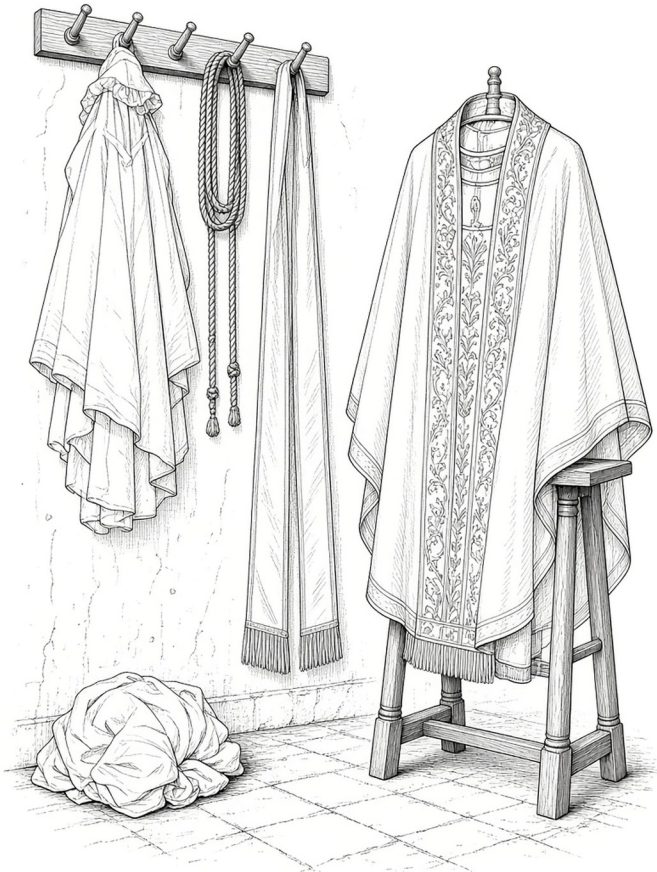




SILENT HOMILIES

The Little House

*Vestments, and the prayers
sewn into the cloth*



Silent Homilies

Little Treasures



SILENT HOMILIES

The Little House

Vestments and the prayers sewn into the cloth

A small book of forgotten facts, short stories, and quiet hope.

Before You Begin

Most of us first notice vestments as colour. Green for weeks at a time. Violet in Advent and Lent. White at a wedding or at Easter. Red when a martyr's name is read. The eye is not wrong. The Church year really is sewn into cloth.

What the eye often misses is the order of putting the cloth on. There are also old prayers a priest may still say while his arms are in the sleeves. Those prayers are not required in the Mass most parishes use today. They are a traditional devotion. They are not about looking splendid. They are about being ready.

A vestment is not only a uniform and not only a costume. A uniform tells you which team a person belongs to. A costume tells you that someone is playing a part. Vestments do something quieter. The priest remains himself. He is still the man who locked the sacristy. In the liturgy he also acts in a ministry the Church has given him. At the altar, especially in the sacraments, he acts in the person of Christ. The cloth does not erase him. It marks the work.

An old Latin name for the chasuble is *casula*. It means a little house. He puts a house on. Then he goes to the altar.

This little book is not a tailor's catalogue. It is not an argument about lace. It is a walk through the sacristy in the old order: the amice that nobody in the seats will see, the white alb that came to remember Baptism, the cord, the maniple that most parishes no longer use, the stole, the little house itself, the deacon's dalmatic, the cope that was once linked with rain, the veil used at Benediction, the colours of the year, and the wool a metropolitan archbishop wears because lambs are still blessed on the feast of St Agnes.

Read it if you have watched a priest dress in a hurry and thought the cloth was only decoration. Read it if you love the decoration and have never heard the prayers. The sacristy is a quiet room on purpose. What happens there is already part of the Mass.

Contents

Before You Begin

1. Not a Costume, and Not a Uniform
2. The Amice No One Sees
3. White That Remembers a Font
4. A Cord Around the Middle
5. The Maniple That Left the Sacristy
6. The Yoke That Hangs Down Both Sides
7. The Little House
8. What a Deacon Wears Instead
9. A Cloak for the Road
10. The Veil at Benediction
11. The Colours of the Year
12. What a Bishop Adds
13. Living Under Someone Else's Cloth

A Last Word

A word of thanks

Chapter 1

NOT A COSTUME, AND NOT A UNIFORM

When you watch a priest get ready for Mass, you see him putting clothes on, not taking them off. Street clothes come off, or they are covered. In many places the black cassock is already on. That cassock is daily dress. It is not a Mass vestment. Over it, or over a simple alb, the vestments of the Mass are added.

