

“Diversity of color in the sacred vestments has as its purpose to give more effective expression even outwardly whether to the specific character of the mysteries of faith to be celebrated or to a sense of Christian life’s passage through the course of the liturgical year” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* 345).

Sacraments are outward signs of God’s grace. As such, they need to be seen and sensed in order to have their effect. The visual images and symbols with which we celebrate the sacraments help to make this possible. One of the symbols we use in the celebration of the Eucharist is the variety of colors of the liturgical vestments worn by the priest and deacon. Each color symbolizes some aspect of the mystery we are celebrating or of the liturgical feast or season.

The color white symbolizes rejoicing and the newness of life won for us in Christ, like the white robed saints in glory. It is worn throughout the Christmas and Easter seasons, other feasts of the Lord and saints, and at ritual Masses such as weddings and funerals.

The color red symbolizes the Holy Spirit, who descended on the apostles as tongues of flame, and the blood of Christ and the martyrs. It is worn on Palm Sunday and Good Friday, Pentecost, and the feasts of martyrs, apostles, and evangelists.

The color green symbolizes the hope of new life, promised in Christ, like the green buds soon to blossom on tree branches in the spring. It is worn during the longest liturgical season of the year, Ordinary Time, when we focus on the public ministry and daily life of Jesus.

The color violet symbolizes penance. It originally symbolized royalty, as the dye to make violet cloth was so costly only kings and other persons of rank could afford it. The soldiers’ mockery of Jesus during his passion by draping a violet cloak over him and taunting him as the “King of the Jews” led to the adoption of violet as a color of penance and atonement for sin. It is worn during the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent.

So the next time you see the color that the priest and deacon are wearing, remember what it means and let that awareness enhance your celebration of the Mass.