

The Mass Vestments

The Mass vestments were originally ordinary garments of the ancient Roman world. Although the fashions of dress changed with the passing centuries, the priest continued to wear at the altar the ancient Roman costume of his predecessors.

Thus, the priest, vested for mass, is a wonderful witness to the historical continuity of the Catholic Church with the primitive Church of Rome, founded by the Prince of the Apostles. In the order in which the priest puts them on, the Mass vestments are:

The Alb:

A long, white linen garment reaching to the feet. The Alb symbolizes the innocence and purity that should adorn the soul of the priest who ascends the altar.

The Cincture:

The cord used as a belt to gird the Alb. It symbolizes the virtues of chastity and continence required of the priest.

The Stole:

Roman magistrates wore a long scarf when engaged in their official duties, just as our judges wear a court gown. Whenever a priest celebrates Mass or administers the Sacraments, he wears the Stole as a sign that he is occupied with an official priestly duty. When placing the Stole about his neck, in vesting for Mass, the priest begs God to give him on the last day the 'garment of immortality' that was forfeited by our sinful first parents.

The Chasuble:

The outer vestment put on over the others. Originally this was a very full garment, shaped like a bell and reaching almost to the feet all the way round. During a bad artistic period, the 18th and 19th century especially, the Chasuble suffered much from a process of shortening and stiffening. Today there is a return to the historical and beautiful, ample, nicely draping Chasubles. The Chasuble symbolizes the virtue of charity, and the yoke of unselfish service for the Lord, which the priest assumes at ordination.

The Dalmatic:

An outer, sleeved tunic that came to Rome from Dalmatia, whence its name. It is worn in place of the chasuble, by the deacon and sub deacon during Solemn Mass. It symbolizes the joy and happiness that are the fruit of dedication to God.