

During this “**Year of the Eucharist**” we will be looking at the celebration of the Eucharist — that is, the Mass — in more detail. The more we know about the Mass, the more we see the meaning behind each word, gesture and — yes! — even the vestments, the more we can appreciate it and enter into it more fully. This week, we will be examining the liturgical garments the priest wears at Mass; in other words, the **vestments**.

WHY DOES THE PRIEST WEAR WHAT HE DOES? WHAT IS THE MEANING BEHIND THE VESTMENTS?

In Catholic tradition, *everything* has a meaning and a purpose. This includes what the priest wears, even the *color* of what he wears. First, the **alb**. It is a long white robe and is a symbol of purity. By wearing this garment, the priest is praying that he will strive to be in a state of purity to celebrate Mass. The second thing he wears is a **cincture**. This is the cord that he ties around his waist. It is meant to be a reminder to the priest of his chastity. He typically prays a prayer that says, in effect, “*Gird me, O Lord, with the cincture of chastity.*” The priest then puts on a **stole**. The stole has its’ origin in the Jewish prayer shawl and is symbolic of the spiritual authority of the priest. This is why the stole is worn for everything — confessions, Mass, anointings — that a priest does. It is a long piece of cloth that is worn like a scarf over the neck and down the front of his chest, usually ending below his knees. You can usually see it peeking out from below the next vestment . . . the **chasuble**. This is the poncho-like garment that the priest wears over the stole and alb. It is meant to represent the charity required of the priest. He is meant to “*cloak himself in charity,*” or love. (The root word of charity — *caritas* in Latin — is the same word for love.) There is a very specific reason why the stole is worn *under* the chasuble. It is meant to symbolize that first and foremost, over (literally) everything else, including any authority the priest has, he is to put love and charity first.



You may also notice that the color of the chasuble changes throughout the year. This is intentional. Each color is meant to represent a certain day or season.

White: Worn during the Christmas and Easter Seasons, as well as at baptisms and funerals. White is also worn on the feast days of saints who were not martyrs. It represents purity and “new life.”

Violet (Purple): Typically worn during Advent and Lent, both of which are penitential seasons. (Violet is the color of repentance, which is why the priest wears a violet stole during confessions.)

Rose: Worn on the Third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday) and the Fourth Sunday of Lent (Laetare Sunday.) It symbolizes joy.



Red: Since it is the color of blood, it is worn on the feast day of martyrs. It is also worn on Passion Sunday (Palm Sunday) and Good Friday, for these reasons. It is also worn on days associated with the Holy Spirit (Pentecost, for example, or Confirmation.) It is meant to evoke martyrdom, or “witness,” which is what the word martyr means.

Green: Green is worn during Ordinary Time, not because it is ordinary as in “ho-hum” but because it is in a week outside of a season (Christmas, say, or Lent.) Those weeks are identified by numbers; the Fifth Week in Ordinary Time, for example. We get the word ordinary from the Latin word *ordinalis*, which refers to numbers in a series.

So, I hope this helps! Next time you see the priest wearing a violet vestment, for example, or a red one, you will know exactly why!