

formed with a censer that is not smoking. The smoke of the blessed incense is a sacramental. A pillar of smoke should ascend from the censer, a symbol of prayer visible to the entire congregation and filling the chapel with fragrant odor. Always have a good big live coal. If you place the unlighted charcoal into the censer and then allow a little wood alcohol to drip on it and soak into it and then ignite it, when the alcohol is burnt away you will have charcoal that is alight through and through.

8. When not in use the Communion plate, after its purification, should be kept on the credence table, face downward to avoid dust; and, outside the time of Mass and Holy Communion, it should be kept in a case, or in a (chamois) bag, to insure that it will be scrupulously clean. If there are any finger marks or spots upon it, it should be carefully cleaned every day.

9. Remember that candle burners in pyrex glass are practically invisible, snug and close fitting. They do not black out too much of the candle flame as do the older lamp-chimney-shape kind and are easier to light.

10. An oblong mirror (say 3 feet long, one foot high) on the baseboard of the sacristy room at the right or left side of the priest as he stands at the vesting cabinet is an ingenious arrangement to enable the priest to adjust his alb properly so that it hangs evenly all around, about an inch from the floor (as the Ritus Celebrandi prescribes). He need but look in the direction of the mirror to see how the alb is hanging at his ankles.

11. When using a censer stand in the sanc-

tuary (as often done in chapels for Benediction when there is no altar boy) place it at the right of the priest with the hook from which the censer hangs away from the altar and towards the people and the shelf for the incense boat towards the altar. It is then very convenient for the priest to put in the incense and to remove the censer for incensation.

12. At the low Mass of a celebrant of less rank than a Bishop more than two candles may be lighted if it is a Conventual Mass or a "parochial or similar Mass" (e. g., that of a religious community on "more solemn days") or if it is a Mass which, on an occasion of very special solemnity, replaces a solemn or sung Mass. For the private Mass of a Bishop four candles are lighted on solemn feasts; on other days two suffice.

13. Remember that before use the following articles must be blessed: the three altar linens; the amice, alb, cincture, maniple, stole, and chasuble; the corporal and the pall; and it is fitting that the candles be blessed.

The following need not be blessed: the canopy; the antependium; the crucifix; the candlesticks; the altar cards; the missal stand; the missal; the ablution cup with its small purificator; the cruets, basin, finger towel (about the material of which there are no regulations), and bell; the vesperale; the purificator; the ciborium veil; the chalice veil; the burse; the Communion plate; the ostensorium or monstrance.

The chalice and paten must be consecrated. The ciborium should be blessed,—also the lunula.

14. The sacred linens, strictly so called, are those which are used by the celebrant at Mass and which come into contact with the Sacred Species (the corporal), or may do so (the pall and the purificator). Accordingly, once they have been used, such linens may be touched only by a (tonsured) cleric or by "the person who has charge of them" (Canon 1306, n. 1), e. g., the sacristan. They may be laundered only after they have been ceremoniously washed, once, by a cleric in major Orders (Canon 1306, n. 2).

To make this quite clear, we repeat that the sacred vessels (chalice, paten, ciborium, lunula), when they do not actually contain the Sacred Species, and the sacred linens (pall, corporal, purificator) not yet washed after sacred use, may be touched by clerics only (that is, by those who have at least received tonsure) or by those who have charge of them, namely, by a lay sacristan or by a Sister sacristan. (Cappello.) The sacristan may, therefore, and should, keep also the chalice, ciborium, paten, lunula, spotlessly clean. The persons mentioned above may also prepare the chalice beforehand, though the celebrant is recommended to do it himself.

If others than those mentioned above touch the sacred vessels or linens, is it a sin? When the sacred vessels contain the Sacred Species they may not be wilfully touched without sin by one who is not at least deacon. Otherwise, excluding scandal or contempt, the touching of sacred vessels and linens even by lay persons is not forbidden under pain of any

sin. (Cappello, De Sacramentis, vol. 1, n. 804, 1938 ed.)

