

A SCHOOL'S GUIDE TO THE PRIEST

SACRAMENT OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE

In the celebration of the Eucharist, Christ is present in the person of the presiding priest, ordained for this ministry. Every authentic celebration of the Eucharist is presided over by the bishop or a priest, presiding in the person of Christ. Note that the celebrant (the bishop or priest) presides. As presider, he does not need an assistant, even if it is a teacher who knows the children well, to give instructions to the assembly – this is part of his presidential responsibility.

As so often, in the Mass, what we see is less than what we get. We see the priest, a man among men. But by virtue of the Sacrament of Ordination and the ministry entrusted to him by the bishop, this man is the symbol of Christ present for us – he is acting in the person of Christ (in persona Christi).

We need to cultivate a reverence for that presence of Christ in the ministry of the priest. This is one way in which we help ourselves to keep an awareness that the Mass is something that involves our relationship with Christ. It is not a merely human work, something we do. It is something richer by far than simply that.

THE ROLE OF THE PRIEST

The priest is the presider - in Mass he represents Christ in his role as teacher and priest; he stands before God the Father interceding for the good of his flock. He brings the prayers of thanksgiving, adoration, penance, and petition before God and calls down the Holy Spirit on the gifts of bread and wine that they may become the Body & Blood of Christ. Of all those involved in Mass, his job is specifically to serve both the people and God.

Through his prayerfulness and his relationship to the Mystery of the Mass, and to the people assembled, the priest is to assist the congregation in their praying of the Mass. It is important to recognise that to do this the priest needs to take overall responsibility for the celebration of the Mass, though he should always also work collaboratively with other ministers.

His role is more integral to the celebration than that of leading the presidential prayers, consecrating the gifts of bread and wine, and ensuring that the sacrament is validly ministered.

HOW TO HELP ENABLE YOUR PRIEST TO PRESIDE MOST EFFECTIVELY

Ensure you have consulted with him in plenty of time about the forthcoming celebration. This will help avoid clashes with Feast Days/Solemnities which might not necessarily 'fit' with the focus of your celebration, but may have priority on a particular day. Do remember that there is only ever one 'theme' to Mass – **the passion, death and resurrection of Christ**. Don't try to insert other themes.

Discuss with the priest what he will prepare and what he expects others to prepare – e.g. choice of readings, music. Agree how decisions are to be shared regarding what is prepared by the priest and what is prepared by others.

Let him know about particular pastoral issues that he should be aware of within the group that is celebrating so that he may be pastorally sensitive. For example, has there been a recent bereavement in the class, or major difficulties in the family life of a pupil or student? He does not need to know all the details, and he will treat information with professional confidentiality. He will not refer to these things during the Mass, if it is judged best not to, but sometimes knowing what not to refer to is as important as knowing what should be acknowledged in prayer.

It is sometimes appropriate for the priest to help the smooth running of the Mass by inviting forward ministers by their name at the appropriate time, e.g. 'John is now going to read the first reading to us...' If this suits your situation, let the priest have a typed list of who is doing what.