

# ACOLYTES: Ministers at Lord's Table

"For the nurturing and constant growth of the People of God, Christ the Lord instituted in the Church a variety of ministries, which work for the

good of the whole body." (Lumen Gentium, 18) It is these ministries which have been the topics of my discussion with you these last few weeks. And it seems to me that in a very special way, the ministry of the Acolyte, the one who distributes Holy Communion, brings about the "nurturing and constant growth of the People of God."



Let me share with you an encounter which leads me to say this.

After a Sunday liturgy in one of the parishes a few weeks ago, I was speaking with some of the laymen and women who had participated in the celebration. One of those who had distributed Holy Communion, a woman in her late thirties and mother of four children, said to me, "You know, Bishop, for years I have tried to serve good meals to my children so that they would be healthy. I feel that now I am doing that for my fellow Christians."

This woman, not a scholar or theologian, had a fine insight. She knew that she did not make the food nourishing. But she chose to serve food that she knew would be most beneficial. And so, in faith, the Acolyte waits on the Lord's table and serves the Bread of Life made present by the prayer of the priest in the assembly of Christians.

This ministry of Acolyte, now no longer given only to seminarians and no longer a term to be used of altar boys, is a special call to assist the deacon and priest in the liturgical celebrations and, in case of pastoral need, to distribute Holy Communion and publicly expose the Blessed Sacrament for adoration by the faithful.

Rather than a temporary measure because of a shortage of priests, the rank of Acolyte is an order of the Church, just as bishop, priest, deacon and lector are orders of the Church and are ministers for the service of the People of God.

As such, the Acolyte has a great responsibility. In his Apostolic Letter establishing this order of Acolyte, Pope Paul makes special mention of this fact:

Destined as he is in a special way for the service of the altar, the acolyte should learn all matters concerning public divine worship and strive to grasp their inner spiritual meaning; in that way he will be able each day to offer himself entirely to God, be an example to all by his seriousness and reverence in the sacred building, and have a sincere love for the Mystical Body of Christ, the People of God, especially the weak and the sick.

If, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, good Acolytes would emerge from the Christian people, then our process of renewal would be greatly enhanced.

Taking their role seriously, the Acolytes could undertake to help the Liturgy Committees of their parishes to give new freshness and depth to the Eucharistic celebration. They could take on a special ministry to the weak and the sick, visiting shut-ins, and perhaps even bringing the Body of Christ to them in their homes.

In order to carry out this task, I hope that the diocese will soon be able to provide special training for this ministry of service. Special courses in Liturgy and Eucharistic theology would strengthen the abilities of the Acolyte and help him to be more effective. In this way, through our common efforts, the Lord Jesus will be able to work for the good of the whole body, which is His Church.

## Part 3 of 4

## MINISTRY TODAY

Next Week: The Deacon: A Ministry of Service.



Acolyte John Fitzsimmons, above, distributes Communion in St. Alphonsus church. The term acolyte no longer refers, to altar boys (left), Bishop Hogan points out. Below, Sister Katherine Ann Reger of Auburn places the host in a pyx, the small container used to carry Communion to the sick and bedridden faithful.