A priest buying bread may wear black. A priest at the altar wears something the bakery has no name for. The change is not a promotion. It is a covering for sacred work.

The Church did not invent sacred clothing. In the Old Testament, Aaron had garments “for glory and for beauty,” and also for covering. What the Church did, slowly, was give Christian meaning to ordinary late-Roman clothes. The alb began as a white tunic. The chasuble began as a travelling cloak. The stole may remember a scarf of office. The garments first looked ordinary. Later they looked strange. Then the Church prayed over them, and the prayers gave them a second meaning.

By the early Middle Ages each piece often had a short prayer to be said while it was put on. Those prayers are older than most of the embroidery. They are still used by many priests. They are a devotion, not a current requirement of the Mass most parishes celebrate.

People sometimes treat vestments as a test. More cloth must mean more faith. Less cloth must mean more honesty. Both arguments make the sacristy into a statement. It is first a discipline. A man who must put on several things before he speaks over bread is being reminded that the next half hour does not belong only to his personality.

If a parish has grown shy of vestments, the shyness is often a fear of being seen to mean it. If a parish has grown vain of vestments, the vanity

is a similar fear turned the other way. Cloth without prayer becomes a display. Prayer without any sign becomes only an idea. The rite has always wanted both.

A Small Reflection

The vestments help the priest remember that this hour is not a performance of his own personality. Families and workplaces need a version of the same thing now and then. Not every conversation has to be about us.

A short prayer

Lord, clothe Your priests for the work You have given them, and keep the cloth from becoming a show. Amen.

Chapter 2

THE AMICE NO ONE SEES

There is a piece of white cloth you will almost never see from your seat. It is the amice. It is a rectangle of linen with two long strings.

In the old order of vesting it comes first. For a moment it is placed on the head like a hood. Then it is dropped to the shoulders and tied around the chest. It covers the collar. In the prayer that belongs to it, it is also asked to be a helmet.

The traditional prayer says: Place upon my head, O Lord, the helmet of salvation, that I may overcome the assaults of the devil. In Latin it begins, *Impone, Domine, capiti meo galeam salutis*. The line comes from St Paul. It is a strange thing to mutter in a small room while you stand in your socks. It assumes that the next hour will be contested. A man who thinks the altar is only a platform has no use for a helmet. A man who thinks the altar is a place of real spiritual struggle may be glad of linen.

Historically the amice kept sweat and hair from showing. It also kept the priest's own collar from showing under the outer vestments. Practical needs and prayer are not enemies here. A covering that began as cleanliness later received a prayer about the mind.

Some religious still wear it as a hood for the walk to the altar and throw it back at the foot of the steps. Most simply hide it and go on. In the Mass most parishes use today, the amice is not required if the alb already covers ordinary clothes completely.

If your parish never uses an amice, the Mass is still the Mass. If it does, you now know that something you cannot see has already been asked to guard the head of the man you can see.

A Small Reflection

Before we speak, it helps to pause. A sharp thought often arrives first. If we say it at once, we can hurt people. The hidden cloth on the priest's shoulders is a reminder to guard the mind before the mouth starts work.

A short prayer

Lord, be our helmet of salvation, and cover the thoughts that would like to climb into the next hour uninvited. Amen.

Chapter 3

WHITE THAT REMEMBERS A FONT

The long white garment is called an alb. The word simply means white. It began as the ordinary late-Roman tunic, the tunica alba. It did not start life as a baptismal robe. Later Christian tradition naturally linked its whiteness with Baptism, because the newly baptised were clothed in white.

The traditional prayer asks: Make me white, O Lord, and cleanse my heart, that being made white in the Blood of the Lamb I may deserve an eternal reward. The priest who says this is not claiming to be a lamb. He is asking to stand in a cleanliness that is not his own.

Deacons wear it. Servers wear it. In many places lay ministers wear it too. That can be fitting, because Baptism is the first clothing of a Christian. The priest's alb is not a higher Baptism. It is the same Baptism, worn to work. When you see several people in white, it can remind the whole church that this is a room of the baptised.