15. See to it that the missal is not shabby. Give it a new covering if the binding is too worn. If pages are torn fix them neatly with transparent tape, e. g., Scotch Cellulose Tape. Do not tolerate it that any tabs be missing or loose. If the ribbons are all crumpled up or almost round, take them (with or without the book) to the laundry and iron them out flat. Look over the missal from time to time to see if it is really presentable.

16. At all times have everything neat and in its place in the sacristy. Never tolerate dust or disorder.

I am a sacristan and not only bake the altar breads but, as sacristan, I place them in the ciborium to be taken to the altar for consecration. Could you give me some practical directions in this matter?

You no doubt have your instructions regarding this important duty, given by the proper authority, and you know that the bread which is used must be real bread, made of wheaten flour, without any admixture whatsoever except natural water, which is used to make the dough; that in the Latin Rite only unleavened bread may be used, i. e., without the addition of yeast or other like substances, to cause fermentation in the dough; that the breads (large or small) should be round in shape; that a large bread is used for Mass and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and small hosts are used for the Communion of the faithful (the

size for either is not determined, the usual size for the large host is from $3\frac{1}{4}$ to $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, for the small breads about $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter, according to O'Connell, though one rarely, though regretfully, we think, finds them so large); that an image of Christ—preferably Christ on the cross—may but need not be impressed on the large breads; that they be spotlessly clean, which is obvious. From which it is evident, as the instructions of the Holy See have frequently emphasized, that the making of altar breads should be entrusted only to persons who are properly instructed in the regulations concerning this important work and who are absolutely conscientious and trustworthy, wherefore as a rule this duty is entrusted to Religious men or women.

Canon Law, the Roman Ritual, and an Instruction of the Congregation of the Sacraments, all prescribe that the hosts (for Mass, Communion, and Exposition) which are to be consecrated shall be fresh and frequently renewed. How fresh must they be? Theologians and rubricians declare that they must not be more than twenty or twenty-one days old at most and that they should be renewed at least once a week. All authorities agree that not more than a month should elapse between the making of the breads and their consumption. Hence a safe working rule is to renew the supply of freshly made breads every three weeks and to change the contents of the ciborium and lunette at least once a week.

However, if there is a sufficient reason and provided there is no danger of even the begin-

ning of corruption, it is permissible, if there be no local law to the contrary, to leave the hosts unchanged for a longer period—up to two weeks.

The breads should be free from loose particles, and the Instruction of the Congregation of the Sacraments (March 26, 1929) recommends that small breads should, if necessary, be freed from all dust and loose particles by shaking them beforehand in a sieve.

It may be noted here that the small hosts should not be too thin, lest the priest break them when giving Holy Communion; nor too small, lest they be dissolved in the mouth and not swallowed, in which case the Sacrament would probably not be received. We think that it is extremely important that all the hosts should be as generous and substantial as possible, all things considered, and that it is deplorable to find some made almost as small as a nickel and of the utmost thinness.

The sacristan should not turn the hosts into the ciborium all together but should put them in singly, thus making still more sure of the removal of small particles. It is very advisable to put the hosts into the ciborium irregularly, not in layers or in symmetrical coils, so to speak. If placed into the ciborium in the latter way they are either hard to get between the thumb and forefinger or, if pressed a little on one side when taking out a Host to give Holy Communion, they tend to shoot up, all together, at the opposite side of the ciborium, and this is very dangerous if the ciborium is full. And, finally, the ciborium should never

be entirely full, still less heaped full, as there is then either great danger of Hosts falling to the floor or the priest is put to a wholly unnecessary nervous tension while he slowly and carefully distributes Communion until he gets down to the height to which the ciborium should have been filled in the first place. (Cf. O'Connell, *The Celebration of Mass*, passim.)

In a previous answer you said that also lay sacristans and Sisters may touch the sacred vessels, even the chalice and ciborium when they do not contain the Sacred Species, and that they should keep those vessels spotlessly clean. How should they do that?

It is very simple. When they need washing—and they often do, especially the chalice; for the priest does not wash it at the altar but only purifies it—they should be washed inside and outside with hot water and soap, or the equivalent. However, it should be done gently and with a soft cloth both for washing and drying, so as not to scratch the gold surface and to make it last longer.

I am a sacristan. One of the many things I sometimes get a little puzzled about is just how many candles to light for the different functions at the altar. How many? Also of what quality? Bleached or unbleached?

