by Rev. David E. Rosage Letters to an altar Boy

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Letters to An Altar Boy



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REV. DAVID E. ROSAGE

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Letters to An Altar Boy

God's Minutemen

DEAR JIMMY,

I am writing these letters to you, Jimmy, but I wish to address them to all the Jimmys, the Joes, the Bills, the Toms, and the whole host of other boys like yourself who have joined the ranks of the altar boys.

I like to think of you as God's Minutemen. In the early days of our country, the Minutemen were a group of men who volunteered to defend and protect our nation. They were constantly on duty and were prepared to go into action on a minute's notice. That is how they received their name.

I salute you as God's Minutemen. I think you are the greatest bunch of boys alive. Some of you may be little fellows, but you are the biggest men in your parish. Serving Mass is one of the most important jobs in any parish. To serve Mass is a great privilege and honor, but at the same time it does demand sacrifice. Being "on call for duty" at all times isn't always easy. Nor is it exactly pleasant to get up in time to serve an early Mass, especially on cold winter mornings. As God's Minutemen you are always prepared for duty as altar boys, nor do you count the cost.

I am writing these letters to you, Jimmy, and to all God's Minutemen with the hope that in them you may

find some encouragement to be loyal and faithful in your service of our Lord. As I write to you from time to time, I hope to drop a hint occasionally which will help you to improve your serving.

It is my hope and prayer that in these letters you will find some inspiration to continue as a loyal Knight in the service of your Master. You are His boy in a very special way.

The Gospel tells us that our Lord loved His first altar boy very much. St. John, the first altar boy, was very close to our Lord at the Last Supper when the first Mass was offered. In fact, St. John was so near the great High Priest that Sacred Scripture tells us he leaned on our Lord's breast. St. John was the only Apostle who remained until the end of the first Sacrifice. Yes, he stood beneath the cross until our Lord died.

Our Lord's first altar boy was called the "disciple whom Jesus loved." Surely, the same can be said today of our Lord's altar boys — "the boys whom Jesus loves."

The Blessed Virgin Mary had a deep love for St. John, too. He was devoted to her and cared for her after our Lord's death and Ascension into heaven. Mary loved St. John because he was so faithful in the service of her divine Son. Our Blessed Lady also has a special place in her heart for all altar boys because of their generosity and devotion to her Son.

My hat is off to you, Jimmy, and to all God's Minutemen! Our Lord loves you; your parents are proud of you; your little brothers think you are tops;

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your sisters think you are princes; your pastors list you as All-American in their scorebooks.

God bless each one of you – His Minutemen! May you always be loyal to your divine Captain.

You Do Rate

DEAR JIMMY,

Do you know that as an altar boy you are one of the most important people in the whole parish? At Mass you rate higher than the janitor and the ushers. Yes, you are even more important than the choir.

"Why is my role so important?" you ask. Let us go way back in history to the time of St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary to find the answer. Our Lord wanted to come into the world. God sent the Angel Gabriel to ask Mary if she would become the Mother of Jesus. That was the way Jesus wished to come into the world.

Mary paused, and all heaven waited eagerly. Then, humbly, Mary said "Yes" in the most beautiful way anyone could have said it: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word." Because Mary gave her consent, our Lord was able to come into the world and do so much for us.

Today, our Lord wants to come to live with us. Each day He wants to come into our hearts in Holy Communion so that He may help us to be good; so that He may help us to live and work as we should. Now, the way our Lord comes into the world today is through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. At each Mass our Lord is born again just as truly as He was born at Bethlehem. Therefore, the Mass is the most important action which can take place in the whole world.

The Mass is much more important than the baseball game which will decide the world series. It is far more important than the touchdown which may determine who will win the conference pennant.

You are so important, Jimmy, because you are helping the priest to say Mass; to bring our Lord into the world each morning. You are the priest's first assistant. In fact, the Church considers you so important that the law of the Church requires a priest to have an altar boy before he may say Mass. A priest must have special reason or permission to say Mass without a server. That's how important the Church considers you.

Whether you realize it or not, you are more important at Mass than your own dear mother, or Sister Superior at school, or a princess in a royal castle, or the mother of a bishop, or even the sister of the Holy Father.

Why? Well, you see, Jimmy, these good and holy women may answer the prayers of the priest at Mass. They may even tinkle the bell at the Sanctus and the Consecration. And they must do this sometimes when you oversleep, but they are never permitted to leave their pews and come into the sanctuary while Mass is being offered. They may not walk up the altar steps during the Mass to change the Missal from the Epistle to the Gospel side of the altar. Neither may they bring the water and wine up to the priest. That privilege is reserved only for altar boys. Yes, you are the only person who may come so close to our Lord during Mass.

So, you see, Jimmy, as an altar boy you are very important. More important, I'll bet, than you thought. Our Lord depends on you to help Him come into the world. Isn't that strange and wonderful? Our Lord, who is the Master of heaven and earth, asks you to help Him come down among men.

Each day when you serve Mass, you can look up at the Sacred Host at the Elevation and smile as you say to our Lord: "Jesus, I have helped You in my own small way to come into the world this morning. I hope my serving Holy Mass has pleased You. Thank You, Jesus, for giving me this wonderful privilege."

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A Saint All Your Own

DEAR JIMMY,

Did you know that the Church has named a very special patron saint for altar boys? He is St. John Berchmans. He is a perfect model for altar boys because his life is so much like the life of any altar boy.

St. John Berchmans lived many years ago in the town of Diest in the very heart of Belgium. His father was a master boot and shoe maker. The sign of a "Great Moon" hung over the doorway of his shop. The shoemaker and his beautiful young wife lived in the apartment above the shop. It was here that John and his four brothers and sisters were born.

As a young boy, John often played around his father's shop. He liked to stand under the "Great Moon" and watch the soldiers marching by.

Then came that great morning when John first went to school. There was one thing about his first days at school which made a lasting impression on young John. He loved the sight of his older schoolmates walking like robed princes through the sanctuary of the parish church while serving Mass. He longed for the day when he too would be able to serve Mass. It wasn't long before he tried to recite the Latin responses of an altar boy. One morning not many months later, the hearts of his good father and holy mother were very happy and very proud. John, their eldest son, was serving his first Mass. It wasn't long before John won the reputation of being the best altar boy in town.

Very early in the morning John would run toward St. Sulpice Church to serve not one Mass, but as many as he could. Each morning as the storekeepers and businessmen opened up their shops, they would look for the little fellow coming down the street.

There were many Masses to be served in John's parish church. John had already learned to love and reverence the altar and the tabernacle where our Lord dwells. One morning as he was kneeling before the altar, he promised our Lord that he was going to serve as many Masses as he could and that he would serve them just as well as he could.

When evening came to the little town, John's mother would close the shutters of the shop. She would gather her children around her and tell them the marvelous stories about Jesus and His beautiful Mother.

John learned to love our Blessed Lady at a very early age. At his mother's knee he learned to pray to her each day. He asked Mary to help him to be good and holy so that some day he could sit beside her in heaven, just as he could sit beside his mother here on earth.

When he was only five years old, little John went with his family on a pilgrimage to the famous shrine of our Lady at Montaigu not far from his home. On this occasion he offered his whole life to the Blessed Virgin.

Years later when he was in college, John consecrated himself to our Blessed Mother. He wanted to dedicate his life to God as generously as Mary had done. He made an Act of Consecration to Mary which he repeated every day of his life. Even today when anyone joins the Sodality of Our Lady, he still makes this same Act of Consecration written by St. John Berchmans.

While John was in college, he decided to become a Jesuit priest. He began his long years of study and preparation. But God decided otherwise. When John had finished part of his studies, he became very ill. He was put to bed and after eight short days his beautiful soul went to heaven to be welcomed by our Lord and His Blessed Mother.

Even though John lived only 22 years, he became a very great saint. He used to say, "If I do not become a saint when I am young, I shall never become one." That is why he did everything as perfectly as he could. He often said he wanted to do everything as well as Mary did.

We celebrate the feast of St. John Berchmans, the patron saint of altar boys, on November 26.