Lace at the hem is a later taste. Some love it. Some find it fussy. The alb does not require it. What it does need is to be a real garment, not a short symbol that ends at the knees.

Watch, sometime, how an alb is put on. The head disappears and comes back. For a second the man is only cloth. Then he will speak.

A Small Reflection

Baptism is not only a day in a photograph album. The white garment says that the same grace is still ours. When we feel we have to start all over again, the Church first reminds us of what we already received.

A short prayer

Lamb of God, keep the white of Baptism honest in us, and do not let us treat it as a costume we once wore. Amen.

Chapter 4

A CORD AROUND THE MIDDLE

The priest ties a cord around his waist. It looks almost too ordinary to mention. The cord is called a cincture. It is often white. Sometimes it is the colour of the day.

The traditional prayer asks: Gird me, O Lord, with the cincture of purity, and quench in my heart the fire of concupiscence, that the virtue of continence and chastity may remain in me. Concupiscence is the Christian name for the disordered desires that pull us away from what is good. Continence here means self-control, not only one kind of vowed life. It is an unfashionable prayer. That is one reason it is still useful.

In Scripture, to gird the loins is to get ready for work or for a journey. Israel ate the Passover dressed for the road. Peter is told to gird himself and become a shepherd. The priest's knot belongs to that family. It gathers loose cloth so that he can move. It also names a life that would like to remain loose.

The knot is usually tied at the side. Servers learn to do it without looking. It is a small skill, like folding a corporal. Nobody in the pew will admire it. The knot will still have been made.

The prayer asks for purity and self-control before the priest goes to the altar. A cord is a small tool for so large a request. The Church has often used small tools.

A Small Reflection

The cincture is first a practical knot. The old prayer gives it a second meaning: gather yourself before you serve. Purity and self-control are not only for monks. They are for anyone who does not want every appetite to walk into the next hour unchallenged.

A short prayer

*Lord, gird us for the work You have given us, and give us purity of heart.
Amen.*

Chapter 5

THE MANIPLE THAT LEFT THE SACRISTY

There used to be a small strip of cloth hanging from the priest's left arm. It matched the stole. It was called the maniple.

The traditional vesting prayer called it a maniple of weeping and sorrow, and asked that the wearer might receive the reward of his labour with joy. Historians do not agree on every stage of its development. One common explanation is that it grew from a practical cloth of late Roman life, a mappula or handkerchief carried in the hand or on the arm. Later the Church treated it as a vestment. The prayer about labour and tears is later still. It is worth knowing the difference.

In 1967 an instruction of the Holy See said the maniple was no longer required. The Missal of 1970 and the missals that followed do not mention it among the vestments of Mass. In celebrations according to the 1962 Missal it remains part of the vesting. Most Catholics under sixty have never seen one except in a photograph.

Its disappearance is not a tragedy on the scale people sometimes claim. It is the loss of a sentence. We no longer put a piece of cloth on the working arm and admit, out loud, that the liturgy will involve labour and sometimes tears. We still have both. We have one less way of dressing for them.

A few priests still wear the maniple. Others would not know which arm it goes on. Neither fact needs a war. What is worth keeping, even without the silk, is the meaning. The Mass is not an effortless appearance. Someone works.

A Small Reflection

Much of the good we do will never be seen. That does not make it small. The old strip of cloth on the priest's working arm was a way of saying that work and tears belong at the altar too. Joy comes after the labour, not instead of it.

A short prayer

Lord, receive the hidden labour of this day, and do not let us pretend that prayer is always light work. Amen.

Chapter 6

THE YOKE THAT HANGS DOWN BOTH SIDES

The long narrow band around the priest's neck is called a stole. A priest wears it so that both ends hang down in front. A deacon wears it from the left shoulder across to the right hip.

The traditional prayer asks: Restore to me, O Lord, the stole of immortality, which I lost in the transgression of my first parents. The prayer treats original sin as a lost garment, and the stole as a first fitting of what was lost.

In ordinary speech the stole has become the sign of ordained ministry itself. A priest is “given the stole.” He wears it for Confession, for baptisms and for blessings, even when the chasuble stays in the cupboard. It is the working vestment. It says the office is being used.