We here pass on the following succinct information:

20 at least for Forty Hours Exposition;
12 at least for Benediction of the Blessed

Sacrament with monstrance, unless a poor parish has obtained special permission from the bishop for six;

6 for private Benediction with ciborium;

6 for Solemn Mass on Sundays and feast days;

4 will suffice for Solemn Mass on other days;

2 will suffice for Solemn Mass on simple feasts or lesser ferias, but one may and generally does light six for any kind of a Solemn Mass;

4 at least for High Mass, whether for the living or the dead, but ordinarily six are lighted;

2 for a Low Mass which is strictly private and said by any priest of lesser rank than a bishop;

2 or more for a Mass as just above if it is the conventual or parochial Mass on Sundays and holydays of obligation or if the occasion calls for more than usual solemnity;

4 or more for the Low Mass of a bishop not only on greater feasts but also on ferial days, though two will suffice;

7 when the bishop pontificates in his own diocese at a Solemn non-Requiem Mass, and even at a Low Mass when he publicly ordains;

2 or more for marriages, blessings, distribution of Holy Communion outside of Mass, and for non-liturgical prayers and devotions, provided these services are celebrated at the altar.

As regards quality, all these candles should be made of beeswax. "Let bishops see to it as well as possible that the Easter candle, the

candle to be immersed in the baptismal water, and the two candles to be used during Mass shall be made of beeswax, at least for the most part; other candles to be placed on altars should be made of the same wax for the greater part or to a notable extent." (S. C. R., Nov. 29, 1904.) So at every Mass at least two of the candles must be made of beeswax "at least for the most part" (at least 75%); those used at all the other services mentioned above should be made of beeswax "for the greater part or to a notable extent (at least 50%). However, it is the duty of the bishop of each diocese to determine what this percentage of beeswax should be. Also, extraordinary conditions sometimes call for and bring extraordinary concessions. But the ordinary legislation of the Church does not allow candles of stearine, paraffin, or tallow on or immediately around the altar either for Mass or Benediction, not even in addition to the number of beeswax candles prescribed.

Finally, to come to your last question, bleached or white candles are ordinarily used and may be used on all occasions. But it is recommended that unbleached or yellow candles be used for Requiem Masses, Tenebrae services, on Good Friday. Some even recommend their use during Advent and Lent if the ferial Mass is said. But this last recommendation about Advent and Lent should not be taken too seriously. It might cause you endless trouble to be changing candles from day to day and often perhaps twice on the same day, when one Mass of the feria is said, for instance, and another of the feast of the

day. (Cf. O'Connell, *The Book of Ceremonies*. Also Cappello.)

To celebrate Mass without any light is a serious sin, but any grave reason excuses. Explanations may be in order, to avoid scandal. In all other cases, e. g., with only one candle, with candles not of beeswax, etc., there is either no sin at all or it does not exceed a venial sin. (Cf. Cappello, *De Sacramentis*, Vol. I.)

I would like to know just when the Paschal candle should be lighted, since I am a sacristan. Please make your answer concise and complete.

“The Paschal candle is lighted at Solemn Mass and Vespers on Easter Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Saturday, and on the other Sundays until the Feast of Ascension. If the custom is to light it on the greater feasts (e. g., Finding of the Holy Cross, Feast of SS. Philip and James) or on other days, this custom may be continued. Moreover, even if the parochial Mass on these days is a Low Mass, the Paschal candle may be lighted. If Mass or Vespers be celebrated before the Blessed Sacrament exposed, the Paschal candle should be lighted.

“For Requiem Masses, Masses on Rogation days, or any Masses in purple vestments, the Paschal candle should not be lighted. Nor should it be lighted for Mass on the vigil of Pentecost nor for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. If, however, Benediction follows immediately after Mass or Vespers, it need not be extinguished.” (O'Connell, *The Book of Ceremonies*, page 14. Bruce.)

When do sacred articles used in divine worship lose their consecration or blessing? We would especially like to know when sacred vestments that have been repaired have to be blessed over again.

