

Mass Altar Servers

Holy Rosary Cathedral

8 September 2018

Dear Fathers Stan, Rodney, Juan: brothers in the priesthood; dear Serra Club members; but especially this morning dear altar servers gathered here with your parents, families and friends – a very warm welcome to your beautiful Cathedral dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary whose birth we are celebrating today:

Introduction

It is always a great joy to celebrate with all of you our Annual Mass for Altar Servers in the Archdiocese. What an inspiring sight you are and what hope you give to your parishes and to the whole Church because of your service at the altar! Your joy and enthusiasm for life, your sacrifice and dedication, and your love of Jesus, tell us of the older generations that, despite the challenges and disappointments, the Church is alive among her young people. That's why you are being honoured here today. And you each deserve the award you are receiving today.

Thanks to the Serrans and Parents

None of us, however, receives an award as if it were his or her own doing. You have been accompanied by many others who have helped you so that you could be here. Let's thank them wholeheartedly today.

I am thinking first of all of the Serrans of Vancouver and Fraser Valley West who organize and sponsor this Award Ceremony. This dedicated group of men and women serve our local Church by praying

for vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, and by accompanying young people on their journey of answering God's call. They are a great gift to all of us, and I thank them sincerely for their love of Jesus and his Church. They work alongside your guardian angels by their encouragement and their prayer.

And to you dear parents, I personally wish to express my gratitude for being witnesses to the Catholic faith in your home and for your diligence in handing on to your children your love of Jesus and his Gospel. I know that, not without often great sacrifice, you make it possible for your son or daughter to serve the priest at the altar in your parish church. Thank you for all you are doing to foster in your children a spirit of prayer and love for the Mass, especially by praying together as a family and receiving the sacraments together. Without your example and encouragement they would not be here.

Advice to the Altar Servers

Now, dear young people, as your bishop and spiritual father, allow me to offer you just four short reflections that I hope you will keep in mind now and in the years to come.

First of all, remember that being an altar server means that you are someone very special to Jesus. He lets you serve him. What an honour that he – much greater than any reward you could receive! He is the One you are really serving.

You are his friend. You are a friend of Jesus. He knows who you are deep down, even better than you know yourself. He knows you by name, and he knows you just as you are. That's why there is no need to put on a mask for him, pretending to be someone else. Jesus is happy that, just like Mary who accepted God's call, you have responded to his choice of you to serve at his altar.

Secondly, I urge to pray. Just as we enjoy the company of our friends and like to spend time with them, in the same way we need to spend time in conversation with Jesus. Like every conversation, this means talking to him, thanking him for his blessing, asking his forgiveness for our sins, and praising him. But also, like every conversation, we can't do all the talking. We have to let Jesus talk to us in the silence of our hearts.

You can talk to Jesus in prayer just as you talk to your close friends. He is the one friend who will never give up on you. He is the greatest and most faithful Companion imaginable. Jesus knows us and loves us; he forgives us. He wants to hear of our disappointments and our dreams. Above, he wants to support us.

But prayer is also listening, listening to God. During the Mass, there's much to be listened to. There's music, the prayers, the responses, and especially there are the words of Scripture. All the things you do as a server during Mass cannot be a distraction to your listening.

Remember, the server is part of the celebration. You are not like a waiter in a restaurant who stands off to the side and only helps out when needed. A waiter is not usually part of the dinner celebration, but a server is. You are a part of the celebration of Holy Mass, listening all the time. This is one way you pray: by listening.

Now a third word, besides friendship and prayer.

During Mass, just before receiving Holy Communion, the priest wishes the people peace, “The peace of the Lord be with you always,” he says. And then we all exchange a sign of peace. At the end of Mass, we are sent forth with the words: “Go in peace”; that is:

take peace with you in order to give it to others, give it through your life, your smile, your works of charity. Concrete commitment to peace is proof of the fact that we are truly Christ’s disciples. Making peace begins with little things. For example, at home after a quarrel, do I go off by myself – let me ask you – and act hurt, or do I make an effort to go back and reach out? Do I know how to make peace with small gestures? Am I willing to ask myself in every situation: “What would Jesus do in my place?” If we can do this, if we really put it into practice, we will bring Christ’s peace to our everyday lives. Then we will be peacemakers and channels of

God's peace.¹

And lastly, remember that God has a plan for your life. He has a definite mission in mind for you that is unique to you, and you alone. Each of you has a vocation or "calling" – a path that God wants you to follow so that you will live a happy life. Most of you he will call, like your parents, to the holy sacrament of Marriage. But some of you, I am certain, he is calling to the priesthood or the consecrated life as a brother or sister.

If you hear this call don't be afraid. What a beautiful gift it is to experience God's call to be a priest or a Religious.

Remember that it is always God who makes the first move. He created us; he chose us to be his sons and daughters and he has a plan. He is the one who calls, for we cannot call ourselves. I only encourage you to pay attention to his voice, and then to respond as Mary did God called her, much to her surprise, to be the Mother of Jesus: "I am the servant of the Lord. Yes. I will do what you want."

Listen carefully, then, to Jesus' voice in your heart. Even if it is just a gentle whisper, do not ignore it; but welcome it and nourish it. And then, when you are old enough, act on it. Too much delay and putting it off is never a good idea!

¹ Francis, Meeting with Altar Servers (31 July 2018).

Conclusion

Friendship, Prayer, Peace, Vocation. These are four words I hope you will remember.

Dear servers, thank you for serving with such care and joy at the Lord's altar. Be proud of what you do – and do it well, because you are doing it for the Lord. He who comes to us now as we continue our celebration of the Eucharist.

_ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver