

# **Traditional Vestment Colors Their Meanings and Times of Use**

## **Different Colors, Different Meanings**

As might be expected, each of the vestment colors has its own meaning. The Holy Eucharist – Mass is offered for many purposes and in honor of many classes of Saints; these various purposes are all designed and symbolized by the color of the Vestments – Paraments which the Church prescribes for each Mass.

Seven vestment colors are customarily permitted by the Christian Church in regard to Sacred Vesture and Altar Paraments (altar frontal, lectern hangings). These colors are White, Red, Green, Purple/Violet, Blue, Rose, and Black.

### **White**

When the Church wishes to denote Purity, Innocence or Glory, she uses White; that is, on the Feasts of Our Lord and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the festivals of the Holy Angels and of those Saints who were not Martyrs. White is also a “default” color which means it suffices should the other color vestments not be available.

### **Red**

Red is the color of fire and of blood; it is used in Masses of the Holy Spirit, such as on Pentecost, to remind us of the tongues of fire and on the Feasts of those Saints who shed their blood for the Faith.

### **Green**

The color Green is used from the Octave of the Epiphany to Septuagesima, and from the Octave of Pentecost to the 1st Sunday of Advent, except on Ember Days and Vigils during that time, and on Sundays occurring within an Octave. It indicates a time of growth, after Epiphany the growing awareness of the divinity of Christ, and after Pentecost, growing in the knowledge of the Faith.

### **Purple-Violet**

The use of Purple or Violet is used from the 1st Sunday of Advent and from Septuagesima to Easter, on Vigils that are Fast days, and on Ember days, except the Vigil of Pentecost and the Ember days during the Octave of Pentecost.

Purple/Violet is also used for Mass on Rogation days, for Votive Masses of the Passion and of Penitential character, at the blessing of candles and of holy water.

The Stole used in the administration of Penance and of Unction and in the first part of the Baptismal rite is to be Purple/Violet.

Violet is worn on the following occasions, of which the first four listed are not included in later editions of the Roman Missal:

Ember days.

Rogation days.

The three Sundays before Lent, Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima.

The Vigils of the Conception of Mary, Christmas, Epiphany, and the Dormition/ Assumption.

The Vigil of Easter and the Vigil of Pentecost, up to but not including the Mass.

The Communion part of the Pre-Sanctified on Good Friday.

### **Blue Vestments**

Blue (Pale or Marian blue) has traditionally been used as one of the vestment colors in the countries of Spain, Portugal, Mexico and South America. In the Philippines it is used for all Feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a practice followed in some many other places. There has also been, an increasing use of Blue in place of Purple/Violet for the season of Advent.

### **Rose Colored Vestments**

Rose colored Vestments/ Paraments are permitted on the third Sunday of Advent and the fourth Sunday of Lent. The rose vestment set is also allowed for the Communion part on Good Friday, and the first part of the Easter Vigil, but white is worn for the Mass.

### **Black**

Black Vestments have traditionally been worn at all Requiem Masses including All Souls' Day; at the Good Friday Liturgy up to but not including the Communion service. Since the early 1970's the use of White has been allowed for Funerals. Traditionally White was also the use for Funerals of children under the age of 6-8 years

### **Other Permitted Vestment Colors**

The medieval use of Sarum-Salisbury allowed for other various vestment colors including Blue and Yellow. This use however was considered by Rome of a local use and was therefore considered improper for those outside of the Salisbury diocese.

Vestments of Cloth of Gold or Gold silk are allowed; in most cases this rich fabric is used as a substitute for Major feasts such as The Nativity of Our Lord; Feast of the Resurrection etc.

### **Conclusion**

The use of a defined color scheme is not of ancient protocol but developed over time. Generally the best vestments of whatever color were used for major feasts and the lesser ones for everyday use. White (and lighter colors) for joyful times, darker colors for penitential times and funerals.