A sacred article that is used in divine worship, e. g., chalice, paten, vestments, and that has been blessed or consecrated loses its blessing or consecration (1) if it is so badly damaged or changed that its form is lost and it becomes unfit for its proper purpose and (2) if it has been used for unsuitable purposes (e. g., theatrical exhibitions) or exhibited for public sale. But chalice and paten do not lose their consecration by the wearing away of the gilding or by the process of regilding. But if the gold plating wears away there is a grave obligation to have the vessel replated. (Canon 1305.)

So if a chalice sustained a slight break or split in the cup near the bottom, or if the paten had holes in it, the consecration would be lost. The consecration would not, however, be lost if the cup were detached from the stem by loosening the screw in chalices which are so made.

Also, as has been said, any profanation of a sinful character entails the loss of the blessing or consecration attached to such a sacred article. The exhibition for public sale or public auction likewise effect the loss of blessing or consecration, no matter whether it is done by Catholics or non-Catholics. It is to be noted that public exposition for sale is sufficient to entail the loss of blessing or consecration, whether the article is actually sold

or not. Note, too, that it is a public offering for sale that is in question, not a private sale made, let us say, by two priests, the one purchasing such an article from the other.

Concerning sacred linens, the form of a corporal or pall, etc., would be changed if, according to common parlance, it could no longer be recognized as such, which would be the case, for instance, if only rags remained. Specifically, if the corporal is so torn that no part of it can receive the host and chalice, if the pall is so torn that it can no longer properly serve its purpose, if an altar cloth is separated into two such parts that neither one suffices to cover the altar, the blessing is lost. But this is only theoretical. In practice no one would think of using sacred linens that are so torn or tattered. In fact, only the best of everything, as far as possible, is used for divine service.

But your inquiry is chiefly about sacred vestments. The general rule is that vestments lose their blessing when they are so worn or torn or lacerated that they are unsuitable for divine service or when they no longer exist in the form in which they were blessed. Thus, for example, a stole which is made out of a chasuble must be blessed again. Through mending or patching the sacred vestments lose their blessing only when the new or inserted portion that has no blessing is greater than the portion that is blessed, not when it is smaller.

To descend to particulars, an alb loses its blessing when a new sleeve is put onto it or if a sleeve is entirely separated from an alb to

which it was sewed; also if the lower (lace) part is entirely separated from the upper part; but the alb remains blessed if a sleeve or the lower half which was not entirely separated from it is again sewed on. The cincture loses its blessing when it is so torn that none of the remaining parts is long enough to gird the priest. The chasuble loses its blessing when it no longer serves its purpose and when the front part is separated from the back part. If only the lining is torn the chasuble does not lose its blessing; one simply repairs the lining or replaces it with a new lining. The blessing is also lost when from one vestment others are made.

It may be helpful for you to know that old, worn out sacred linens or vestments that cannot be used any more should not be used for profane purposes or sold, even if they have lost the blessing. They should, as much as possible, be further used for church purposes or else they should be burnt. Valuable embroideries, e. g., crosses or pictures on the chasuble, can often still be used in the making of new vestments, pieces of silk stuff that are still good can be used for the repairing of other vestments, amices can be made from albs, etc. (Cf. Augustine, Hartmann, Creusen and Vermeersch, Van der Stappen.) But see below.

May one use altar cloths that are worn and somewhat shabby and so unsuitable for use on the altar as ordinary table cloths or as tray covers?

For the celebration of Mass the altar is to

be covered with three clean cloths of linen or hemp, which are to be duly blessed before use. The two lower cloths—or one cloth doubled—should cover the entire surface of the table of a fixed altar; and, at least, the entire altar stone in the case of a “portable” altar. The top cloth, however, should cover the entire surface of the table of the altar and also the two sides, so that it should hang down to the ground, but not on it, at each side. The custom of not having it hang down to the ground may be tolerated for a good reason. The upper altar cloth need not hang down in front; but if it does, the addition of such an ornament as lace is permitted. Since the rubric prescribes that the altar cloths be clean, it does not seem to be too much to demand that the top cloth of an altar on which a number of Masses are said each day be washed at least twice a month and the lower cloths at least four times a year (Wapelhorst).

