



The Society of St Tarcisius

A SODALITY FOR TRADITIONAL
ALTAR SERVERS

Fidelis usque ad mortem

No ministry, except that of those who by ordination are set apart for the service of the Altar, deserves greater thought and consideration than the duty entrusted to those laymen and youths who have the office of assisting the priests of God in the discharge of their sacred functions. Willingly you have come forward to take up this exalted office, to enjoy the privilege which Holy Mother Church grants you of wearing the sacred dress of a cleric, namely, cassock and cotta, and of performing duties in the Sanctuary for which originally men were set apart from others by tonsure and minor orders. Your first impulse is a generous one. You value the high privilege and you feel a secret joy at giving yourself to it. You are going to be often in a holy place, performing sacred duties, and you will appear very publicly in the sight of all the congregation. To fulfil such an office worthily you will need to be holy in your own life, and edifying always in the sight of other people. Your great help will be Prayer, Holy Mass and the Sacraments.

Francis, Cardinal Bourne, *The Altar Server's Handbook* (1907)



St Tarcisius
Martyr, c. Third Century
Memorial - 15 August

Introduction

The Society of St Tarcisius is a Guild or Sodality for servers of the Traditional Latin Mass. It was inaugurated on 15th May 2010, and is an association of Christ's faithful (cf. Canon 215), affiliated with the Latin Mass Society of England and Wales.

Serving at the altar is a great privilege, and is not to be undertaken lightly. It should be carried out devoutly and with precision, giving a good example to others of reverence for the Blessed Sacrament. Altar servers must ensure that they are fervent in their devotion to Our Lord, and exact in carrying out their duties on the altar.

St Tarcisius was a 12 year-old Roman acolyte, who was martyred for his defence of the Blessed Sacrament, in one of the fierce persecutions of the third century.

He was carrying the Blessed Sacrament to those in prison, and was killed on the way while preventing its profanation. He is one of the patron saints of altar servers, and his example reminds us of the reverence that we must have for the Body of Christ when we are serving on the Sanctuary.

The feast day of St Tarcisius is 15th August, which is also the Feast of the Assumption of Our Blessed Lady.

Objects of the Society

1. To promote the dignified, devout, and accurate service of the altar in the traditional Roman rites, including through the training of members.
2. To promote the spiritual formation of altar servers, in the spirit of St Tarcisius, who accepted death rather than allow the profanation of the Most Holy Sacrament.
3. To maintain a list of those who are willing and able to serve at the traditional liturgy, and provide this information to those organizing traditional events, where needed

Four Principles of the Society

1. Fidelis usque ad mortem

Apocalypse 2:10: *Esto fidelis usque ad mortem et dabo tibi coronam vitae.*

Be thou faithful until death: and I will give thee the crown of life.

This phrase from the Apocalypse of St John (The Book of Revelation) describes the perseverance of the Christian soul. It also well describes the martyrdom of our Patron, St Tarcisus, who was martyred for his fidelity to the Blessed Sacrament.

Members of the Sodality pledge fidelity even unto death—to the fulness of the Catholic faith, to the traditions and disciplines which are necessary to its maintenance, to the honour of the Body and Blood of Our Lord really present in the Blessed Sacrament.



2. Pax Christi exultet in cordibus vestris

Colossians 3:15: *Pax Christi exultet in cordibus vestris.*

Let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts.

The service of a Christian is not an unfruitful external service, but is a service of the heart. The rites and rituals of the Catholic Church are not mere pomp and ceremony, but bring about what they signify—the Grace of God, transforming us into the image of His Son.

Members of the Sodality commit themselves not only to external precision in their service of the altar, but to maintaining a spiritual life that corresponds to what they are doing: to be servants of the altar not only for the time when they are on the sanctuary, but throughout their lives.

3. Super pauca fidelis

St. Matthew 25:21: *Euge serve bone, et fidelis: quia super pauca fuisti fidelis, super multa te constituam.*

Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

Every action of a Christian, no matter how small, can avail to salvation provided it is undertaken for the love of Christ. Every word and action in the liturgy has importance, because through faithfulness to these small things we serve God's greater glory.

Members of the Sodality commit to a high standard of service on the altar: to achieving a precise knowledge of the words and the rubrics, and carrying them out correctly and reverently.

4. Servite Dominum in Laetitia

Psalm 99:1: Jubilate Domino omnis terra, servite Domino in laetitia, introite in conspectu ejus in exultatione.

Sing joyfully to God, all the earth: serve ye the Lord with gladness. Come in before his presence with exceeding great joy.

The service of a Christian is a service of joy and gladness, for we serve not an angry deity but our loving Father. Fervent devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and to the Immaculate Mother of Our Lord, expresses our Joy in His service.

Psalm 42:4: Introibo ad altare Dei, ad Deum qui laetificat iuventutem meam.

I will go up to the altar of God, to the God who gives joy to my youth.

These opening words of the Traditional Mass indicate that we should serve the Lord in a spirit of love and joy. Serving Our Lord on His altar, being present at the Eternal Sacrifice, receiving the communion of His True Body and Blood, are matters for joyfulness.

Philippians 4:4: Gaudete in Domino semper iterum dico Gaudete. Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.

Ranks and Test Requirements

Tests are administered by the National Coordinator, the Chaplain, one of the Society's Grand MCs, or a person deputed by them.

