

## **Mass for Altar Servers**

Holy Rosary Cathedral

10 September 2011

Dear brothers in the priesthood, dear members of Serra, but especially dear altar servers with their parents, families and friends:

### ***Introduction***

It is always a great joy to welcome all of you to this, our beautiful Cathedral dedicated to Mary, Queen of the Holy Rosary. How good it is for us to be together with at this Annual Altar Servers Mass so generously sponsored and organized by the Serrans of Vancouver and the Fraser Valley, together with Father Joseph Nguyen, our Director of Vocations. The Serrans are an exceptional group of men and women who are especially dedicated to praying for, fostering and sustaining vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life not only here but around the world. They play an irreplaceable role in our Archdiocese, and I know that I speak for all of you when I express my profound gratitude to them for their love of the Church and for her priests. Thank you, dear Serrans, for your selfless commitment to the Church in this corner of the Lord's Vineyard.

### ***Thanks to the Parents***

Dear parents: you know that without your help and cooperation these boys and girls would not be here today. You have encouraged your children to become altar servers and, often with much sacrifice, have supported them in this service they give to the Church. Before I

thank you and encourage your special ministry in the Church. You have an awesome responsibility: leading to God the little ones entrusted to your loving care. Your task – and it is not an easy one in today’s world! – is to help them contribute by their practical involvement to the life of the parish and its reverent worship. From you, within the family, which is the church of the home, your children learn to know God, to love him and to trust him. It is from your example in the home that your children meet Jesus and welcome him as their Friend, learning to spend time with him in prayer, to serve him and to come to know the particular mission in life, the particular vocation, that God has in mind for them. And so I am grateful to each and every one of you for raising your child in the Catholic faith, ensuring his or her religious formation through Catholic schools or participation in PREP, and for helping them to give God the first place in their lives. Thank you, dear parents.

Blessed John Paul II said it best: “Parents will best help their children live their lives to the fullest if they teach them to make their whole lives a gift to God and to others. They need to respect their choices and encourage every vocation with joy, including religious or priestly. The family will play a fundamental role in the development, growth and final maturing of their vocation.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Blessed John Paul II, Homily, Campos Grande, Brazil (7 October 1991).

### ***Thanks to the Altar Servers***

Just as Jesus says in the Gospel: good trees bear good fruit, and each tree is known by its fruit (cf. Lk 6:43-44). I consider that you – dear altar servers – are the good fruit of your families. They are the strong trees that have given you life and nourished in you a love for serving the priest at the altar during Holy Mass.

Now I want to thank you who are receiving awards and all your fellow servers throughout the 80 parishes of our Archdiocese for your service to Jesus, to your parish community, to the priests and to the whole Church. Your service at the altar is, of course, a great privilege for you and your families.

I know that sometimes serving Mass often entails giving up things you could otherwise be doing: sleep, sports and other “fun” activities. But you have accepted the responsibility – and it is such an important one – of serving Holy Mass. Your assistance is invaluable. It helps us all to worship God with attention and devotion. This is a truly wonderful way to serve your parish family. Thank you for responding generously to this call from Jesus!

### ***Gospel: Building Your Life on Rock***

In this morning’s Gospel, Jesus tells us to the build our house on rock. We need to build the right kind of foundation for a house if it is to withstand the harshness of the elements. Your life is like building a

house, the house of your life. What kind of foundation are you providing for it?

Jesus places an alternative before you: to be wise by building on rock – a house that can resist rain and wind; or to be foolish by building on sand – a house that is weak and easily washed away by buffeting storms. The foolish person is the one who hears his voice but fails to act. There is no follow-through. Such a person’s house collapses.

Dear friends: build the house of your life on a rock-solid foundation; that is, on God: *on* Christ and *with* Christ. Jesus says: “Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock” (Mt 7:24). These are not just the empty words of some person or another; these are the words of Jesus, God’s only Son. You are being asked to commit yourselves to building your life on Jesus Christ and his Word.<sup>2</sup>

***First Reading: Rooted in Christ***

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Meeting with Young People (27 May 2006).

In today's First Reading, St. Paul tells us that a happy life is one that is "rooted" or "planted" in Christ (cf. Col 2:7). Jesus wants us to be close to him, to be his friend and companion. Because of our Baptism, we are as close to him as are branches on a vine. "From him we draw our life. Without him, we cannot truly live."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Jesus tells us that he himself is our life (cf. Jn 14:6) and that he has come to give us "life in abundance" (Jn 10:10).

Always remember to build your whole life on Christ, to accept his Gospel with joy and put his teachings into practice. That is the great adventure of the Christian life that lies before you. Rooted firmly in Jesus, and built on the solid foundations of his friendship, you will be able to meet the challenges of your own life and to spread the Good News to your friends and families.

### ***Vocation to Priesthood and Religious Life***

Since you are close to Jesus, and he is close to you, you will speak to your heart if you listen to his voice with openness. He has something to say to each of you, because he loves you. Perhaps he is saying to some of you: "I want you to serve me in a special way as a priest or a Religious." Jesus needs young people who are willing to spend their whole lives serving him without reserve.

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<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, Message for World Youth Day (6 August 2010), 2.

I have no doubt at all that Jesus is calling many of you young men here today in this church to serve him as his priests, to serve him at the altar, not just as boys and young men, but your whole through.

Furthermore, I am also sure that Jesus is calling many of you girls and young women to serve him as Religious sisters. What a beautiful gift to experience God's call to be his priest or a Religious! Do not be afraid to answer that particular call if it is meant for you. Listen carefully, therefore, to Jesus' voice in your hearts. Even if it is just a gentle whisper, do not ignore it but welcome it and nourish it.

### ***Final Thanks and Conclusion***

Dear altar servers: thank you for being witnesses of what it means to be a friend of Jesus, boys and girls, young men and women who listen carefully to his voice. Your attention and devotion during the celebration of Holy Mass can inspire everyone in the church and can help them draw closer to Jesus. Pray that you will come to understand more deeply what a privilege it is to serve Mass.

Listen to what our Holy Father, Pope Benedict, once said to thousands of altar servers from all over the world who were gathered in St. Peter's Square in Rome:

Do your task as altar servers with love, devotion and faithfulness; do not enter a church for the celebration with superficiality but rather, prepare yourselves inwardly for

Holy Mass! Assisting your priests in service at the altar helps to make Jesus closer, so that people can understand, can realize better: he is here.<sup>4</sup>

Yes, Jesus will once again come among us on the altar and give himself to us as the Bread of Life so that we might have life in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10).<sup>5</sup>

\_ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

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<sup>4</sup> Benedict XVI, General Audience (4 August 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, General Audience (2 August 2006).