Blessed altar cloths such as you speak of may not be used for non-sacred purposes like those mentioned in your question but should either be used for other church purposes or be burnt and the ashes put into the sacrarium (Wapelhorst). The same holds good for all blessed sacred linens and vestments. The sacrarium is a place connecting directly with the ground where used blessed water, ashes, purifications, etc. may be disposed of.

However, Church law (Canon 1305) states that articles blessed or consecrated for use in divine worship lose their blessing or consecration if they have been torn or have been changed in such a way that they are no longer

suitable for their original purpose, as when an alb has had a sleeve torn off. When such an article has lost its blessing it may be put to any convenient use. While it is ordinarily not allowed deliberately to change blessed articles in order that they may lose their consecration, still this may be done for a good reason, as in the case of such articles as are worn and must be replaced by new ones—like the altar cloths you mention. If you cut them into pieces they lose the blessing and may then be used for the purposes you indicate in your question, even if you sew the pieces together again.

I am a sacristan. The other day I laid out the vestments for Mass and thoughtlessly used the wrong color for that day. The color should have been red and I laid out white. The priest took that color and never said a word about it afterwards (I was not in the sacristy before Mass). Is it a sin not to use the prescribed color?

Speaking of vestments, it might be well to recall that there are five liturgical colors: white, green, red, purple, and black. (Silver vestments may be used instead of white.)

White is the symbol of purity. It is used on all feasts of our Lord except those relating to His sufferings; on feasts of our Lady; on the feasts of saints that are not martyrs.

Red is the figure of blood and fire. The Church assigns it to the feasts of the martyrs and apostles; to Pentecost Sunday; to feasts connected with the Passion of our Lord.

Green is the symbol of hope. It is used on the Sundays after Pentecost and on the Sundays from Epiphany to Septuagesima.

(The Sacred Congregation of Rites permits the use of gold vestments instead of red, white, or green, provided the material be of pure cloth of gold.)

Violet, the penitential color, is used during Lent and Advent and on the vigils of the greater feasts. (Vestments of rose color may be worn in place of violet on two days during the year: the third Sunday of Advent, called Gaudete Sunday, and the fourth Sunday of Lent, called Laetare Sunday.)

Black, the sign of mourning, is used on Good Friday, and in Masses of the Dead.

The obligation to use just that color of vestments prescribed by the rubrics is from its nature binding under pain of venial sin; accidentally it might be binding under pain of serious sin, by reason of scandal, as when one would, for example, celebrate with black vestments on Easter Sunday. Though many authors seem to think that the rubric which determines the color is merely directive and hence not binding under pain of any sin, and though St. Alphonsus thinks it only more probably preceptive, the obligation is clearly evident from many decrees of the Congregation of Sacred Rites and from long-since received custom in all places. However, a reasonable cause excuses from any sin whatsoever, as, for instance, when there is a large gathering of priests and there are not enough vestments of the proper color. And it is better on any day to celebrate Mass in any color

rather than omit the offering of the Holy Sacrifice. (Cf. Cappello, *De Sacramentis*, vol. 1, no. 811.) Here it might be well to recall the general rule that when there is a light obligation to do a certain thing one is excused from that obligation where a reasonable cause is present, without a serious reason being required. (L. C., no. 740.)

You committed no sin in laying out vestments of the wrong color, because of inadvertence or thoughtlessness or absent-mindedness. It often happens that for such like reasons one does things that are not right and is yet wholly guiltless.

The priest who came to offer Mass when vestments of the wrong color were laid out may not have adverted to the error at all, in which case he of course committed no fault; or he may have noticed it but, rather than turn things upside down, so to speak, and cause a disturbance or call the sacristan or delay the beginning of the Mass, he thought it better for the peace of mind and the recollection and devotion of himself and all concerned to proceed quietly with the Holy Sacrifice. Also in that case there was no fault, as he had a good reason for acting as he did.

Is it a sin for a lay person to touch the tabernacle on the outside, for example, when decorating the altar?

No; it is not a sin. There can be no question of sin here. So, too, it is ordinarily quite proper and even a matter of duty for sacristans to remove the key from the tabernacle door in

case it was forgotten. In this case it is well to make sure that the tabernacle is locked.