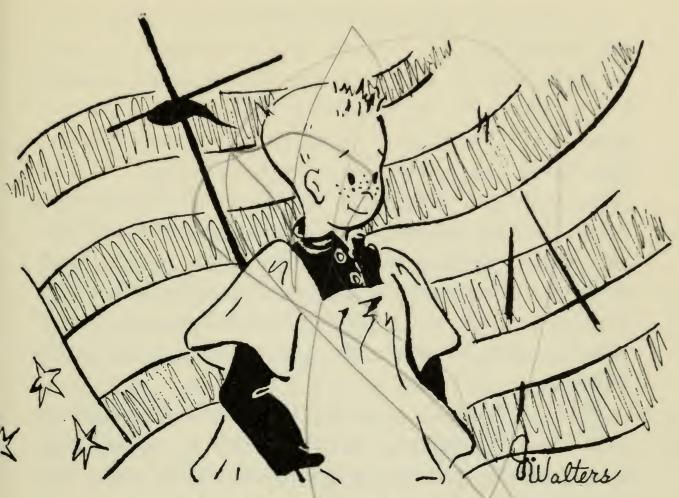
Jimmy, often say a little prayer to St. John Berchmans asking him to help you become a good altar boy. Above all, ask him to help you become a saint. Another All-American

DEAR JIMMY,

We have All-American football players and basketball players, All-American executives, and what have you. Why should we not have All-American altar boys? In my opinion they rate as high as any of our other All-Americans.

To be an All-American football player or a first-class basketball player, or to get into the major leagues, requires a lot of hard work, long hours of practice, and years of training. Besides, a player must have special qualifications to begin with. Now what qualifications must a boy have to become an All-American altar boy? The qualities which people like to see in an ideal altar boy are many. I think they could be listed under four headings.

1. An altar boy should be a boy of *real character*, pure in heart and mind. Yes, a boy who serves Mass must have a good character. He must be better than the average boy. Two qualities should distinguish an altar boy from most other boys. He should have a special love for our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. He should show this love by receiving our Lord frequently in Holy Communion and also by visiting Him often in the Tabernacle.



All-American Altar Boy

2. An All-American altar boy should be *intelligent*. Not only must he learn the Latin prayers, but he must also pronounce the words correctly and with devotion. Likewise, he must be able to recite the Mass prayers from memory. A certain amount of intelligence is required to know what to do around the altar, to time actions correctly, and to move about with grace and with a certain dignity. An altar boy must also know what to do under certain circumstances which may arise. For example, if the priest should need something at the altar, the server should know where to find it and bring it without causing confusion. 3. To be an All-American altar boy, a server must be *trustworthy and reliable*. When scheduled to serve an early Mass, he must not only be there, but he must be on time. On certain mornings it may require a great deal of sacrifice to keep an appointment, but a good altar boy makes the sacrifice willingly. "Be on time" is an ironclad rule for an All-American altar boy.

4. The last qualification is very important. When performing his duties as an altar boy, a young man must be *neat and clean in appearance*. Never should he venture into the sanctuary with dirty shoes. His hands and face must be clean. His hair must be combed and brushed.

Jimmy, these are some of the standards which an altar boy must meet. Any altar boy who has these qualifications is listed as an All-American altar boy in my books.

Check yourself carefully and see how well you measure up to these standards. What is your batting average, Jimmy? Are you likely to be voted an All-American altar boy?

Don't Say It

DEAR JIMMY,

The other day I had a little experience which really did my heart a lot of good. As I was going around the back of the church on my way to the garage, I heard the closing sentences of an argument.

Joe Brown was telling two of his companions what he thought about the language they were using. Joe is quite a boy — one of the biggest and the strongest we have among the Knights of the Altar.

"It isn't at all smart, and it's not right for an altar boy to be saying such things," Joe was telling his companions.

His two playmates looked Joe over to see whether or not he was serious. But the look on his face soon convinced them, and they didn't have much to say in reply, for all the boys respect Joe very much.

It seems, Jimmy, that almost every boy runs into a period in his life when he thinks he is showing his manhood by using all sorts of bad language. Boys often think it is smart to use some kind of profanity, and even filthy and impure language.

A boy's companions are often responsible for this bad habit. First of all, these companions use foul words and expressions all the time themselves. Second, if one of their friends does not use such language, they make fun of him and ridicule him. Of course, no boy wants his friends and his gang to laugh at him, nor does he want to be called a "sissy" because he doesn't talk as tough as the rest of the gang.

Did any of your companions ever laugh at you, Jimmy, for not using strong language? If they did, I am proud of you, and I know our Lord is pleased with you too.

If a man or a boy "cusses" it proves he does not know enough decent words to express himself correctly. It also proves that he wants to be tough and "show off." Really, he has nothing to show off about, so he thinks his rough talk will show the world how tough he can be. Isn't he ridiculous?

As an altar boy, I hope you will never use bad language. You have the privilege of answering the beautiful prayers which the priest uses at Mass. Isn't there something wrong with our thinking if we praise our Lord at one moment of the day and then insult Him a little later with foul talk?

There is still another very important reason why as an altar boy you should never acquire bad habits of speech. Our Lord uses your tongue very frequently as a cushion on which to rest when He comes into your soul in Holy Communion. The offense would be the more serious if you were to use that same tongue to speak disrespectfully of our Lord, or to abuse His Holy Name.

People expect their altar boys to be just about per-

fect. They expect them to be different from anyone else in the neighborhood. They are very disappointed when they hear an altar boy using the rough and tough language of the boy in the street who has never had the opportunity and the privilege of serving Mass.

Jimmy, I should like to suggest a special crusade for all altar boys. Our Lord is insulted millions of times throughout the course of a single day by the profanity and filthy language which men use. Since altar boys are the special friends of our Lord, His Knights of the Altar, they are the very ones who should make some reparation to our Lord for all these insults.

I should like to suggest that every altar boy say a little ejaculation quietly to himself every time he hears anyone use the wrong type of language. "Praised be Jesus Christ!" would be a very fitting suggestion. A boy can say this ejaculation whenever he hears profanity on the bus, on the street, at his work, or in play. No one will know he is making atonement for the sins of men. Did I say no one? I mean no one except our Lord.

Will you be a Crusader, Jimmy? Perhaps you can even be a captain in this crusade by suggesting the practice to your friends and other altar boys.

Madonna of the Altar Boys

DEAR JIMMY,

I'll bet your mother is really proud of you because you are an altar boy. Yes, you make her very happy when she sees you assisting the priest at Holy Mass. You have won a warmer spot in your mother's heart because you are an altar boy. Deep down in your heart, Jimmy, I'll bet you are happy, too, because you are making your mother so happy and so proud of you.

If your earthly mother loves you because you are an altar boy, your Mother in heaven loves you even more. Our Lady has a very special liking for altar boys.

Do you know why our Blessed Mother loves you so much? First of all, she loves anyone who loves her divine Son. And you need not tell me that every altar boy does love our Lord. Of course he does. That is why he is willing to get up early in the morning to serve Mass, and why he doesn't mind learning the Latin responses, and why he comes so faithfully to servers' meetings, and makes the many other sacrifices which an altar boy must make.

There is another reason why our Lady loves her altar boys. Remember the three important people who were present when the first Holy Sacrifice was offered on Calvary. They were our Lord, the

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Madonna of the Altar Boys



great High Priest; our Blessed Lady, and St. John. The Mass is the continuation of that Sacrifice on Calvary. As an altar boy you are another St. John. St. John stood by to help Jesus offer His first Mass. He was there to stand by the side of the Blessed Virgin, too.

Each morning you have the opportunity of standing beside Mary at the altar to help the priest offer Holy Mass. The Mass brings many souls to heaven, and that pleases Mary very much. That is why she loves you, Jimmy Altar Boy.

St. John was a pure, holy young man. He loved our Lord and His Blessed Mother dearly, and they loved him in return. He is called "the disciple whom Jesus loved." If you are like St. John, your guardian angel can say the same thing about you, "the altar boy whom Jesus and Mary love."

Our Lady wants all her altar boys to be good and holy like St. John. She watches over them and protects them from all harm. Our Lady stands at their side to help them overcome temptation. When there is danger that an altar boy may commit a sin, she sends a whole squadron of angels after him to help him fight the temptation.

Jimmy, can't you just see our Blessed Mother standing at the throne of her divine Son asking for something which you need or which you want? Our Lord seems to be listening patiently to His Mother, and then she tells Him that, besides the other reasons why she is asking this favor for you, there is the fact that you are an altar boy.

Is there any wonder that there are so many onetime altar boys who are canonized saints today? Who of us can ever tell how much our Lady helped them to become saints?

There are many people who claim the special protection of Mary, but none of them have a greater right to claim her aid than her own special boys — her altar boys. By every right, she is the Madonna of the Altar Boys.

What's Your Idea?

DEAR JIMMY,

In many parts of our country there is a custom of tipping the altar boys who serve Holy Mass on special occasions. Usually, the altar boys who serve a nuptial Mass will receive a little tip from the newly married couple. In other places an offering is given to the altar boys who serve a funeral Mass and go to the cemetery.

