

# Sac·}ris·}tan (säk'rĭ -stən)

## Liturgy Documents Presentation: The Sacristan Ministry

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### Sac·}ris·}tan (säk'rĭ -stən)

*n.*

1 One who is in charge of a sacristy.

2 A sexton.

[Middle English, from Medieval Latin *sacrist ānus*, from *sacrista*, from Latin *sacer*, sacred. See sacred.]

A term to describe the person who is responsible for the contents of a church related to liturgical worship, such as vestments, vessels, books, etc. More generally, it can refer to the sexton who has the responsibility of the upkeep of the church building. (*Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia*, Rev. Peter MJ Stravinskis, Ed. p. 854.)

Historically the Sacristan was an officer who is charged with the care of the sacristy, the church, and their contents. In ancient times many duties of the sacristan were performed by the doorkeepers (*ostiarii*), later by the *mansionarii* and the treasurers.

The definition and role of sacristans as well as the rules governing their responsibilities have varied through time:

From the Decretals of Gregory IX (lib. I, tit. xxvi), "De officio sacristæ speak of the sacristan as if he had an honourable office attached to a certain benefice, and say that his duty was to care for the sacred vessels, vestments, lights, etc."

The under-sacristan (*custos*) is also mentioned in the Decretals (lib. I, tit. xxvii, "De officio custodis"). He was the assistant of the sacristan, was subject to the archdeacon, and performed duties very similar to those of the sacristan. It is noteworthy that the office of *custos* was usually a salaried position.

The nineteenth ecumenical council at Trent (Council of Trent; 1545-1563) was formed to make a definitive determination of the doctrines of the Church in answer

to the heresies of the Protestants Council of Trent. Regarding sacristans, the Council desired that, according to the old canons, clerics should hold such offices; but in most churches, because of the difficulty of obtaining clerics, laymen perform many of the duties of the sacristan and under-sacristan.

**T**he *Cæremoniale episcoporum*, instituted by Sixtus V in 1587 and revised a number of times over the centuries, contains all of the rights and ceremonies observed at Mass, Vespers, and other liturgical functions. Regarding sacristans, the *Cæremoniale episcoporum* prescribed that in cathedral and collegiate churches the sacristan should be a priest, and describes his duties in regard to the sacristy, the Blessed Eucharist, the baptismal font, the holy oils, etc., and suggested that one or two canons be appointed each year to supervise the work of the sacristan and his assistants.

**G**eneral Instruction of the Roman Missal, 2003, Chapter 3. The Duties and Ministries in the Mass, p. 37, 105. Following several paragraphs defining the role of the acolyte and lector, the Roman Missal states that the sacristan, who carefully arranges the liturgical books, vestments, and other things necessary in the celebration of the Mass, also exercise a liturgical function.

## **P**atron Saint of Sacristans:



### **G**uy of Anderlecht (Memorial-12 September).

Born in poverty, he was trained in religion by pious parents.

Cared for the poor and sick in his teens.

When he worked the fields, an angel would sometimes man the plow so that Guy could pray undistracted.

Hung around the local church so much the priest made him the sacristan; lived in the church, and often spent all night in prayer.

Though he never joined any order or house, he vowed chastity, and devoted most of his time to prayer, and work as a sacristan.

**P**atronage: against epilepsy, hydrophobia, infantile convulsions, mad dogs, rabies, animals with horns, bachelors, convulsive children, epileptics, laborers, protection of outbuildings, protection of sheds, protection of stables, sacristans, sextons, work horses.

## **S**acristan Societies

The Sodality of St. John Berchmans, known as the Pious Association of Servers of Mass and Sacristans, was founded by Vincent Basile, S.J., missionary Apostolic among the Southern Slavs, for lay acolytes, choir boys, sacristans, and all who have any duty to perform in the services of the Church.

Its object is to induce all its members to perform their duties piously and in a manner befitting the ceremonies in which they participate, for the glory of God and the edification of the faithful.

Members are required to attend monthly meeting and to receive Holy Communion at least once a month. The director should be either the pastor or a priest appointed by him.

This sodality was approved by Pope Pius IX, 21 Sept., 1865, and indulgences were accorded to its members, subject to the usual conditions.

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**H**ere at St. Francis of Assisi many of the responsibilities traditionally assigned to the sacristan are spread over a number of ministries, such as Eucharistic Ministry, Environment, and Church Keeping, affording a broader number of parishioners the opportunity to partake in service of the church.