

**Achievement Course: Altar Service**  
**Recommended Ages: Dependent upon each parish**  
**Approximate Completion Time Frame: 6-9 months**



Saint Tarcisus, pray for us!

Saint Tarcisus was a 12 year old acolyte, possibly of the pope, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century during a harsh Roman persecution. Mass was secretly held in the catacombs for fear of imprisonment. A deacon would make a clandestine visit to the prisons and bring the Holy Eucharist to the Christian prisoners. One day, there was no deacon, and as an acolyte, Saint Tarcisus desired to bring the Holy Eucharist to them. Although when he was en route, a group of unruly non-Christian children wanted to know what he was doing. He did not want to play their games and they began to taunt him. They discovered he was hiding something, and began to beat him to see what he was hiding. Christians came to his aid, but his injuries were too severe. He died protecting our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in the Holy Eucharist.

During the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Pope Saint Damascus wrote a poem about this “boy-martyr of the Eucharist.” He compared him to the first Christian martyr, Saint Stephen, who was stoned to death for the love of Christ. The story of Saint Tarcisus was heroically depicted in Cardinal Wiseman’s novel, *Fabiola*. He is the patron saint of altar servers and encourages great devotion, attention to detail, carrying oneself with dignity, and the courageous protection of the Holy Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Word.

**Objective:** To learn how to serve the Rite of Mass used at your home parish.

Per the Handbook for Altar Servers by the Archconfraternity of Saint Stephen, “To serve at the altar, as to sing in the choir, is next to the priesthood the highest privilege which a human can enjoy. He represents the faithful and takes a most intimate part in the rich treasures of the church’s liturgy and ceremonial. Those sacred ceremonies should be carried out with devotion, dignity, and attention to detail.”

**Choose and complete the requirements for your parish’s rite ONLY.**

1. Roman Extraordinary Form – Romanum (E) Requirements
  - a. Low Mass
    - i. Learn to serve Low Mass as the only Acolyte
    - ii. Serve as the only Acolyte at a Low Mass
    - iii. Learn to serve Low Mass as A1 or A2
  - b. Missa Cantata (Sung Mass – One Priest)
    - i. Learn to serve a sung Mass as A1
    - ii. Learn to serve a sung Mass as A2
    - iii. Serve a sung Mass as A1 or A2
    - iv. Learn to serve a sung Mass as Thurifer
  - c. Solemn Mass (Sung Mass – Priest, Deacon, Subdeacon)
    - i. For one of the positions under section b above, learn how to serve that position at a Solemn Mass.
  - d. Benediction
    - i. Learn and serve once at Benediction.
  - e. Special Ceremonies
    - i. Learn to serve and serve at least two of the following ceremonies:
      1. Blessing of Candles at Candlemas
      2. Blessing and Distribution of Ashes at Ash Wednesday
      3. Blessing, Distribution, and Procession of Palms on Palm Sunday
      4. Tenebrae of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, or Holy Saturday
      5. Mandatum Mass on Maundy Thursday
      6. Mass of the Presanctified on Good Friday
      7. Lesser Litanies of the Rogation Days
      8. Greater Litany of Saint Mark’s Day
2. Byzantine Divine Liturgy Requirements
  - a. Learn and serve the following positions at least twice each at the Divine Liturgy
    - i. Candle
    - ii. Ripidion
    - iii. Cross
    - iv. Incense
  - b. Serve at a Divine Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts.
  - c. Learn and serve at least four of the following ceremonies:
    - i. Moleben
    - ii. Paraklesis
    - iii. Theophany
    - iv. Akathistos
    - v. All Souls Saturday
    - vi. Great and Holy Thursday

- vii. Great and Holy Friday
  - viii. Great and Holy Saturday
  - ix. Pascha
  - x. Bright Monday
  - xi. Ascension
  - xii. Pentecost
  - xiii. Transfiguration
  - xiv. Dormition
  - xv. Exultation of the Cross
  - xvi. Nativity
- d. Describe and name the priest's and altar servers' vestments.
  - e. Give a tour of the church describing the different names and meanings of the major parts and icons.
  - f. Learn the seasonal greetings and responses.
  - g. Name the 12 major feasts and describe the biblical stories that they celebrate.
  - h. Explain the significance of icons, how they are made, and their included symbolism, such as the meaning of colors and facial features.
  - i. Cantor, lector, lead, or assist the leader in chanting or singing at any liturgical service.
3. Ordinary Form (Novus Ordo) Requirements
- a. Sunday Mass
    - i. Learn to serve as Crucifer (or equivalent). Serve three times.
    - ii. Learn to serve as a Candle Bearer (or equivalent). Serve three times.
  - b. Identifying Liturgical Objects
    - i. Correctly name and explain the use and symbolism of these 25 liturgical object and vestments:
      - 1. Chalice
      - 2. Paten
      - 3. Corporal
      - 4. Purificator
      - 5. Pix
      - 6. Sanctuary Lamp
      - 7. Altar Cloth
      - 8. Candles (in general)
      - 9. Crucifix
      - 10. Tabernacle
      - 11. Water
      - 12. Wine
      - 13. Stole
      - 14. Chasuble
      - 15. Ciborium
      - 16. Cruet
      - 17. Finger Towel
      - 18. Monstrance
      - 19. Lectionary
      - 20. Roman Missal
      - 21. Cinture
      - 22. Alb

23. Cassock
  24. Pall
  25. Lectern or Pulpit or Ambo
- ii. Explain how the church changes during different liturgical seasons.
- c. Special Ceremonies (Serve seven times total for any of the following special ceremonies)
    - i. Stations of the Cross
    - ii. The Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday
    - iii. The Celebration of the Lord's Passion of Good Friday
    - iv. The Celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation
    - v. Holy Hour
    - vi. The Easter Vigil
    - vii. A Funeral Mass
    - viii. Benediction
    - ix. Wedding
    - x. Baptism
    - xi. Ash Wednesday

#### References

Taken from "The One Year Book of Saints" by Reverend Clifford Stevens, published by Our Sunday Visitor Books, Huntington, IN 46750.

Bernard Cardinal Griffen, Archbishop of Westminster, Preface to Handbook for Altar Servers by the Archconfraternity of Saint Stephen.