Sometimes a visiting priest will give his server a quarter or more to show how much he appreciates having someone serve his Holy Mass.

These customs are all good. Tips are a small reward for the extra work and the little sacrifices which servers make in helping at these special functions.

Not long ago, I heard of a plan which a group of altar boys themselves decided on at one of the meetings of the Knights of the Altar. These Knights made this agreement among themselves. They are going to give every tip they earn to the Sister in charge of the Knights. At the end of the year they will divide the money. One half of the total amount will be used for a picnic for all the altar boys. The remaining half will be sent to the missions.

What do you think of that idea, Jimmy? I think it one of the finest ideas I have heard about in a long time. It shows that these boys are unselfish. It proves, too, that they really know the value of the Holy Sacrifice, because they want to help missionaries all over the world to bring the Mass and our Catholic religion to more and more people. I know that God is going to bless them abundantly for their generosity to Him.

A few years ago when I was traveling, I heard of another custom in the parish where I stopped to say Holy Mass one morning. In this case the boys were doing even more. They were giving *all* their tips to the pastor. The pastor has established a seminary burse with the money. A seminary burse is an amount of money set aside to educate a young man for the priesthood.

Well, Jimmy, I often give an altar boy a quarter when I say Mass in a strange church. When I heard of the generosity of the altar boys of this particular parish, I gave my server a dollar next morning.

When I talked to the pastor afterward, I learned that the altar boys were going to have a picnic anyway at the end of the year. The pastor himself was going to give them a real treat. I also learned from this good, holy priest that five boys from his parish were already in the seminary preparing for the priesthood. That was God's way of showing how pleased He was with the boys' unselfishness.

I have also heard of other groups of altar boys sponsoring paper drives, collecting scrap metal, and conducting other campaigns in order to raise money for worth-while projects around the church. In one place the Knights of the Altar bought a much-needed new ciborium; in another they purchased some new cassocks.

Of course, Jimmy, these things are not exactly essential requirements for being a good acolyte, but they do show a wonderfully generous spirit among altar boys and prove their love for the Church. Practices such as I have mentioned are but some of the reasons why God is so pleased with His altar boys and why they are His very special friends.

Let Your Light Shine

DEAR JIMMY,

The example given by an altar boy is always much more powerful than that of an ordinary boy. His influence for good is always very great whether he is at the altar or not.

The privilege of serving Mass is so sacred and so unique that everyone expects an altar boy to be just about perfect. In fact, people think he should be almost a living angel because he comes so close to God.

Here is a little story of how one faithful altar boy proved himself a real "good angel" and of what he did to bring at least one person into the Church.

This altar boy's name was Mike. (He might be embarrassed if I told you his last name.) Mike was assigned to serve the 6:30 Mass each morning. He was very dependable. Mike never missed and he was never late.

On his way to church Mike often met a young man who was going to work about the same time. They would greet each other rather casually and keep on going. In fact, they did not even know each other's name.

One night it had snowed very hard. By the next

morning the snow was really deep. Six o'clock was too early for people to have their sidewalks shoveled, but a few early risers had made a narrow path in the snow.

This morning Mike and the young man met "head on" in the narrow path. After the usual exchange of greetings, the young man said, "Perhaps, it's none of my business, but I've often wondered why you are up so early in the morning and where you are going each day at this time. I see that not even this deep snow stopped you this morning. Do you carry papers or something so early?"

"No, I'm not a paper carrier," answered Mike, "but I serve the 6:30 Mass each morning."

The young man looked at Mike with a puzzled expression. He did not know what it meant to serve Mass, nor had he ever heard of anyone going to church so early in the morning, especially on weekdays.

Mike found it hard to explain and besides he was in a hurry to get to church on time. He merely said, "Why don't you come with me some morning and see for yourself what I do?"

The young man agreed to do so. A few mornings later he went to Mass with Mike. Much impressed, he watched every movement as Mike, dressed in cassock and surplice, assisted the priest at Mass.

Some time later the young man met the priest. They became quite friendly. In less than a year's time the young man himself became a Catholic.

This is just one instance of what an altar boy can

do by his good example. It's a true story, too, because I am the priest whom Mike came to serve each morning, and I am the priest who baptized Fred and received him into the Church. Oh, I forgot to tell you, Fred was the young man's name.

I know it is hard to get up early in the morning. I know from experience, for I have been doing it a good many years. I realize, too, that it is often hard to be on our best behavior, especially when we feel like kicking the stars right out of the sky. But, on the other hand, only God and our guardian angels will know all the good we have done by our example. Even our Lord said, "Let your light shine before men, in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

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You're a Big Wheel

DEAR JIMMY,

We often refer to the "big wheels" of a business or of an organization. They are the men on the top who get all the credit and all the praise for the success of the business organization. However, in every business and organization there are some "little wheels" who do a lot of the work and never receive any publicity. People don't even know they exist. They may be the secretaries or the stock boys or a whole host of other people who make a business a success or keep an organization running smoothly.

In every machine there are big wheels and little wheels. The big wheels cannot run smoothly unless the little wheels are operating correctly.

The same is true of altar boys. The altar boys themselves are the "big wheels." People see you gloriously arrayed in your cassocks and surplices. They hear you answer the Latin prayers with the ease of a scholar. They see you moving about the altar with grace and dignity, doing everything precisely at the proper moment. Yes, you are a big wheel, and no one in the parish will deny it.

Behind the big wheels there must be little wheels which no one sees. Oftentimes people do not realize that they even exist. You know who the little wheels are, Jimmy. They are the Sisters, the priests, and the other people who have spent long hours in training you to serve Mass.

They taught you the Latin prayers and practiced the correct pronunciation of those prayers with you until they heard you struggling with them in their sleep.

They rehearsed with you until you knew every proper movement. They tried to teach you how to walk with dignity when your feet just would not match. Over and over again they showed you how to pick up a cruet or Communion plate without dropping it.

How many times some of the other little wheels spent hours washing and ironing that immaculate surplice which makes you look like a prince. Of course, they often had to give it a special washing because you did not see a hook on which to hang it when you finished serving Mass and thought the floor would be a safe place from which it could not fall.

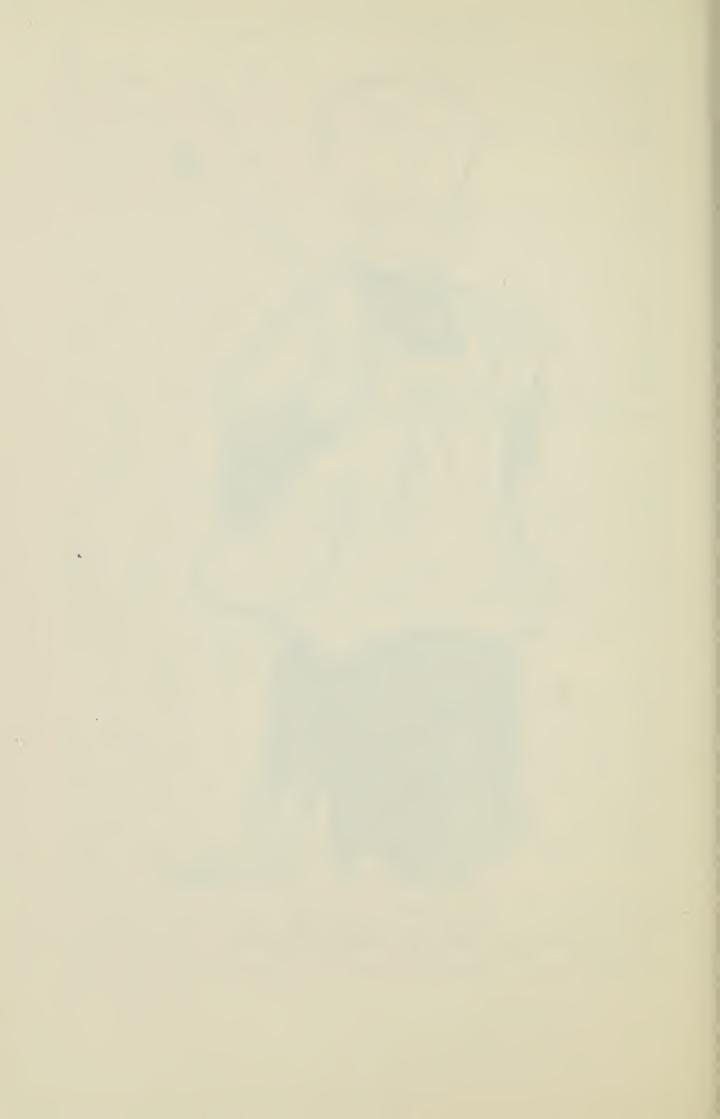
And there are those other little wheels who are still praying that someone may invent a thread which will sew buttons on so tightly that no altar boy can rip them off when he is in a hurry to get out of his cassock. How often the little wheels follow you after Mass with a needle and thread to mend those robes which are the insignia of your office.