We may here repeat, for the sake of general information, that the Code of Canon Law requires that the necessary precautions be taken to see that the sacred vessels and the sacred linens which have been used in the Holy Sacrifice shall not be touched except by clerics (at least tonsured) and by those entrusted with their care. (Canon 1306, no. 1.)

For the sake of clearness we divide our explanation as follows:

1. Without any special permission from the Ordinary all clerics as well as persons (lay or religious) who have been given charge of the sacristy have the right to touch the sacred vessels, when they do not contain the Holy Eucharist and when they have been purified.

2. Said persons have the right to touch the sacred linens, even though not yet purified.

3. However, lay sacristans and religious not clerics should in all cases refrain from publicly touching the sacred vessels and the sacred linens with bare hands. Let them (as some do) then wear white gloves reserved for such use only, or let them use a clean linen cloth always kept at hand for just that purpose. And if the sacristan is a layman, he should (in case of handling publicly) first put on cassock and surplice.

4. However, if persons not mentioned in Nos. 1, 2 and 3 above were to touch what the persons mentioned have the right to touch, they would not commit any sin, except in case of scandal; but reverence for the objects con-

nected with the Holy Sacrifice should make them respect the wishes of the Church.

5. It is not wrong for anybody to touch a corporal which has served for the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, or the sacred linens after they have been purified. Nor is it wrong to touch, even without a linen cloth, the monstrance or the ciborium or the pyx (custodia) when they do not contain the Blessed Sacrament. But here, too, reverence should lead to the use of white gloves or linen cloth as suggested above, for all who are not clerics.

6. On the other hand, when the sacred vessels contain the Sacred Species, it would be a mortal sin for anyone who has not received the order of deaconship to touch them. (Without necessity, of course, as might happen in case of accident, fire, etc. If one accidentally touches such a sacred vessel, as sometimes happens in the distribution of Holy Communion, no sin is committed.)

7. It is expressly forbidden (but only under pain of venial sin) to permit lay persons, even religious, unless they have a special indult from the Holy See, to wash purificators, palls, and corporals which have been used in Holy Mass, before they have been purified one first time, that is, given the first ablution or rinsing, by a cleric who is at least a subdeacon. Anyone may perform the second or third ablutions; as a matter of fact, these second and third ablutions are not in any manner prescribed. (Canon 1306, no 2.)

8. The above precautions about touching in no way refer to the priestly vestments, the altar cloths, the veils for the ciborium or

monstrance or tabernacle, the antependium, the cross, the candles and candlesticks, the missal, altar cards, and other furnishings of the altar, though all objects necessary for the Sacrifice will ever be treated with due reverence by the good Catholic.

If a person is obliged to leave the church after Consecration and before Communion, must one make a "double genuflection," or is the Blessed Sacrament considered covered as such and would it be the same as if it were in the tabernacle?

There are two kinds of genuflections, namely, a double genuflection, when both knees are bent to the floor and a slight bow of the head and shoulders is made; and a simple genuflection, when only the right knee is bent to the ground without being accompanied by a bow of the head or the body. The faithful should make a double genuflection on entering or leaving the church when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, as during Benediction or the Forty Hours. Also when Holy Communion is being distributed. If one should enter a church or pass an altar at the Consecration of the Mass, one should make a double genuflection and remain kneeling until the chalice has been replaced upon the altar. When entering the church between the Consecration and the Communion only a simple genuflection is made, as when the Blessed Sacrament is enclosed in the tabernacle.

Also the simple genuflection, being an act of adoration, should be devoutly made. The

body should be held erect, and the right knee should touch the floor near the ankle of the left foot. The genuflections made by many of our Catholics are disgraceful. Moreover, during the Forty Hours, for instance, many of our people simply will forget to make the double genuflection. We here give the manner of making it. Bend first the right knee to the floor and then the left (in other words, kneel down), make a medium inclination of the head and shoulders; then arise, bringing first the left foot into position and then the right. Do not hold on to anything when making a genuflection, unless you must do so because of some infirmity or disability.

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SUMMARY OF INTRODUCTION

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Virtues of Sacristan
Faith
Humility
Modesty
Piety
Perfection

