

Tridentine Community News

November 11, 2018 – Resumed Fifth Sunday After Epiphany

How a Layman Can Serve as Subdeacon in the EF

One of the most frequent questions this writer has heard over the past year has been whether it is permissible for a layman to serve as Subdeacon for a Solemn High Mass in the Extraordinary Form. Some Latin Mass communities have been using laymen in this capacity; the question is whether this is actually permitted. The answer is yes, under specific circumstances.

It is worth mentioning that the laws governing this matter are not all that easy to find. One really has to be a scholar of Tridentine Mass rubrics to find the answer. The entity governing such matters, the Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei in Rome, does a poor job of publicizing its rulings. Ideally they would post their various decisions on a web site, but alas that has not yet happened.

The 2009 edition of Fortescue's *Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described* states that originally, the only men who could serve as Subdeacon were those who had been ordained to any of the minor orders and those who had received tonsure, the ceremonial cutting of hair at the commitment to religious life.



Pope Paul VI's 1972 Apostolic Letter *Ministeria Quaedam* abolished the minor orders (porter, lector, exorcist, and acolyte) and eliminated the major order of subdeacon, leaving only deacon and priest. (Note the labeling of steps to the priesthood at Chicago's Mundelein

Seminary Chapel: minor orders on the front sanctuary steps, major orders on the back High Altar steps. [photo by Fr. Bryan Jerabek]) The document replaced them with "ministries", of which Acolyte is one. The PCED's ruling clarifies the matter and establishes that the Ordinary Form "installation" (as opposed to ordination) to the ministry of Acolyte is the pertinent modern day equivalent to the former minor orders. Note that the minor orders continue to be provided to members of the religious communities which follow the Extraordinary Form ordination track, including the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter and the Institute of Christ the King.

In 1993, the PCED issued Protocol 24/92, a ruling stating the following: "In celebrating the Solemn High Mass according to the 1962 Roman Missal it is necessary to follow the rubrics of that missal. In the past the employment of a person who had received the ministry of acolyte acting as subdeacon was tolerated. In that case the acolyte acting as subdeacon did not wear the maniple. Thus usage may continue to be tolerated."

In response to the PCED's ruling, a few dioceses began to install laymen as Acolytes. The Diocese of Lincoln, Nebraska and the U.S. [Anglican] Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter stand out: both install large numbers of men as Acolytes, the latter specifically to assist at Solemn High Masses.

The challenge nowadays is that many if not most bishops do not understand the PCED's rulings and have little if any interest in taking what they see as unusual steps to assist Latin Mass communities. Archbishop Allen Vigneron in Detroit and Bishop Earl Boyea in Lansing, Michigan, for example, have not installed any laypeople to the Ministry of Acolyte, despite having been made aware of the PCED's stance on the matter.

Over the years, a few laymen who serve at metro Detroit and Windsor Tridentine Mass sites have expressed an interest in being installed as Acolytes, in large part because of the difficulty of securing priests and deacons on Sundays. The frequency of Solemn High Masses has in large part been limited by the availability of suitably ordained clergy.

Today we have some good news to report: Over the last few months, one of those laymen, James Murphy, one of our roving altar servers based at Windsor's St. Benedict Tridentine Community, successfully petitioned Diocese of London, Ontario Bishop Ronald Fabbro to be installed as an Acolyte. His Excellency granted permission for this to

take place and delegated the ceremony to his Auxiliary Bishop, Joseph Dabrowski. On Thursday, November 8, 2018 Bishop Dabrowski installed James to the Ministry of Acolyte at the chancery chapel in London.

As a result, James becomes the first layman in metro Detroit and Windsor to be authorized to serve as Subdeacon. As a layman, he will not wear maniple or biretta. Our congratulations to him, especially for patiently and persistently going through the steps Rome has decreed are necessary to undertake this ministry.

Tridentine Masses This Coming Week

Tue. 11/13 7:00 PM: Low Mass at *Holy Name of Mary, Windsor* (St. Didacus, Confessor)

Sat. 11/17 8:30 AM: Low Mass at *Miles Christi* (St. Gregory the Wonderworker, Bishop & Confessor)