As an altar boy you are considered a *big wheel* in your parish, and rightly so. You are important, and you are performing a very important duty. But I

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You're a Big Wheel



hope you will never forget, Jimmy, that there can be no big wheels unless the little wheels are running smoothly too.

When you serve your next Mass, Jimmy, offer it for the little wheels. They are really wonderful people.

Your Soul Has Windows

DEAR JIMMY,

Do you know that the eyes of an altar boy are extremely important? It makes no difference whether his eyes are brown or blue or gray or even green. It's not a question of color at all.

A person's eyes can do strange things. The eyes are called the windows of the soul. You know from your own experience that your mother can always tell when you have done something wrong. Your eyes tell her.

Likewise, you can tell if a person is interested in what you are saying or doing simply by watching his eyes. If you ask your dad's permission to do something, you know his answer even before he speaks. You can read the expression in his eyes. An altar boy's eyes can teach many valuable lessons to others. If a server keeps his eyes reverently cast down as he walks into the sanctuary, and moves around the altar, he is showing everyone that he is serious and conscientious about serving Holy Mass. He is telling the whole congregation that he knows he is very close to our Lord.

On the other hand, if an altar boy "gawks around"

in church, he is showing the people that he is thoughtless and does not care much about the great privilege of being close to Jesus in the tabernacle.

Jimmy, have you ever met "Ronald the Rubberneck"? He is the altar boy who can twist his neck all the way around and see everything and everybody in church. Ronald is the fellow who doesn't miss a thing — except what is going on at the altar. He thinks he must investigate every noise. He must see everyone coming into or leaving the church.

"Ronald the Rubberneck" is so busy with everyone else in church that he misses half the responses at Mass. His head is always turned away from the altar when he should be ringing the bell.

"Ronald the Rubberneck" is really a menace. He distracts the priest at the most important function of the day. He annoys the whole congregation.

As an altar boy, Jimmy, you must always guard your eyes. The general rule for you to follow is never to let your eyes look beyond the Communion rail. Keep your eyes cast down to such an extent that you never see anyone in church outside the sanctuary.

I know that at times the temptation to look around can be very great. When some baby cries, or someone drops something with a resounding noise, our first impulse is to turn around and see what is happening. At times, too, we wonder if Aunt Mary or Uncle Bill might be in church and we want so very much to see.

At first you will find it hard to control yourself, Jimmy, but you can train yourself gradually to keep your eyes where they belong – inside the Communion rail.

If you were to ask me when you should be particularly careful, I would say while you are helping the priest to distribute Holy Communion. While the altar boy is carrying the Communion plate, he should never look up and down the rail. This habit distracts the people at a very sacred part of the Mass while they are concentrating on what is taking place. It also shows little respect for our Lord who is just a few inches away from you. If you have eyes only for your King, Jimmy, you can help others keep their eyes fixed on Him too. Doesn't that make you realize how important your eyes are?

Pope of the Altar Boys

DEAR JIMMY,

You've heard it said, I'm sure, that we are living in a terrible age. In some ways, that is true. War, for example, is a terrible thing. But I rather think we are living in a wonderful age. One of my reasons for thinking so, is that there are so many wonderful people living today. One of them is our Holy Father. Pope Pius XII is known all over the world as a great man. He is known as an outstanding statesman, as a leader in bringing peace to the world, and also as a very saintly man. There is still another title for the Holy Father, however, which should interest you very much. Pope Pius XII has been called the "Pope of the Altar Boys."

Of course, Pope Pius XII, like almost every other Pope, served Mass when he was a boy. All the churches in Europe, and many in this country, have big registers in which the altar boys sign their names after each Mass they serve. This is done to keep an accurate record of the number of times an altar boy serves Mass.

In the sacristy of the church called *Chiesa Nuova di* Santa Maria in Rome, there is an old register containing hundreds of signatures of Mass servers. If you look back in the pages of the 1800's, you will find the name of Eugenio Pacelli autographed many times. This is not, however, the real reason why Pope Pius XII is called the "Pope of the Altar Boys."

In 1947 Pope Pius XII wrote a long letter to all the bishops and priests throughout the world. This letter, which is called *Mediator Dei* from its Latin title, deals with the correct and worthy performance of divine worship, especially the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Holy Father discussed many different points in this letter, but he stresses in a special way the altar boys.

Just think of it, Jimmy, the Holy Father, who is so busy trying to direct the Church all over the world, takes time out to think about the altar boys. And he says some very important things about them, too.

The Pope tells us that altar boys should be selected with great care. They should be the finest boys of the parish, for only boys of good character should be chosen. The Holy Father says also that only those boys who are generous in giving up their time and who are willing to serve at any time without counting the cost should be selected as altar boys.

However, the "Pope of the Altar Boys" makes this point clear. It makes no difference whether a boy is rich or poor; whether he is white or black or any other color. The important thing is that boys who are good at heart, willing to learn, and well behaved should be those chosen to serve. That's what the Holy Father has to say about altar boys.

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He then gives his reason for saying that altar boys should be the best boys of the parish: "From them come the priests of tomorrow."

It is because of this part of the great encyclical letter, *Mediator Dei*, that Pope Pius XII is known as the "Pope of the Altar Boys." He wants all altar boys to serve perfectly and exactly. He wants you, Jimmy, to behave well not only in the sanctuary, but also in the sacristy, on the streets, and wherever else you may be.

The Holy Father was once a boy very much the same as boys today. He knows how careless and carefree boys can be, because he makes a confession of his own days as an altar boy. Sometimes when he had finished serving, he would unbutton his cassock in a hurry, throw it in a heap on a table, and rush out to play.

How do we know this? Well, one day after he was made a cardinal, the Holy Father visited his old parish church. When he came into the sacristy, he looked over to a table in the corner and smiled as he said: "That's where I used to toss my surplice and cassock in a heap. . . ."

Perhaps, Jimmy, I should not tell you these things about the Pope. But he realizes now how unbecoming such behavior was, and that is why he writes to you and tells you how correct and perfect a server should be.

Don't you think that after writing this letter in

1947, Pope Pius XII has every right to be called the "Pope of the Altar Boys"? Aren't you glad that you are a server at this time when our gloriously reigning Holy Father is the special "Pope of the Altar Boys"?

Three Brushes and a Fourth

DEAR JIMMY,

You have often heard it said: "Clothes make the man." This old saying may not be absolutely correct, but it does have a lot of truth in it. Everyone takes pride in being well groomed and properly dressed, whatever the occasion may be. We want to look our very best when we are going to meet some important person or when we are going to a very nice place. Our outward appearance really counts.

This is especially true of an altar boy. An altar boy actually meets the most important Person that lived, our blessed Lord and Saviour Himself.

In order to present a really first-rate appearance, an altar boy must use four brushes. The first of these brushes is the *scrub brush*. Cleanliness is next to Godliness. There is hardly an excuse for a server's not being neat and clean around the altar.

As a rule a boy's face shows signs of having seen some water even though he appears in the sacristy rather early in the morning. But what about those hands and fingernails? Sure, I know, Jimmy, how dirty your hands get when you fix your bicycle or play ball or do a thousand other things boys must do. No matter what the commercials say, the best grade of soap is powerless against some of the grime a fellow gets into. That's why a scrub brush is absolutely necessary to clean your hands and fingernails.

Around the altar a server touches many sacred things like the cruets, the Communion plate, the chalice veil, and the missal. That is why his hands should be immaculately clean. Don't you think so, too, Jimmy?

The second *must* on an altar boy's list is a *shoe*brush. The sanctuary is a very holy place. A server treads in the very house of God and around the altar which is our Lord's throne. Do you remember that story from your Bible History of how God called to Moses from the burning bush? Before Moses could come close to God in the burning bush, God told him to take off his shoes because the ground on which he stood was holy.

Sometimes I think God used this incident to warn altar boys that their shoes must be clean and polished before they come into the sanctuary. The ground around the burning bush was holy because God was present in that bush. Surely, then, the sanctuary is holy, because our Lord is living there.

I am sure you will agree with me when I list a *hairbrush* as a third *must* for an altar boy. A man's character is sometimes judged by the attention he gives his hair. Of course, that is, if a man has any hair left. Do you know the first thing a girl notices about a boy? His hair, naturally.

