



## The Bishop's Regalia by Fr. William Saunders 6/20/03

Bishops wear certain regalia which are distinctive of the Order of the Bishop, the fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders — the pectoral cross, ring, mitre, crozier (staff) and, for archbishops, the pallium.

The regular regalia, which identify a bishop, are the pectoral cross and the ring. The pectoral cross (*crux pectoralis*) is worn by the Holy Father, cardinals, bishops, and abbots. The word pectoral derives from the Latin *pectus*, which means "breast." This cross is attached to a chain (or cord) and is worn on the chest, near the heart. In the earliest times, the pectoral cross contained a relic of the True Cross, or even a saint. While not all the pectoral crosses today continue to contain a relic, the tradition remains. Interestingly, in 1889, the Holy See recommended that the pectoral cross of a deceased bishop, which contained a relic of the True Cross, be given to his successor. When putting on the pectoral cross, traditionally the bishop says, "*Munire me digneris*," asking the Lord for strength and protection against all evil and all enemies, and to be mindful of His Passion and cross.

Bishops also wear a ring. In the past, a distinction was made between the pontifical ring (which would have a gemstone, traditionally an amethyst), and the ordinary ring (which would have the bishop's coat of arms or some other design engraved on it). The ring, like a wedding band, symbolizes that the bishop is "wedded" to his diocese. Also, the ring would be used, at least in days ago, to make the important imprint of the bishop's seal in hot wax to authenticate documents. Moreover, in Catholic tradition, to reverence or "kiss" the ring of the bishop, as a sign of respect for his authority, is still proper; interestingly, a partial indulgence was attached to the reverencing of the bishop's ring.

The other regalia — the mitre, crozier and pallium — are used for liturgical functions. The mitre is a "headdress." The word "mitre" derives from the Greek *mitra*, which signifies a headband or diadem. In the Old Testament, the high priest and other priests wore a distinctive garb which included a mitre: "For Aaron and his sons, there were also woven tunics of fine linen; the mitre of fine linen; the ornate turbans of the fine linen; drawers of linen (of fine linen twined); and sashes of variegated work made of fine linen twined and of violet, purple and scarlet yarn, as the Lord had commanded Moses. The plate of the sacred diadem was made of pure gold and inscribed, as on a seal engraving: 'Sacred to the Lord.' It was tied over the mitre with the violet ribbon, as the Lord had commanded Moses," (Ex 39:27-31; cf. Lv 8:7-9).

Exactly when the Church adopted the mitre as part of the vesture of bishops is hard to pinpoint. One tradition holds that the mitre's usage dates to the time of the Apostles; other traditions place its first usage at about the eight or ninth centuries. Of course artists have taken the liberty to depict the apostles and earliest saints who were bishops as wearing mitres. The first written mention of the mitre is in a bull issued by Pope Leo IX in the year 1049, when he granted Bishop Eberhard of Trier "the Roman mitre" as a

sign of his authority and of the primacy of the Diocese of Trier. By 1100, a bishop customarily wore a mitre.

In the Latin Rite, the mitre originally was a headband with a veil, and eventually appeared more in its present triangular form pointing upward with two *infulae* or fans (two strips of cloth from behind). Some suggest that the *infulae* originated from the sweatband that Greek athletes wore, which was wrapped around the forehead, tied behind the head in a knot with the two ends hanging down from the back. Since the victorious athlete was crowned with a laurel wreath, the whole headdress soon was seen as a sign of victory. The mitre took on a similar symbolic meaning. Such symbolism arises from St. Paul's analogy: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on a merited crown awaits me..." (2 Tm 4:7-8). Surely, the bishop should be leading his flock in the race to salvation to final victory in Heaven.

Over the centuries, mitres were elongated or embellished according to the times. For example, during the baroque period, mitres were very tall and were embellished with jewels. Also, please note that in the Eastern Rites, the bishops wear a mitre that looks like an ornamented round hat with a cross on top.

The crozier, or officially the pastoral staff (*baculis pastoralis*), symbolizes the role of the bishop as the Good Shepherd. The word translated as "good" in the original Greek text is *kalos*, which also means "model." Our Lord is the model shepherd for the apostles and their successors, the bishops, who are appointed as shepherds. The bishop, like a good shepherd, must lead his faithful flock along the path of salvation, disciplining and protecting them as needed. The shepherd's staff is therefore a most appropriate symbol for the office of bishop. St. Isidore explained that a newly consecrated bishop received the crozier "so that he may govern and correct those below him or to offer support to the weakest of the weak." Since the time of Pope Paul VI, the Holy Father's crozier has a curved cross at the top, which symbolizes his special office as not only Bishop of Rome, but also the Vicar of Christ who is entrusted with the leadership of the universal Church.

Finally, the Holy Father, Metropolitan Archbishops and the Patriarch of Jerusalem also wears a pallium. (A metropolitan archbishop is one who actually governs an archdiocese and heads a province.) The pallium is a strip of white wool which is worn around the neck like a collar, over the chasuble, with two strips — one hanging down the front and one hanging down the back. Predating Christianity, the pallium was about 12 feet in length and worn for warmth. Christians adopted this garment and viewed it as a sign of their fidelity to Christ. The usage of the pallium evolved over time. By the third century, it was worn by both the laity and clergy; by the fourth century, by the pope and eventually exclusively by him alone; by the fifth century, by the pope and those important clergy who had received it as a gift from the pope; by the ninth century, exclusively by the pope, metropolitans, archbishops, and bishops of special distinction; and by a decree of 1978, to metropolitan archbishops and the Patriarch of Jerusalem, as well as the pope.

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