That is why a stole thrown on over a coat at a hospital bed is not sloppiness. In an emergency or at a bedside a priest may have little more with him than that strip of cloth. It makes his ministry visible at once.

How it is worn matters. In some older usage a priest crossed the stole on his breast and held it with the cincture. In the Mass most parishes use today the stole hangs straight down. A deacon's diagonal is not a fashion. It leaves the right arm free and tells the eye that this order is not the priesthood.

The stole can be turned into a badge. That temptation is old. “Restore to me the stole of immortality” is not a campaign. It is a beggar asking for clothes.

A Small Reflection

Some responsibilities are given to us. We did not invent them. Parent, nurse, priest, neighbour. The stole hanging down both sides is a picture of that kind of weight. The question is not whether we carry something. The question is whether we still remember who asked us to carry it.

A short prayer

Lord, restore to us what we cannot give ourselves, and keep this thin yoke from becoming a banner. Amen.

Chapter 7

THE LITTLE HOUSE

The large outer garment is called a chasuble. An old Latin name for it is *casula*, a little house. The word is a diminutive of *casa*, a house. It began as a travelling cloak large enough to wrap a person against weather. The Church kept the cloak and made it the Mass garment.

The traditional prayer asks: O Lord, who said, My yoke is easy and My burden light: grant that I may bear it so as to obtain Your grace. The priest is already wearing a yoke in the stole. Now he asks to find the yoke easy. Then he puts this outer garment over his head.

Over the centuries chasubles were cut in different ways. Some became quite narrow at the sides. People call that shape a fiddleback. Others kept a fuller cloak-like shape. Both forms belong to Catholic history. Both can be prayerful. Both can be vain. A parish that fights only about shape has forgotten the vesting prayer. The garment is for covering the work of the altar.

Because it is the outermost garment, the chasuble carries the colour of the day into the church. People who cannot name an amice can name the green. That is allowed. Colour is a teacher for those who will never read a rubric.

When the priest lifts his arms at the invitation to pray, the little house lifts with him. For a second you see the white alb underneath. Then the arms come down and the house closes. It is one of the quiet movements of the Mass. The cloth was already cut to do it.

The priest does not stop being himself under the chasuble. He remains the man who bought the bread and locked the sacristy. What changes is the claim. For this hour the visible claim is not his face. It is the office, the colour, and the work of the altar. The little house does not

erase him. It shelters the work so that the work can be seen.

A Small Reflection

A house is built so that something can happen inside it, not so that the builder can be admired from the street. A closed door while someone prays, a kitchen table that is not a stage, a hospital curtain drawn for privacy: ordinary life already knows this. The chasuble is the same idea in cloth.

A short prayer

Lord, whose yoke is easy, let the house we put on cover the work You have given, and not become a display. Amen.

Chapter 8

WHAT A DEACON WEARS INSTEAD

If a deacon is serving at Mass, he does not wear the same outer garment as the priest. He wears a dalmatic. It is a tunic with short, wide sleeves, usually in the colour of the day.

A deacon is an ordained minister. He is not a priest. He cannot celebrate Mass or confer priestly absolution. He can proclaim the Gospel, prepare the altar, help at Holy Communion, baptise, witness marriages, and serve people in need. The different garment helps us see that his work is real, and that it is not the same as the priest's work.

The dalmatic comes, by a long road, from Dalmatia. Long ago it was simply smart ordinary clothing. The Church kept the cloth and gave it a new purpose. The wide sleeves are part of its history as a tunic. Some later writers liked to see in them a sign of service with the hands. That is a possible reading. It is not a proven origin.

Many parishes have a deacon and no dalmatic. That does not make him less a deacon. The stole worn across his body is the essential sign. The dalmatic only makes the ministry easier to see. Most Catholics now meet this garment only at an ordination or in a cathedral.

If the parish has a dalmatic, it is good to use it. A vestment left in a drawer cannot teach anyone.

A Small Reflection

The Church needs more than one kind of work. A deacon is not a junior priest. A priest is not a deacon in different clothes. Different ministries do not compete. The Church does not need everyone to have the same role in order for everyone to matter.

A short prayer

Lord, dress Your servants for the work You actually gave them, and keep us from treating every ministry as the same work in different clothes. Amen.