Candidates receive their medals with the appropriate colour at a ceremony of enrolment, and each member's name, rank, and date of admission is noted in the Society's records. Promotion to a higher rank can also take place at an enrolment ceremony. Medals and cords are supplied by the Society; replacements can be purchased by members from the Latin Mass Society.

Terminology

‘Low Mass’: *Missa Privata*, without singing or incense; one or two acolytes.

‘Sung Mass’: *Missa Cantata*, with singing; with or without incense; without deacon and subdeacon;

MC, Thurifer, two acolytes, possibly boat-bearer and torchbearers. (American usage: ‘High Mass’)

‘High Mass’: *Missa Solemnis*, with priest, deacon, and subdeacon: servers as for *Missa Cantata*. (American usage: ‘Solemn High Mass’.)

‘Pontifical’ and ‘Prelatial’ (as in Low Mass, High Mass, Vespers, etc.): celebrated by a bishop or Cardinal respectively.

Supporter

A supporter does not feel called to serve at the Altar, but nonetheless wishes to further the aims and objectives of the Society of Saint Tarcisius. Supporters may wish to provide material support to the Society, or even more importantly pray for the spiritual and temporal needs of the Society.

Postulant

The Postulant wishes to join the Society, but does not yet meet the requirements for Junior Acolyte, undertaking training with a view to taking the necessary test. A probation period of six months is recommended, although this can be shortened or lengthened depending upon the individual Postulant’s ability and commitment.

Junior Acolyte: medal with green cord

Test: to become a Junior Acolyte, a server must demonstrate a thorough familiarity with the responses at Low Mass and the following roles:



- (a) serving Low Mass by himself, or as 1st or 2nd Acolyte;
- (b) Incense-boat bearer at Sung and High Mass; and (c) Torchbearer at Sung and High Mass.

Senior Acolyte: medal with pale blue cord

Test: to become a Senior Acolyte, a server must demonstrate a thorough familiarity with the following roles:

- (a) 1st and 2nd Acolyte at Sung and High Mass
- (b) Crossbearer, and Thurifer at Sung and High Mass, including Requiem Mass
- (c) Assistant server at Benediction

Junior Master of Ceremonies: medal with royal blue cord

Test: to become a Junior Master of Ceremonies, a server must demonstrate a thorough familiarity with the following roles:

- (a) MC at Sung Mass, including Requiems;
- (b) All the serving positions at Benediction;
- (c) A deeper knowledge of the roles he has already learned, include some less common variations on them, including variations for Passiontide, the Low Mass of Requiem, and Ember Days.

He will have grown in virtue and have demonstrated his self-discipline, reliability and punctuality, and his intelligence and reverence while serving.

He will in addition focus on developing his character, and establishing a devotional practice to the Sacred Heart, the Immaculate Heart, or a suitable alternative.

In addition to passing the test, a prospective Junior Master of Ceremonies must present a letter of recommendation from a priest.

Senior Master of Ceremonies: medal with silver cord

Test: to become a Senior Master of Ceremonies, a server must demonstrate a thorough familiarity with the following roles:

- (a) MC at High Mass;

- (b) All roles at Pontifical Low Mass and at Mass in the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament Exposed;
- (c) All roles at Vespers and Pontifical Vespers;
- (d) Assisting at the Rite of Marriage, of Baptism, at Confirmation, and at Burials;
- (d) Acolyte and thurifer at Holy Week services.

In addition he will be involved in the training and development of the lower ranks, and will develop his love and appreciation of the spirituality of the Mass through spiritual

Grand Master of Ceremonies: medal with gold cord

Test: to become a Grand Master of Ceremonies, a server must demonstrate a thorough familiarity with the following roles:

- (a) MC at the Pontifical and Prelatial High Mass;
- (b) MC at the services of Holy Week;
- (c) MC at the Rite of Marriage, of Baptism, at Confirmation, and at Burials;
- (d) All roles at Compline and other Offices when said publicly.

In addition, the Grand MC will be an authority on the spirituality of the Mass, and well established in his spiritual life.

He will be involved in the development of the lower ranks by teaching and assessing Junior MCs for progression to the rank of Senior MC.



Prayer of the Society of St Tarcisius

(for private use)

Lord Jesus, I profoundly adore Thee, really present in the Most Holy Sacrament of the altar. I love Thee, and desire to love and serve Thee more perfectly. I do reparation to Thy Sacred Heart, for the negligence and indifference which is often shown to Thy True Body and Blood.

I thank Thee for the great privilege of serving Thee on the Sanctuary, and resolve for the future to serve Thee with greater fervour, devotion, attention, and exactness. O Lord, let my example when on the Sanctuary never be an occasion for scandal to my neighbour, but rather encourage others to greater reverence. May I always act as I believe, and show by my example my belief in the great truths of our Faith.

Most Blessed Mary, Mother of our Lord, obtain for me by thy prayers the grace to serve thy Son with reverence and devotion.

Saint Tarcisius, pray for me, that I may follow thy example by defending the honour of the Blessed Sacrament all the days of my life and even unto death.



Bishop Michael Campbell in Westminster Cathedral at the LMS AGM Mass 2019; taken by John Aron. Other photographs in this booklet were taken by Joseph Shaw,