

The Clothes that “Make the Priest...” There is an expression that most of us are familiar with: “It’s the clothes that make the man.” That saying conveys the idea that dressing well is a virtue and earns people’s respect. Although the majority of priests would not win a fashion contest, we do wear special clothes and vestments that identify us as ministers of the Lord. I thought it would be interesting in my bulletin article this week to discuss some of the “clothes that make the priest” liturgically speaking. First of all there is the Roman collar. The Roman collar is a black and white neckband that is part of the priest’s street dress outside of the church or rectory. The collar is usually attached to a black shirt or to a special vest known as a rabat. A cassock is a long black robe that is fixed with several buttons down the front. Although many priests do not wear the cassock anymore, I enjoy wearing mine on the weekend when giving our Holy Communion at Mass. When performing a liturgical function, the priest will don a white surplice over the cassock. A surplice is a large sleeved tunic that comes down about half-length. Then there are the vestments that we use during the celebration of the Mass. The alb is a long white robe common to priests, deacons and to those entrusted with a special ministry in the church. When the priest puts the alb on he prays “purify me O Lord from all stain of sin that washed in the Blood of the Lamb that I may enjoy eternal delights.” The cincture is simply a cord or rope which the priest ties to secure the alb at the waist. When fastening the cincture the priest says, “gird me with the cincture of purity so that the virtue of chastity will remain in me.” The stole is a long, narrow band of cloth that the priest wears around the neck and hanging down in front, the deacon wears the stole over his shoulder and drawn across the chest to the right side where it is fastened. In the prayer that is said when donning the stole, the priest prays, “restore to me Lord the stole of immortality that was lost by our first parents...” Finally, the chasuble is placed over everything. The chasuble is an ample tent-like garment. The word chasuble comes from the Latin “casula” which means “little house.” In explaining this vestment to little children, I explain that it covers us up like a little house! The vesting prayer for the chasuble may be: “Lord, You said ‘My yoke is easy and my burden light,’ grant that I may carry it so as to obtain your grace and favor.” The liturgical colors of the vestments may be white, gold, red, green, rose and black. We can trace the use of special vestments right back to the Old Testament priests. In the early church, even in the catacombs, priests and bishops were specially garbed when celebrating the Mass. So the tradition of wearing vestments is an old and established one. Although we don’t go to church just to see special and pretty clothes, the special vestments reminds us that what occurs in Church is sacred and holy indeed. It is also a good reminder to us to dress modestly and appropriately for Mass on Sunday. Although clothes do not define a priest or a Christian, they do express reverence for the presence of God, and that reverence is needed in our own times where people easily forget God. May we as Christians always worship the Lord in holy attire! Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. Jerome