Chapter 9

A CLOAK FOR THE ROAD

Sometimes the priest wears a big cloak fastened at the chest, not the usual Mass vestment. That cloak is called a cope. Its Latin nickname, *pluviale*, means a garment against rain. The name remembers outdoor use. The cope's history is longer than a simple raincoat, but the rain-cloak is the meaning ordinary people can keep.

The cope is used for processions, for Evening Prayer, for the blessing of palms and candles, and often for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. It is the vestment of liturgy that has left the altar, or has not yet arrived there.

The chasuble belongs to the Mass at the altar. The cope belongs to movement. It is worn when the Church walks, sings the hours, stands in a cemetery, or blesses what cannot be carried into the sanctuary.

If you only ever see a chasuble, you have only seen the Mass at the table. The cope is the Church when she leaves the building and is still praying. Funerals know this. So do processions that look slightly foolish until the weather turns and the cloak suddenly makes sense.

A Small Reflection

The Church does not stay only at the altar. She goes to cemeteries, hospital rooms and wet streets. The cope is the cloak for that walking. Faith that never leaves the church building has not yet learned the parish.

A short prayer

Lord, go with us when the rite leaves the table, and teach us to pray on the road as well as at the altar. Amen.

Chapter 10

THE VEIL AT BENEDICTION

At Benediction you will see the priest cover his shoulders and hands with a long silk cloth before he lifts the monstrance. That cloth is the humeral veil.

It is usually white or gold. It is placed over the priest's or deacon's shoulders. The ends hang down so that they can cover his hands. He then takes the monstrance — the vessel that holds the consecrated Host — through the veil, and lifts it to bless the people.

Catholic teaching is that Christ is truly, really and substantially present in the Blessed Sacrament. The blessing is not a wave from the priest. It is Christ, held carefully, turned toward the people.

The same cloth is used when the Blessed Sacrament is carried in procession, and when certain blessings are given with the Blessed Sacrament itself. Servers sometimes use a thinner veil, called a vimpa, to hold a bishop's mitre and crozier. That is a different cloth and a different job. The idea is related: the hands are holding something that is not theirs to claim.

The point is not that the priest's hands are dirty. An hour earlier those same hands consecrated the Host. The Church is not suddenly ashamed of him. She is careful of Christ. Familiarity is a real danger. A man who handles holy things every week can begin to handle them as if they were his. The veil interrupts that habit.

If your parish never has Benediction, the Mass is still the Mass. If it does, watch the veil the next time. You have seen it often. You may not have noticed what it was refusing to do.

A Small Reflection

We get used to precious things. A ring. A name. A promise. Even Holy Communion. The veil over the priest's hands is a simple lesson: treat what is holy with care. Care is not coldness. It is one way love looks when it is paying attention.

A short prayer

Jesus, present in the Blessed Sacrament, deepen our reverence and love for You. Amen.

Chapter 11

THE COLOURS OF THE YEAR

Most of us first notice vestments as colour. That is not a mistake. Colour is one of the Church's simplest teachers.

White is used for Easter, Christmas, feasts of the Lord, of Mary, and of saints who were not martyrs. Red is used for Pentecost, for Passiontide, and for apostles and martyrs. Green is used for the long ordinary weeks when the Church is simply growing. Violet is used for Advent and Lent, the two waiting seasons of the year. Rose may be used on two Sundays only, Gaudete in Advent and Laetare in Lent, when the Church allows a lighter colour inside a season of waiting. Black may still be used for funerals and for All Souls. Gold may stand in for white, red or green on more solemn days.

Blue, loved in some places for Our Lady, is not a universal liturgical colour of the Roman rite. Spain and a few other regions have privileges. That is a local permission, not a general rule.

Colour works on people who will never open a missal. A child can tell that this Sunday is not like last Sunday if the outer garment has changed. That is already teaching. Liturgical colours belong to the Church's calendar rather than to private preference.

Watch the changes for a year without taking notes. Advent will feel different if the violet is allowed to be violet. Easter will feel like a relief if white has been scarce.

A Small Reflection

Not every Sunday is Easter, and that is a kindness. Some weeks we are waiting, tired or sad. The Church gives those weeks a colour of their own. We do not have to force every day to feel like a feast.

A short prayer

Lord of times and seasons, teach us the year through cloth, and keep us from inventing a calendar of our own. Amen.

