

The Catholic Church of St Mary the Virgin
(Anglican Use)

Arlington, Texas

Directions for servers at
Benediction of the
Most Blessed Sacrament

These directions are supplemental to the “Directions for all altar servers”. Neither takes the place of the other. They must be read together and all directions in both are to be followed.

29 December A. D. 2001

Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam

General instructions

Benediction is a ceremony requiring functions and movements different from those of the solemn sung Mass, sufficient to justify a separate set of directions. In all other cases, special instructions are given for each different server office. The present set of directions, in contrast, comprises the special instructions for all servers involved in the Benediction service. Nevertheless, the “Directions for all altar servers” should be consulted for matters such as vesture, posture, and the like.

At Benediction, there are three servers. Two are torch bearers, one of whom will also ring the bells, and the other of whom will assist the celebrant with the humeral veil. The third server is the Master of Ceremonies (MC), who also is the thurifer.

It is perhaps worth noting that the celebrant of Benediction must be an ordained minister with faculties in the diocese, but need not be a priest. A properly delegated deacon can preside over the ceremony and carry out all functions, including the Eucharistic blessing. The celebrant is vested in alb and cope. The stole is not technically necessary, as no sacramental function is undertaken at Benediction.

Preparation of the sanctuary

Well in advance of the scheduled time for the ceremony, the torch holders that ordinarily are placed by the sides of the torch bearers’ bench must be taken up and placed on the first step of the predilla. Each must be lined up with an end of the mensa. The bells are also placed on the first step, to the right of the holder on the Gospel side.

The humeral veil is placed, folded, over the communion rail on the epistle side of the bridge opening in the rail. A copy of the hymn and prayer texts for the service should be placed on the first step, one each for each torch bearer and for the MC. The small stand that usually stands next to the celebrant’s chair is put on the first step, in the center.

The branched votive light holders are placed on the altar, left and right of center, and midway back, allowing ample room for the monstrance to stand between them. The monstrance is placed on the altar, between the branched light holders but toward the Gospel side.. The veil is kept on it, and the monstrance faces away from the sacristy.

About ten minutes before the ceremony, charcoal is started in the firebox of the thurible. The boat should be checked to see that it is filled with incense.

About four or five minutes before the ceremony, the votive lights in the branched holders are lit by the torch bearers, using tapers but not the candle lighters. This operation must be undertaken with care. If a taper is held for more than a few seconds at a downward angle, the flame can start traveling up the taper. Soon, the entire taper is afire and dripping wax. The altar candles are also lit. If there is time to do so, the six candles on the reredos are also lit (these, of course, require use of candlelighters). Upon returning to the sacristy, the torch bearers light their torches.

The ceremony proper

At the appointed time, the ministers enter the sanctuary directly from the sacristy. The sacristy bell is only rung if the congregation is not already singing a hymn. The torch bearers are first in the procession. Each goes to stand at the foot of the altar, in front of one of the torch holders. The MC follows, bearing the thurible in his left hand, the boat in his right. He stands to the left of center. The celebrant, of course, is last. Unless the congregation is already singing, the first hymn begins as the sacred ministers enter.

The celebrant will genuflect to reverence the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle. The MC, and only the MC, genuflects with him. The torch bearers then place their torches in the holders and kneel on the first step, inside the torches. The MC remains standing.

The celebrant goes up to the tabernacle and opens it. At the instant the celebrant opens the tabernacle, the bells are rung once (vigorously, as the congregation will still be singing). The celebrant takes the luna from the tabernacle, puts it in the monstrance, and turns the monstrance to the congregation.

When the celebrant comes down from the altar, the MC offers the boat to the celebrant, who takes it from him. The MC then opens the thurible and holds it at a convenient height for the celebrant to spoon incense on to the live coals. He waits for the celebrant to give the usual silent hand blessing of the thurible, then closes the thurible and hands it to the celebrant, at the same time taking the boat from him. The MC kneels on the first step and puts the boat down on the first step.

The celebrant incenses the exposed Blessed Sacrament, then hands the thurible to the MC, who, still kneeling, takes it from the celebrant and holds it in his right hand.

The hymn “O Saving Victim” is sung. The celebrant bows deeply while the first lines are sung. All servers bow profoundly at the same time.

A short prayer follows the first hymn, and then the second hymn, “Therefore we, before Him bending”. Again, the celebrant bows deeply for the first two lines of the hymn, and the servers bow profoundly at the same time.

After the second hymn, a versicle is chanted by the celebrant, and the congregation chants the responsory. The celebrant chants the prayer beginning “O God, who under a wonderful Sacrament ...”. As this prayer ends, the torch bearer on the epistle side rises and takes up the humeral veil from the communion rail. He unfolds it and puts it over the shoulders of the celebrant (from behind the celebrant), offering him the hook and eye, one in each hand, by which the veil is secured. The inside of the veil is the shiny side. The server should have the dull side towards himself. The torch bearer returns to his place, kneeling on the first step.

The celebrant goes up to the altar and takes up the monstrance. He then blesses the congregation with the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance. As this is done, the bells are rung continuously and the MC continuously incenses the Blessed Sacrament. Both the ringing and the incensing continue until the celebrant puts down the monstrance.

When the celebrant comes down from the altar, the epistle side torch bearer rises and takes the veil from the celebrant, again from behind him. The server folds the veil and puts it back on the communion rail. The folding should be done quickly. No attempt is made to fold it in the way it was when first put on the rail prior to the ceremony. The torch bearer returns to his place and kneels.

The Divine Praises are now recited by the celebrant, the congregation following. When these are concluded, the celebrant intones the antiphon for Psalm 117. While the Psalm is being chanted, the celebrant goes up to the altar and returns the lunette, in its pyx, to the tabernacle. The bells are rung once as the tabernacle is closed.

As the celebrant turns from the closed tabernacle, all servers rise. The MC takes up the thurible and boat, and the torch bearers take up their torches. The celebrant will genuflect to reverence the Sacrament, and the MC, only, genuflects with him. All then turn to the left to proceed out to the sacristy. The order is the same as it was in entering.

After the ceremony

One torch bearer should extinguish the lights on the altar. The other should go immediately to the foyer of the church and collect from the members of the congregation, as they leave, the service cards. These are brought back to the sacristy. The MC is responsible for cleaning out the thurible. All the other things (branched votive light holders, veil, torch holders, bells, monstrance) which were put out are returned to their usual places. This work is usually carried out by members of the altar guild. An ordained or instituted minister is not necessarily involved, as no sacred vessels are involved.