

Why Do Catholic Priests Wear Vestments (Colorful Robes)?



Vestments are a sacramental. That means they are set apart and blessed by the Church to excite good thoughts and to increase devotion in those who see and those who use them. They are the uniform of the priest when he is “on duty,” while he is exercising the functions of his ministry and using the sacred powers which he received at his ordination. The clothing that is worn by the priest while he is not “on duty,” it is not called vestments. The Mass vestments were originally ordinary garments of the ancient Roman world. While the fashions of dressing have changed with the passing centuries, the priest continued to wear at the altar the ancient Roman costume of his predecessors.

There is a process all priests follow when getting dressed prior to celebrating mass.

- 1) When vesting for the liturgy the priest first washes his hands, praying:**
“Give virtue to my hands, O Lord, that being cleansed from all stain
I might serve you with purity of mind and body.”



2) ALB - The alb is the long white, robe-like vestment worn by all clerics at liturgical celebrations (celebrant, concelebrant, deacon or acolyte). White is the symbol of purity and the term alb, from the Latin word *albe*, means white. It can be traced to the Roman alb worn under a cloak or tunic.

The priest prays: “Purify me, O Lord, and cleanse my heart, that being made white in the Blood of the Lamb, I may come to eternal joy.”

3) Girdle - The girdle which is a symbol of chastity, ties the alb at the waist.

The priest prays: “Gird me, O Lord, with the girdle of purity, and extinguish in me all evil desires, that the virtue of chastity may abide in me.”



4) Stole - The stole symbolizes the clerical office, immortality, and the Yoke of Christ.

This, matching the liturgical color, is a long, scarf-like vestment worn over the alb and under the chasuble. This is presented at Ordination when made a Deacon and worn diagonally across the body. When ordained Priest, the stole is ceremonially untied and from then on worn hanging equally down the chest.

A Bishop wears the stole in the same way because he never ceases to be a priest. The origins of the stole are the towels that slaves wore around their necks. When

bending down, or kneeling, they would use the towel to wipe the feet of guests or their masters. Jesus wore a towel around his waist and washed the feet of the disciples at the Last Supper. The stole is seen as a symbol that the cleric is to be a servant (slave) to the people of God.

When putting on the stole, the priest kisses the Cross on the stole and prays: "Restore unto me, O Lord, the stole of immortality, which was lost through the guilt of our first parents: and, although I am unworthy to approach Your sacred Mysteries, nevertheless grant unto me eternal joy."



5) Chasuble - The chasuble symbolizes charity and the Yoke of Christ.

This matches the liturgical color and is a long, often ornate, sleeveless poncho-like garment worn by priests and bishops over the alb and stole during the sacrifice of the Mass.

As he puts on the chasuble he prays: "O Lord, who said: My yoke is easy and my burden light: grant that I may bear it well and follow after you with thanksgiving. Amen."

6) Cope - Worn by the Priest or Deacon for non-Eucharistic Liturgy the cope is a large mantle worn by clerics at some liturgical celebrations, but not at the Mass. It can be worn, for example, during processions and benedictions of the Blessed Sacrament, at funerals and at weddings. It matches the color of the liturgy and is worn in the same way as the chasuble.

7) Cassock – The black cassock worn by most Priests in many different situations is of no special significance other than as a means of identification. Part of its significance is that it covers up and, to some extent, hides the individualism of the Priest and proclaims to all that he is a Priest of the Church.

Liturgical Colors

The use of colors to differentiate liturgical seasons became a common practice in the Western church in about the fourth century. At first usage varied but by the Twelfth Century Pope Innocent III had put in place a system using five colors.

Violet, White, Black, Red and Green.

The Lutheran and Anglican churches that emerged from the Reformation retained the traditional colors. To these have been added Blue and Gold, colors that were used in some Western rites before the Twelfth Century.

Gold or White

These are the festival colors and denote happy times. They are used at Christmas and Easter, on many of the greatest saint's days (except when red is considered more suitable) and on all occasions of great significance to individual Christian people such as Baptism, Confirmation, Weddings or Ordination.

Red

Red is used in three main ways. First, to denote a saint who has died for the faith (the color of blood spilt in the name of Christ). Second, red is associated with the Holy Spirit (i.e. Whitsun), the Disciples' description of the flames of Pentecost must undoubtedly be the origin of this (we still think of fire engines as red). Third, red is used in association with the spilling of Jesus' own blood for us and is often now the color used on Good Friday. In some churches, like our own, rich red vestments are used for Martyrs and the Holy Spirit and plain red for Good Friday and Passiontide.

Purple and Black

Purple is used as a somber color at times of reflection and preparation for great festivals. Advent (before Christmas) and Lent (before Easter) are two such times.

Purple is also the color associated most with funerals and prayer for the departed. It is often used in preference to black, although we still have black vestments and do use them on occasions.