Some boys can simply comb their hair and it looks



The Three Brushes



quite presentable, but most boys I know need a good hairbrush. How often we see a tousled mop of red or brown or black bristles, whose unruliness shows that the boy has lost the battle with his hair. A brush usually gets better results than a comb alone, especially if your hair just won't stay in place.

We don't want altar boys to be "sissies." Nobody likes "sissies." But if a boy is clean and has his shoes shined and his hair combed — I mean brushed — that is no sign he is a sissy. It proves he is a gentleman, the type of boy we want around the altar.

And, lastly, there is the fourth brush. Yes, you've guessed it. It's the toothbrush. There is no need to say much about its importance, is there? Clean, sparkling teeth not only make your smile doubly attractive, but, like your entire outward appearance, they can help to reflect a clean mind and soul. Besides, clean teeth are a *must* when you receive Holy Communion.

So remember, Jimmy, hairbrush – shoebrush – scrub brush – and their little brother – toothbrush.

Stouthearted Men

DEAR JIMMY,

I asked a boy one time if he were an altar boy. "None of that sissy stuff for me, Father," came his answer.

Altar boys, sissies! Softies! Pantywaists! Who said so?

Altar boys are among the strongest, toughest, bravest, most courageous boys alive. And I am waiting for someone to prove that I am wrong.

Would a sissy or a softy get up morning after morning in the wee hours and race off in the snow or rain in the early morning darkness to serve Mass? I want to meet the pantywaist who will give up a ball game or a fishing trip to attend a servers' meeting or to practice on Saturday, or who will stay after school in the evening to learn the prayers for Mass.

Mention some of the famous people living today. You'd be surprised to find that they were, and some of them still are, altar boys.

Do you know that Bing Crosby not only trained his four sons to serve Mass, but that he, himself, serves Mass whenever he has the chance? The "hemen" of Notre Dame, such as Terry Brennan, are often seen serving Mass.

Some time ago I not only found my two altar "boys"

in the parish where I was giving a retreat were taller than I, but that one was a prosecuting attorney and the other a successful businessman. On this day their sons sat in the pews because it was the "men's Sunday" to serve Mass.

During the war a colonel served my early Mass whenever my regular altar boy did not appear. I am far from celebrating my silver jubilee in the priesthood, but doctors, lawyers, plumbers, ball players, policemen, and even a bishop have served my Mass.

A story came out of China recently that when a priest was arrested while saying Mass, his server was severely whipped and beaten. Nevertheless, the altar boy clung to the cassock of the priest when the soldiers were dragging him away to prison. Finally, to get rid of the boy, the soldiers shot him. "Pantywaist," you say!

Did you also know that there are parishes in which the "kids" do not serve. The altar boys are grown up men. There is a group of these men in San Diego, California, and another in Cleveland, Ohio.

I know of another parish in which it is the custom for the father to serve Mass with his son on the day the son serves his first Mass.

No, serving is not for sissies, softies, and pantywaists. One of these may get into the ranks of the altar boys, but he doesn't last long. The going is too tough and too steady for weaklings.

An altar boy can look back into history, and he can look about him in the world today and find that

there are real genuine "he-men" serving Mass every chance they get.

You may be getting taller and maybe the sleeves of your cassock do not come down to your wrists anymore, but never give up serving Mass. It is not for weaklings; it is for "men." Apostle Jimmy

DEAR JIMMY,

Didn't you say the other day that you wish you might have been an apostle? Well, you really are one, Jimmy; or at least you can be one. An altar boy can do more good by his example than any other boy of his age. That is why everything he does is so important.

Many altar boys have formed the habit of receiving Holy Communion every day they serve Mass. They have adopted the motto: "No Mass without Holy Communion." That is a marvelous and beautiful practice – a practice that makes you an apostle of good example.

Of course you know, Jimmy, why you should go to Holy Communion very often, and if possible each day. You have learned all these reasons in your catechism. You want our Lord to live in your soul. You need His help to do your duty each day. When our Lord is present in your heart, you can overcome temptation more easily. By receiving Holy Communion, you can store up for yourself a greater reward in heaven.

These are all very good reasons. But don't you think there are even more perfect reasons why every altar boy should go to Holy Communion often? Every time you receive Holy Communion, Jimmy, you bring our Lord into your own little world. He comes into your heart. You can take our Lord back into your family, into your school, and among all those boys with whom you play each day.

Our Lord wants to come down and live among us. He does that now when people receive Him in Holy Communion.

Think of the millions of times that our Lord would be able to come into the world if every altar boy received Holy Communion each day he served Mass. Think of the millions of homes He could come into.

An altar boy can give a splendid example to all the people by receiving Holy Communion. According to the Church's custom, the altar boy is the first person to receive Holy Communion after the priest. He also receives Holy Communion kneeling on the top step of the altar. This means that everyone can see the server going to Holy Communion.

If the people see the server going to Holy Communion at Mass, they will be encouraged to do the same. If the server is reverent and devout in going to Holy Communion, he can bring others very much closer to our blessed Lord.

Unfortunately, there are so many people who cannot be bothered with going to Holy Communion frequently. They do not fully appreciate what is taking place when they receive our Lord into their hearts. Otherwise, they would go more frequently.

I think so often of Mary and Joseph coming into

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Bethlehem on the first Christmas Eve. When St. Joseph asked for a place to stay so that Jesus could come into the world, people merely told him they had no room. They could not be bothered.

The same is true today, Jimmy. People cannot be bothered. That is why our Lord is very pleased when His altar boys receive Him in Holy Communion. They are helping Him come into the world as He did on the first Christmas night.

Each day when Mass is said, the church becomes another Bethlehem. The altar boys are like the shepherds who were the first ones to adore Him.

By going to Holy Communion an altar boy can help tremendously to save our wicked world. Holy Communion means our Lord is coming into the world, and where He goes, wickedness and sin will be banished.

Do your share to hasten the day when all altar boys will take as their motto: "No Mass without Holy Communion."

On the Spot

DEAR JIMMY,

You are in a class all by yourself. You are different from other boys. People are proud of you because you are *their* altar boy. Each member of the parish everyone in your neighborhood — claims you as his very own because you represent him at the altar of the Lord. Everyone is happy to know you. Everyone is really proud of you.

Isn't it a grand feeling to know that people regard you so highly? But you are really on the spot, Jimmy. Everyone respects you so highly because you serve Mass. The privilege of serving Mass is so sacred and so unique that people want you to be perfect. Everyone thinks you should be an angel.

People forget that every son of Adam has his faults, and that no human being is perfect. Yes, you know, Jimmy, priests and even bishops go to confession.

Somehow everyone wants an altar boy to be perfect. When another boy gets into mischief people say it is only natural for a boy to get into trouble once in a while. But when an altar boy does something wrong, they are shocked.

If you get into a fight on the way home from school,

if you use bad language or disobey Sister or your parents, people are really shocked and disappointed in you. You are an altar boy; you should be different from the average boy.

See what I mean, Jimmy, you are really on the spot. The eyes of the world are on you at all times. There are days when you feel like kicking the stars right out of the sky; but you can't because you are an altar boy.

Most of the altar boys I know just about measure up to this standard. Our altar boys are the cream of the boys in our parishes. For the most part they are good. They are the boys who go to Holy Communion more frequently than the other boys. They are the ones who are most willing to help around the church and the school when there is a job to be done. When the priest needs help around the rectory or church, he usually calls on his altar boys because he knows they are generous and willing to do anything. In short they are "tops."

Now, don't misunderstand me. I do not say that altar boys are perfect, but in their own way, they are "out of this world." You may not be an angel, Jimmy, but I'll bet you are far above the ordinary boy. You want to lead a good, holy, and pure life, because you live so close to our Lord in the sanctuary.

I like to think of the cassock of an altar boy as a special shield — his bulletproof garment — against all the temptations of the devil. It is the mantle which protects him from much evil. His surplice is a constant reminder to him that his soul should be as clean and fresh as its starched whiteness.

Who will deny that an altar boy's surplice will be his ticket for a special nonstop flight to heaven when he dies? There are many altar boys among the list of canonized saints. I am sure that they would never be there if they had not first been good altar boys.

"You may not be an angel," but the angels are watching over you very closely. Don't let them down. You are the people's altar boy. Don't disappoint them.

A Note From Dad

DEAR SON,

Words just can't tell you how proud I am of you. This morning I enjoyed one of the greatest thrills of my lifetime. As I knelt in the pew and saw you, my eldest son, serve your first Mass, I thought I was standing on the threshold of heaven. You were perfect, Son. For several weeks you told me you were scared, but you had no reason to be so. You moved so correctly through the entire ceremony that it seemed as though you had been serving all your life.

