

## ***Ask Fr James***

### **Why do priests wear vestments at Mass instead of suits like Protestant Pastors**

People sometimes asks priests; do you have to wear all those clothes, especially in the summer? Throughout much of its history the Roman Catholic church priests have worn vestments for liturgical occasions and celebrations. There was the understanding that the priestly vestments today are the direct descendants of the Old Testament priestly vestments. In the Old Testament, priests were to wear dress appropriate for the liturgical celebration in the Temple. Leviticus 16:32 and 21:10 says the high priest should wear five traditionally recognized liturgical dress: (1) the robe; (2) the ephod; (3) the breast piece; (4) the headgear; and (5) and the head ornament. This practice continued in the New Testament and we have a reference that the high priest tore his robes during the interrogation of Jesus (Matthew 26:65; Mark 14:63).

At Mass, the priest represents Christ and performs the actions of Christ. Hebrews 5:6; 20; 7:17, 21 says Jesus is priest and high priest. The Vestments that the priests wear at Mass are the visible expressions of our theological beliefs about the kind of robes worn by Christ at the Last Supper and to the Cross. At the Last Supper, Jesus took off his outer clothing (chasuble) and wrapped a towel around his waist and started washing the feet of his disciples (John 13:4) and the robe(s) put on Jesus at the time of his trial(s) and scourging are variously described as a scarlet cloak [Matthew 27:28-31]; a purple robe [Mark 15:17, 20]; a bright/shining robe [Luke 23:11]. These descriptions also explains the various liturgical colours of the priests liturgical vestments today.

The priest wears layers of various vestments such as the alb, cincture, amice, stole, and the chasuble or cope. The alb (from the Latin *albus*, meaning white), the garment in which Pilate clothed Christ and cincture (cord used as a belt to gather the alb at the waist) which can be the color of the day or liturgical season are a reminder of his chastity. The stole which the priest wears around his neck with the ends hanging down in front symbolizes the bonds and fetters with which Jesus was bound during his Passion and the stole will generally be the liturgical color assigned by the church for the liturgical season or for the particular service and fringe is usually applied to the ends of the stole following Numbers 15:38-39.

The chasuble (outer garment) reminds of his call to charity like Christ who went to the cross for all. The priest's readiness to carry the parishioners' burden charitably is expressed in the traditional prayer that a priest prays before putting on the chasuble -

***O Lord, who has said, "My yoke is sweet and My burden light," grant that I may so carry it as to merit Thy grace.***

The chasuble is seen as the "yoke of Christ" and reminds the priest that he is "another Christ" in the sacrifice of the Mass and to "put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth" (Ephesians 4:24). Additionally, the chasuble symbolizes the "seamless garment" worn by Christ when he was led to his crucifixion (John 19:23). Parishioners are encourage to buy and donate Mass vestments to the Church. At Mass, the Priest and his parishioners are encouraged to meditate on the rich symbolism of the vestments as this further accentuates the connection between the priest, the Mass, and the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

***You may email/send your faith questions to Fr. James and he will answer them in our Sunday Bulletins.***