Sackcloth

The Salisbury tradition of using sackcloth during Lent is followed in our church. The symbolism goes right back to the Jewish custom of putting on sackcloth and pouring ashes over your head as a sign of contrition. Lent is a time when we are encouraged to acknowledge our sins and repent.

Green

It is tempting to say that green is used when no other color is appropriate. It has a significance of its own in terms of growth, and seems eminently suitable for occasions like Harvest Thanksgiving but it is used on other occasions in the year when one of the other colors is inappropriate.

Colors and the seasons of the church year



The Season of Advent

Advent is a season of spiritual preparation for the celebration of the birth and reign of Christ. Expectation rather than personal penitence is the central theme of the season. Advent is a preparation for, rather than a celebration of, Christmas. Royal Purple symbolizing the sovereignty of Christ is normally the liturgical color but Blue is also occasionally used to distinguish the season from Lent. As the color of the sky, Blue symbolizes Christ the source of day. As the color honoring Mary, Blue also reminds us that during Advent the church waits with Mary for the birth of Jesus.

Christmas and the Christmas Season

The readings for Christmas and the following twelve days, culminating in Epiphany, invite the church to reflect on the Incarnation of God as a human being. God enters human history and identifies fully with the human condition. The traditional colors of the season are White or Gold, symbolizing joy in the light of day.

The Season after Epiphany

The season following Epiphany continues the theme established on Epiphany Day, the spread of the Good News of Christ to all nations on earth. The scripture readings explore the mission of the church in the world. The theme of this season together with the sequence of readings from the Gospel continues in the season after Pentecost, and so both seasons together can be called the “Time of the Church.” The traditional liturgical color is Green, the color of growth.

The Season of Lent

The traditions of Lent are derived from the time when the church prepared candidates, or “catechumens,” for their baptism into the Body of Christ. It eventually became a season of preparation for the whole congregation. Self-examination, study, fasting, prayer and works of love are disciplines historically associated with Lent. Conversion – literally, the “turning around” is the theme of Lent. The forty days of Lent correspond to the forty-day temptation of Jesus in the wilderness and the forty-year journey of Israel from slavery to a new community. On Ash Wednesday, ashes are placed on the foreheads of the congregation as a symbol that we have come from dust and one day will return to dust. With this reminder of life’s fragility begins a spiritual quest that continues until the Easter Vigil, when the entire congregation joins in a reaffirmation of their baptismal vows. Most of this time of preparation is symbolized by the color Violet, though the season is bracketed by the mourning Black of Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. As an alternative to Violet, some churches have begun to use brown, beige or grey a reminder of “sackcloth” to reflect the season’s mood of penitence and simplicity.

Holy Week

During Holy Week, the congregation follows the footsteps of Jesus from his entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, through the Last Supper of Maundy Thursday to his death on the Cross on Good Friday. Red, the color of blood and therefore of martyrs, is the traditional color for Palm or Passion Sunday and the next three days of Holy Week. On Maundy Thursday, White or Gold symbolizes the church's rejoicing in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. But at the end of the Maundy Thursday celebration, the mood changes abruptly. All decorations are removed and the Holy Table is stripped bare. The church becomes as empty as a tomb. On Good Friday, either Black or Red is customary, although the use of no color at all is also appropriate. The Red of Holy Week is sometimes a deeper red than the brighter scarlet color associated with Pentecost

Easter and Pentecost

Jesus has been raised from the dead. The heavenly messenger invites the mourners to see the empty tomb and then go and tell the disciples that the Crucified One is alive! The season from Easter to Pentecost is also called the Great Fifty Days, a tradition inspired by the Jewish season of fifty days between Passover and Shavuot – the feast celebrating the giving of the Torah to Moses. The liturgical color for this season is celebratory White or Gold. When the season ends on Whit Sunday White is replaced with Red. This color reminds the congregation of fire – the symbol of the Holy Spirit. The first Sunday after Pentecost celebrates the Trinity, and the color again is White or Gold.

The Season after Pentecost

This longest season of the liturgical year is a continuation of the "Time of the Church" that began on the Sunday after Epiphany. It explores the mission of the church and uses the color of Green, symbolizing growth.

Other Holy Days and observances

Pentecostal Red is also the traditional color for Reformation (Martin Luther) Day on October 31st. White or Gold is the color for All Saints Day on November 1st and is also an alternative to Green on the last Sunday after Pentecost. During other observances, the tradition is to use Red on commemorations of martyrs and other saints. As the color of the Holy Spirit, it is appropriate for ordinations.

The colors of Christmas, White or Gold, are also customary on other feast days that celebrate the Incarnation or Resurrection of Christ (Holy Name, Baptism, Presentation, Annunciation, Visitation, Ascension and Transfiguration).

Black for centuries was the traditional color for funerals, but in the past fifty years many liturgical churches have preferred to use White or Gold—the colors of Easter and therefore of the hope of the Resurrection.

*Much Information was found at: http://www.holytrinityamblecote.org.uk/colours_&_vestments.htm
and also at <http://www.whycatholicsdothat.com>*