Each one of your responses was "just right." You prayed the *Confiteor* with such fervor and devotion, that I am sure the sins of all the people for whom you were reciting it were pardoned immediately because God was so pleased with His altar boy.

When I was your age, Son, I earned the questionable distinction of being the world's worst altar boy. I do not think that my title has been seriously challenged since. I was notorious for ringing the bell with a violent jerk of my arm when it was not supposed to be rung at all. Invariably, I would kneel during the Gospel, or answer Sed libera nos a malo when I should have said Et cum spiritu tuo — not to mention the other blunders I made regularly. Your performance this morning was superb. You were so much better than I had ever dared hope you would be at your age. You received this wonderful training from the Sisters. It is the type of training which only the devoted Sisters can give. I hope you will thank Sister Mary for making this morning possible for both of us. God bless her for it.

Son, you looked like a prince in your cassock and surplice. Your hands and face were spotless. Your hair was neatly combed. All this you owe to your lovely mother. As you know, she taught you how to groom yourself properly. She taught you good manners when I had no time to be bothered. Why don't you hug her, Son, and tell her how happy you are that God gave you such a wonderful mother.

Jimmy, if I were to be honored by our city as its leading citizen, or hailed as a great hero for something I had done, I would not be half so proud as I was this morning when I knelt and watched you serve your first Mass.

I would not even want to be elected governor of our state; all I want is to be the father of my son, the altar boy. I would rather kneel in the pews and watch you serve Mass, than sit beside the President of the United States at lunch.

To have knelt at the railing and received Holy Communion from the priest for whom my son was holding the paten was the greatest honor of my lifetime. There is nothing I would exchange for a half hour at Mass served by my son. Son, I can think of only one honor which would be greater. There is only one thing in this whole wide world which could make me happier than I was this morning. Your old dad would be the happiest man alive if some day he could kneel in the pews and see his son offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Your dad would certainly enjoy a foretaste of heaven if he could kneel at the Communion rail to receive the Master of heaven and earth from the hands of his priestly son. What a heaven on earth! Please God that day may come, Son.

Your proud Dad

Harry All-Hands

DEAR JIMMY,

Would you like to preach the sermon at Mass next Sunday? I can see you grin with that "what do you mean?" expression. You say you have never preached a sermon, Jimmy? Oh, yes, you have preached many a sermon, and in church, too.

No, I'm not joking. I'm really serious. You can preach a sermon to the entire congregation and your sermon can be even more eloquent than mine. You can preach a powerful sermon without saying a single word.

Yes, you guessed it. Your good example in the sanctuary next Sunday can be and will be a splendid sermon.

Your manner of walking to the altar, your conduct during Mass, the way you guard your eyes, and the many actions you perform while serving Mass will teach the people a valuable lesson on the sacredness of the most important action in their whole lives – the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

All these points I just mentioned are important, Jimmy, but I should like especially to say a few things about keeping your hands in the right position during Mass. The way you keep your hands folded as you



"Would you like to preach a sermon at Mass next Sunday?"



walk before the priest to the altar and all the time you are at the altar until you return to the sacristy will do much to inspire the people who cannot help noticing you.

I know what a nuisance a boy's hands can be. I am sure that trousers are made with two pockets instead of one just so boys can have a place for their hands. At Mass, however, hands are to be folded when they are not performing some necessary action. And there is only one correct way of folding your hands. Join your palms together and let your fingers extend straight out, crossing the right thumb over the left thumb.

Of course, it may seem odd at first, but try it for awhile. Very soon it will become second nature for you. Practice it regularly as you serve Mass.

Folding your hands correctly may seem like a small item, Jimmy, but it is very important. Folded hands are a help to prayer and a natural gesture at prayer. Folded hands help us to avoid distractions. Folding hands is like getting down on our knees. Isn't it much easier to pray when we are on our knees? The same is true of folding our hands.

Keeping your hands properly folded during the whole of Mass will help you to avoid so many distracting gestures and movements. Some altar boys can be a pest to the whole congregation. I know a server whom I should like to rename "Harry All-Hands." Harry never knows what to do with his hands. He tinkles the bell at least three times before he is supposed to ring it simply because he doesn't know what to do with his hands.

Harry must also handle the prayer cards or books which may be on the steps of the altar. To make sure that his actions do not go unnoticed, he always drops a book or some other object with a resounding bang. If he can't find anything else to do, he tries to see how loud he can snap his fingers or crack his knuckles.

Even if we have only one "Harry All-Hands" in a parish, it is one too many. Let your motto be, Jimmy, "Keep those hands folded correctly."

Jhank You

DEAR JIMMY,

Have you ever done a little favor for someone and had that person stop to thank you for your kindness? Didn't it make you feel good? You felt like doing everything possible for such a person. You appreciate so much his thoughtfulness that you want to give or do more for him.

The same is true of our Lord. He wants all of us to thank Him for all that He has done for us. It would never be necessary for us to ask God for anything if we always truly thanked Him for the many favors that He has given us. We know that our Lord wants to be thanked. Remember the ten lepers whom our Lord cured? Only one returned to thank Him for the miracle. Our Lord was disappointed, for He said: "Were not ten made clean? Where are the nine?"

Do you want to help thank our Lord, Jimmy? I know that altar boys could do very much in getting others to thank our Lord for one of the greatest favors He is giving us. I mean the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Unfortunately, the custom of making a thanksgiving after Mass is dying out. So few people think of staying in church for even a moment after Mass to thank our Lord for giving them the privilege of offering another Mass and even for having just received Him in Holy Communion.

Would you be willing, Jimmy, to help revive this beautiful custom? You don't have to go about campaigning. All that you must do is to show by your example that you appreciate the Mass by making a little thanksgiving.

I was saying Mass in a large church in the Midwest one time. After Mass the four altar boys who served my Mass disappeared so fast that I did not have time to thank them for serving. After unvesting I went over to the boys' sacristy, but there was no sign of them anywhere.

Finally, I gave up and went into the sanctuary to make my own thanksgiving after Mass. The candles were still burning on the altar. The cruets and the missal had not been put away. But there kneeling on four prie-dieus provided for them were my four servers making their thanksgiving after Mass. Later I learned that this had been the custom in the parish for many years.

Needless to say, most of the people of that parish stay for a thanksgiving after Mass. The pastor told me that he had taught his people to make a thanksgiving through the example of his altar boys.

Here's a chance to be a real crusader, Jimmy. Climb on the "Thank You" band wagon and watch others follow your noble example.

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Thank you, Jimmy, and thanks, too, to You, Lord, for giving us such genuine altar boys as Jimmy and all his faithful comrades. Larry Latecomer

DEAR JIMMY,

As a general rule altar boys are wonderful people. A person cannot find a better, kinder, or more helpful group of boys anywhere. I'd go to bat for an altar boy any time. There is only one type of altar boy that I cannot tolerate. I think this type of altar boy should be called "Public Pest Number One." He is the altar boy who always comes late.

Maybe I seem a little harsh, but Larry Latecomer (that's what we will call him) upsets everything and everybody. First of all, if the priest does not start Mass on time, many people are kept waiting. On weekdays many of these people must go to work. If Mass starts late, they will either be late for work, or they must go without breakfast. Even worse, they may give up coming to daily Mass altogether.

On Sundays there are many mothers or fathers who must get back home on time so that the rest of the family can come to the next Mass. It causes a disturbance if the priest starts Mass without a server, or if the server comes trekking into the sanctuary after the priest has begun Mass.

One time my altar boy, Larry Latecomer, did not show up on time. I prepared the altar and lit the candles, and was fully vested for Mass when the door opened and Larry Latecomer strolled in entirely unconcerned about upsetting the whole routine.

Trying to hide my impatience I said: "Larry, you should have been here fifteen minutes ago."

Larry looked up in surprise and asked, "Why, Father? What happened?"

There is no excuse for Larry Latecomer. Coming late shows little regard for other people. Coming late for Mass is certainly disrespectful to our Lord, to say the very least. There are some people who get into the careless habit of coming late for everything. There are others who would never be late for a show or a ball game, but coming to church on time doesn't seem to matter much to them.

I realize that occasionally we may be excused for coming late. It is possible that a bus may be late; and many other things could cause us to be late through no fault of our own.

Yes, it is even possible for the best server to oversleep once in a great while. But, there is a good solution to that, Jimmy. Before you go to bed not only set the alarm, but ask your guardian angel to send a whole varsity team of angels to wake you in time to serve Mass. It works! Try it sometime.