Chapter 12

WHAT A BISHOP ADDS

A bishop at the altar wears what a priest wears, and then a few extra signs. The mitre is the pointed hat, split into two peaks. The crozier is the shepherd's staff, curved at the top. He also wears a pectoral cross and an episcopal ring. People have given these objects many meanings over the centuries. Some of those meanings are beautiful. None of them is required before the objects may be used.

The pallium is the surprise. It is a thin band of white wool marked with black crosses. The Pope wears it, and so do metropolitan archbishops — that is, the archbishop who has a province of neighbouring dioceses. The wool comes from lambs blessed each year on the feast of St Agnes, 21 January, at her church in Rome. The finished pallia are blessed by the Pope, traditionally on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, and rest near the tomb of St Peter until they are given.

How they are imposed has varied. For some years they were placed on the archbishops in Rome. Pope Francis asked that they be imposed in the archbishop's own church. More recently the older public rite in Rome has been used again. The meaning has stayed the same. The wool speaks of communion with Peter, of pastoral care, and of a girl-martyr whose lambs still give the Church her thread.

Gloves, special shoes, and the dalmatic worn under a bishop's chasuble survive now mostly in older usage or in very solemn Masses. When the extra cloth disappears, the office does not. It only becomes harder to see.

If your bishop vests simply, do not despise him. If he vests fully, do not adore the wool. Watch for the pallium if he has one. It is the quietest of the extra things: a band of sheep's wool worn over the little house.

A Small Reflection

A bishop's extra signs are not for making him look important. They are signs of a job he did not invent. Most real responsibility is like that. It was given. It can be asked back.

A short prayer

Christ the Shepherd, keep every extra sign from becoming a claim, and every simple vesting from becoming a shrug. Amen.

Chapter 13

LIVING UNDER SOMEONE ELSE'S CLOTH

Most readers will never wear many of these garments. All of us can learn to notice what they are saying.

Let the colour tell you the day. Let the covering tell you that this hour is not only the man's. Let the stole at a hospital bed tell you that the office will travel in a bag. Let the cope at a graveside tell you that the rite has left the building and is still the rite. Let the veil at Benediction tell you that even consecrating hands do not own what they carry.

Refuse two cheap pictures. One is the vestment as a museum piece, loved more than the Mass it serves. The other is the vestment as an embarrassment, hidden because the age is casual. Both pictures treat cloth as the main word. The main word is the prayer said while the arms are still in the sleeves. Everything visible is a consequence.

If you sew, or iron, or mend, you are already in the story. Someone has to keep the little house standing. Sacristy work is not less liturgical than singing. This hidden practical work makes the Church's public worship possible.

When you next see a man disappear into white and come out a colour of the year, remember the helmet you cannot see, the cord you will not inspect, the yoke, the house, and the veil that will not let familiarity become carelessness. He is not performing. He is being covered for a work that could not be done in a coat.

A Small Reflection

After this book you may notice a colour, a cord or a veil and know a little more of what they mean. That is enough. The Church often teaches through ordinary things. You do not need a lecture. You only need to look.

A short prayer

Clothe Your ministers with salvation, Lord, and let us, who watch, live under the same mercy they put on. Amen.

A Last Word

A helmet no one sees. A white garment that remembers Baptism. A cord. A strip of cloth that most of us never see now. A stole. A little house. A deacon's sleeved tunic. A cloak for processions. A veil over the hands at Benediction. Two rose Sundays. Wool from lambs blessed on the feast of St Agnes.

That is enough of the wardrobe for one sitting. The rest is in the sacristy this week.

Next Sunday you may notice a colour, a veil, or a stole that has been in front of you for years. That is enough. The Church often teaches through ordinary things.

St John Vianney, pray for us. St Agnes, pray for us. St Joseph, guardian of hidden work, pray for us.



Silent Homilies
Little Treasures

A word of thanks

If these pages have helped you see the cloth at the altar as a prayer and not only as a colour, a small gift on the Silent Homilies website would be received with real gratitude. It is never asked as a condition of reading — only as a kindness, if you wish and if you can.

Printing tip

This booklet is designed in A5 format. For best results print double-sided on A5 paper (or print two pages per A4 sheet and cut). Recommended paper: 80–100 gsm for a pleasant reading feel.