

Understanding the Mass Vestments

Each week, we are explaining the different parts of the Mass - what is in the church, what we use in the Mass, and why (and how) we celebrate Mass the way we do.

Today our topic is **Vestments**.

Vestments are the different clothes that the priest wears to celebrate Mass. These special clothes are a sign that he is acting not as a private person, but as a minister of the church. Each item has a special meaning - keep reading to learn more!

As the priest prepares to dress himself in the sacred garments for Mass, it has been a long-standing tradition in the Church that he recites the following prayers:

Washing of hands

Give virtue to my hands, O Lord, that being cleansed from all stain I might serve you with purity of mind and body.

1 AMICE – a rectangular neck cloth which serves to protect the valuable chasuble and stole, but is used only if the alb does not cover the ordinary clothing at the neck.

Prayer

Place, O Lord, the helmet of salvation upon my head, to repel the assaults of the devil.

2 ALB – a long white garment worn by the priest to represent the new and immaculate vestment that has been received through baptism.

Prayer

Cleanse me, O Lord, and purify my heart, that washed in the Blood of the Lamb I may attain everlasting joy.

3 CINCTURE – a cord used as a belt to tighten the alb symbolizing the virtue of chastity and continence, and is the same color as the chasuble.

Prayer

Gird me, O Lord, with the cincture of purity and quench in me the fire of concupiscence, that the virtue of continence and chastity may remain in me.

4 STOLE – a long narrow band, several inches wide and about 80 inches long (and of the same color as the chasuble) which is worn as a sign that the priest is serving in his official liturgical role.

Prayer

Return to me, O Lord, the stole of immortality, which I have lost in the sin of my first parent; and although I, unworthy, approach Thy sacred mystery, grant to me, nevertheless, everlasting joy.

5 CHASUBLE – the final vestment of the priest that is worn over all the others and symbolizes the virtue of charity and the yoke of unselfish love.

Prayer

O Lord, who hast said, My yoke is easy and My burden light; grant that I may be able so to bear it, that I may obtain Thy grace. Amen.



Illustration by Nathan Runda

¹ Exploring the Mass, by Cardinal Vincent Nichols (2017)