A businessman once told me that he would always hire altar boys to work for him. He said that they are usually neat and clean. They know how to conduct themselves in public, and, above all, they are always punctual. Just another proof that the training which a young man receives as an altar boy is invaluable for the rest of his life!

Keep your record perfect, Jimmy. Be on time always.

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Lip That Lip

DEAR JIMMY,

During World War II we often heard the slogan: "Zip your lip and save a ship." There was much truth in this warning because careless talk during those critical days did endanger the lives of our boys and could mean the possible destruction of much war equipment.

Even in our private lives, is it not our tongue which often gets us into trouble? We say things that offend and hurt others. St. James says: "If anyone does not offend in word, he is a perfect man." I am sure that all of us would have many more friends today if we had zipped our lip more frequently.

There is a special time and place when an altar boy should zip his lip. Surely there is no excuse for an altar boy to speak during Mass except to answer the prayers of the priest. For the most part altar boys are conscientious about keeping silence in the sanctuary.

But in the sacristy! "Aye, there's the rub!" The sacristy is the anteroom of the sanctuary. It is, therefore, a sacred place, too. As far as possible, silence should be observed in the sacristy. Too often loud talking from the sacristy disturbs the people who are praying in church. Silence is necessary for prayer. Before Mass the priest and the altar boys usually observe silence so that they may think about the great function they are both about to begin. Useless and silly talk is a distraction to both priest and server.

Observing silence is not so unusual. In a funeral parlor, no one who respects the dead ever speaks above a whisper. You will notice that in a public library silence is rigidly enforced so that others will not be disturbed. Everyone follows these important rules out of respect for others. With how much more reason should we keep silence in church where our Lord is waiting to talk to us?

To "zip your lip" isn't always easy is it, Jimmy? It does cost some effort to be quiet when you are just bursting at the seams to tell the other altar boys about the movie you saw or something else of importance. Keeping silence is just another training rule a server must observe to become an All-American. When you want to talk so badly, why not zip your lip and offer your silence to our Lord in reparation for all the sins committed with the tongue.

Silence is golden. Keeping silence in church will merit for you, Jimmy, another gold star in that crown which, as an altar boy, you are going to wear in heaven.

The altar boy's silence speaks eloquently. Everyone in church notices the reverent silence of the altar boys. It is another splendid way you have to teach others by your example. Zip that lip and save a *soul*, who knows?

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Cherchez la Femme

DEAR JIMMY,

Cherchez la femme is a French expression which means "look for the woman." You have often heard a similar expression in English, I am sure. Every good man has a woman behind him in one way or another.

It takes a good woman to make a good man. She is either his mother, his wife, his sister, or some other good woman who has helped him along the road to happiness and success.

If you are a good altar boy, Jimmy, a good woman is responsible for it. She is the wonderful mother whom God gave you.

Your mother taught you your first prayers when you were hardly able to talk. No doubt, when you were a few years older, she took you to Mass. She introduced you to the Real Presence of our Lord on the altar by telling you that no one talks in church because Jesus is there. On the way home she often explained to you the meaning of the richness of the Mass.

I am willing to bet my last dime that it was your good mother who encouraged you to become an altar boy. She first taught you to love our Lord. She first told you what a wonderful privilege it is to serve Mass.

When you became discouraged because you had to attend so many servers' rehearsals and just about broke your jaws over those Latin prayers, your mother would always give you the lift which you needed to persevere.

Now that you are a good server, Jimmy, your mother is still helping you. Doesn't she always help you to remember which days and what Mass you are to serve? Isn't it your mother who drags you out of bed in the wee hours of the morning after the alarm has danced



"Isn't it your mother who drags you out of bed in the wee hours of the morning after the alarm has danced and shouted in vain trying to rouse you?" and shouted in vain trying to rouse you when your eyelids just refuse to open. Maybe she even helps you get dressed in time to serve the early Mass.

How many times did she not accompany you to church when you were serving? As she knelt there in the pews and watched your every movement in the sanctuary, she was proud of you. Her very own son assisting the priest in offering the greatest Act of Sacrifice which a human being is permitted to offer!

Jimmy, didn't you always try to serve without a single mistake because you knew your mother was watching you? Aren't you happy because you are doing something to make your mother so proud of you?

You are a success, Jimmy. Certainly you are, because you are a good altar boy. Why are you such a good altar boy? *Cherchez la femme* – Look for the woman. It isn't hard to find the woman who made you a good altar boy. She is that good, kind, and lovely mother of yours.

Thank God often for giving you such a wonderful mother.

Mother Writes a Letter

DEAR JIMMY,

Ever since I married your father, my life has been one long chain of happy events. God has certainly blessed me by giving me a wonderful husband and such a fine family of sons and daughters.

Now I want to let you in on a little secret, Jimmy; one I have never told even your dad. Sometimes, when your daddy and I go to early Mass, the altar boy does not appear. I suppose his guardian angel just couldn't rouse him from sleep in time to serve Mass. On these mornings your father will slip quietly out of the pew and go up into the sanctuary to serve Mass. Jimmy, I have always been proud of your dad, but never quite so proud as when he is serving Mass.

I have never told this to your father, but I am telling you, because I want you to know how I felt this morning when I saw you, my very own son, serving Holy Mass.

You have no idea how thrilled your mother was to see you vested in cassock and surplice, moving through the sanctuary, as you helped the priest perform the greatest function possible for a human being. It is a wonderful privilege to be the mother of an altar boy.

I can't find words to tell you of the joy that filled

my heart. I have always been proud of my children and I love all of you very dearly. Somehow, Jimmy, since you are an altar boy, you have found a much warmer place in my heart.

Now I know in a very small way how our Blessed Mother felt when she was able to bring our Lord into the world to save the human race from its sins. She must have been very happy to co-operate with God in doing her share to save the world. Her Son came to redeem all of us. He was to offer the first Sacrifice of the Mass to pay the debt of our sins. Mary must have been overjoyed at being able to help make this possible.

This morning you, my son, helped to continue the Sacrifice of the Mass. No one can know the joy a mother feels when she sees her son near the altar. With the help of an all-good God, I was able to bring you into the world. And, now you in turn have helped the priest offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

I remember the many times you have been naughty and the many times I have lost patience with you, but all that seemed past this morning. As you moved about so devoutly in the sanctuary, I could not help but think of the millions of angels who hovered about you as they adored our Lord present on the altar.

When you answered the priest clearly and correctly, tears came to my eyes. They were tears of joy. As I smiled through my tears, I knew that our Blessed Lady was proud of you, too.

Jimmy, never forget the great honor that is yours,

now that you are an altar boy. I hope you will always continue to serve Mass, as your daddy still does. Above all, Jimmy, keep that wonderful soul of yours good, holy, and pure. Then your two mothers, our Lady and I. will always be proud of you, our altar boy.

> Lovingly Mother

Foreign Service

DEAR JIMMY,

This morning the postman brought me a letter bearing a foreign stamp. I knew immediately it was from Father Bob, a friend of mine down in South America. Father Bob and I grew up together. We started our seminary studies together, and then he decided to go to the foreign missions.

Father Bob told me a little story in his letter. You have heard similar ones many times. Recently Father visited a village in his large mission field. All the people there had been baptized Catholics. Unfortunately they had not seen a priest for 18 years. However, during that time these poor people had kept up the practice of their religion as best they could.

Each evening they gathered in the tiny church to say their evening prayers together. Parents taught their children as best they could about God. In all those years they had had no Mass, nor had they received the sacraments, because there was no priest who could be sent to them.

Father Bob told me that he could stay at the mission only a few weeks and that then he must move on to another village where he feels the same tragic story will be repeated. He closed his letter begging me to pray that more and more young men from the States will dedicate their lives to the foreign missions.

Jimmy, this is only one instance of the need for priests. The same condition exists in every mission land all over the world. If I could tell you the exact number of priests that are needed, you would be astonished. Every mission area needs hundreds and hundreds of holy, zealous priests to bring souls to our Lord.

Sometimes a boy imagines it requires some sort of giant to become a missionary priest. That is not true. The priests and Sisters working in mission lands are ordinary people like you and me. The only thing that is gigantic about them is their heart.

I remember well the days Father Bob and I worked and played together. He was just an average boy. He got into trouble just like other boys. I recall a time or two when he copied my homework because he did not get his own finished on time.

Father Bob had a wonderful home, too. He has a fine mother and wonderful dad, but he felt he could do so much more good away from home.

Two years ago I saw Father Bob when he came home for a visit. He had been home only a week at that time. Already he was homesick for his missions and was anxiously waiting to get back to his people. He loves every one of them and his people appreciate so much all that he can do for them.

Just think, Jimmy, as soon as we have enough priests in the mission fields, our entire world will be converted. Our Lord gave us the command to go into mission lands when He said: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations."

Our Lord also asks us to pray for the missions: "Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into His harvest."

Jimmy, I was never able to go to the foreign mission myself, but I pray every day that some boy from my parish may be selected to go in my place. Maybe that boy will be you.

Why Not You?

DEAR JIMMY,

Did you ever think that you would like to become a priest? "Who? Me?" you probably ask in astonishment. Well, I can't blame you; for, no doubt, such a direct question startles you.

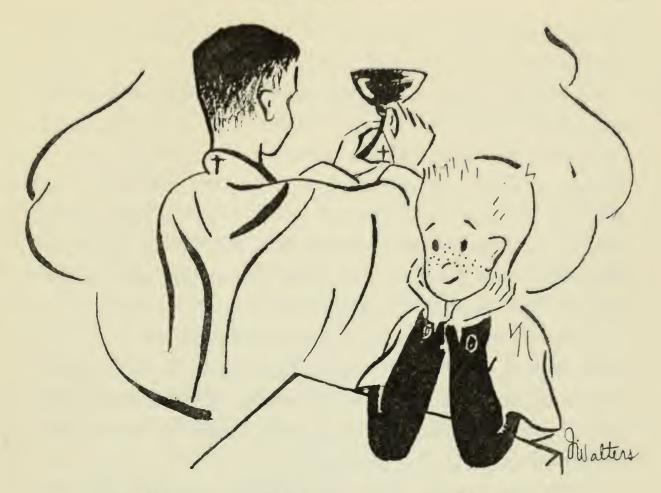
Maybe the thought has occurred to you at times. Probably you said, "I'm not really good enough," or "I could never make the grade." You may be right, Jimmy, but God can work miracles with those who are generous enough to give themselves to Him.

Our Lord needs priests, many priests, to carry on His work here on this earth. Every diocese in our country needs many more priests. Almost every parish could use another priest or two. Many new parishes should be started, but there are not enough priests to go around. And think of the many mission fields throughout the world!

Our Lord depends a great deal on His altar boys. Frequently, He calls His altar boys to the priesthood. And why not? The life of a priest is a life of sacrifice for others. Altar boys have learned very early in life to make sacrifices. Our Lord calls upon them because He knows they are generous and willing to serve Him.

Many altar boys misunderstand a vocation to the

WHY NOT YOU?



"Did you ever think you would like to be a priest?"

priesthood. You have seen a picture on a recruiting poster for the military service. Uncle Sam is pointing a long finger to a young man and saying: "I want you." Let me assure you, Jimmy, that our Lord does not appear in this manner to a young man in order to call him to the priesthood.

A vocation is merely a desire to serve God. In the beginning the desire is enough. Just as a plant needs water or our bodies need food, so a vocation needs nourishment. The nourishment which a vocation needs is prayer. A vocation doesn't just happen. It is developed through prayer. St. Vincent de Paul says that vocations come through prayer.

You must pray over your vocation, Jimmy. There are many beautiful prayers which you can say asking God to show you which vocation He wants you to follow in life. I would suggest a special prayer to our Blessed Mother each day. I know a fine priest today who never went to bed at night without first reciting the Litany of Loreto to our Lady so that he would know what God wanted Him to do.

A few years ago a young man told me that he had been saying his Rosary every day for ten years begging our Lady to help him find his vocation. At the present time he is in the seminary. God willing, he will be ordained in just a few years.

I am not saying that our Lord is calling all altar boys to be priests, but I do know that he is calling more boys than those who actually answer His call.

Say a prayer each day, Jimmy, that you may know what our Lord wants you to do in life. I promise to pray for you, too. Until I write again, ask God to send us many more priests.

Here's the Answer

DEAR JIMMY,

It was good to receive your letter in this morning's mail. I was pleased to hear that you have been thinking from time to time about becoming a priest.

So you would like to know what qualifications a boy must have to become a priest. That is a very good question, Jimmy. I would list them under three simple headings. I think a young man should have the *heart*, the *head*, and the *health* that are necessary if he is considering the priesthood.

Heart. When I say a young man must have the heart, I mean he should have the right intention. The first intention a young man should have in choosing a vocation may seem rather selfish. He should choose that vocation in which he feels he can best save his soul. Of course, he should have many other reasons. He must want to become a priest also because he can help save the souls of others.

Then, too, a young man must have a good character. His conduct must be good at all times. He must have a love for our Lord and be willing to make sacrifices in order to serve Him. I do not mean enormous sacrifices, but the little acts of self-denial which a server is already asked to make, such as serving an early Mass or serving an extra Mass occasionally. Frequent reception of Holy Communion is another way in which a boy shows his love for our Lord.

Head. In order to become a priest a boy does not have to be an intellectual genius, nor need he have a straight "A" average in school. A boy of average ability should have no difficulties mastering the knowledge which is required of a priest.

The first years in the seminary are much the same as those in any good high school or college. After a young man gets a solid foundation in the basic subjects, he is ready for his advanced studies in the major seminary.

Health. To become a priest it is not necessary for a young man to be a prize fighter nor an All-American football player. It is only necessary that he should have ordinary good health.

The years of preparation require much energy. Also, the work in the priesthood has many trying hours. This means that a young man must have a degree of ordinary good health to carry on.

The Church realizes the necessity of a "sound mind in a sound body." In the seminary a recreation period is set aside for physical exercise each day. Seminarians are great sportsmen. They play baseball, basketball, tennis, handball, and many other games which give the students fresh air and sunshine.

Outdoor exercise is necessary if the seminarians are to remain healthy in body and soul.

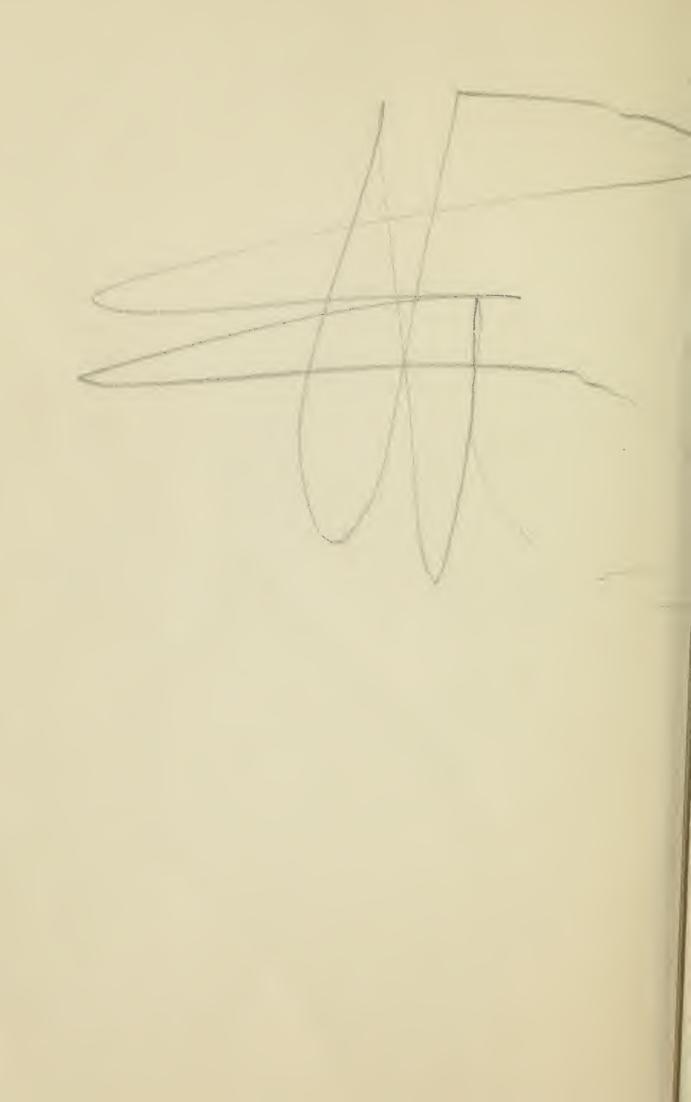
I'll let you in on a little secret, Jimmy. Did you

ever wonder why so many priests like sports? Well, most of them were pretty good players in their seminary days. In fact, I know one young man who refused a major league contract as a pitcher in order to become a priest.

In closing may I say that if a boy has these three H's, he is well along on the road that can lead him to the priesthood.

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