



Understanding the Mass

Part I

The Introductory Rites

When does Mass begin?

Remotely, Mass begins when you are sent from Mass the previous Sunday as everything you do during the week is preparation for the coming Sunday. Key to this time is actually preparing for Mass by reading the Scriptures assigned to the next Sunday. They are easily available online.

In a more immediate way, Mass begins when you decide you are going to Church. The manner of your dress and the positive attitude you take with you sets the tone for your experience of the Liturgy. Remember your action is prophetic as those around you see you witness to the centrality of your faith.

Significance of the Church Bell

The ringing of church bells in the Catholic tradition dates back to the end of the 4th century and was sanctioned by Pope Sabinianus in the 604. Prior to this bells were rung by pagans to ward off evil spirits. While some of this understanding may have carried over in the early Church, today bells are rung to symbolize the Voice of God calling people to come forth from their homes or workplaces and to assemble for worship. At the end of Mass, the bells are rung to signify the joy that the assembly has in being sent as the voice of God to proclaim the Good News.

Arrival at the Church

Whether you walk to church or drive, once you arrive at the church grounds, your preparation for Mass should become more serious. Why are you

here? What do you need from God? What is God asking of you? The church grounds should be well maintained so that the lawns, flowers, trees, statues and shrines direct attention to the sacred nature of this space.

Greeting Others before Mass

The communal nature of worship means that others will be present. Taking time to greet others is perfectly acceptable. At the same time, we must be aware of those who are preparing themselves for Mass by quiet prayer.

Entering the Church

The doors of a church are significant and symbolize the person of Christ who is the Way and the One through whom we enter into union with God. Holy water is placed near the entrance to remind us that we first entered into Christ through the Sacrament of Baptism. Here we make the simplest of all prayers as we sign ourselves with the Cross and call upon the Holy Trinity.



Genuflecting or Bowing Profoundly

Before entering a pew or finding a seat, we take a moment to acknowledge God's presence among us by "bending the knee" in adoration, especially when the

Most Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the tabernacle behind the main altar. Those unable to genuflect may make a profound bow.

The Purpose of the Introductory Rites

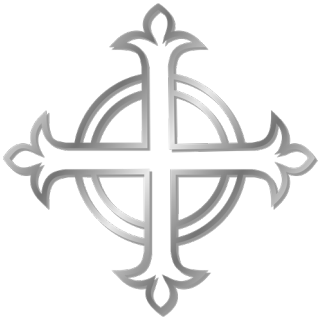
So far everything we have done has been done individually. The remaining parts of the Introductory Rites are intended to "gather" individuals together and to make them one community that is ready to listen, to celebrate, and to manifest the presence of Christ.

The Entrance Song

The old adage reminds us that "those who sing, pray twice." By joining together in song, the assembly unites their voices and, if done well, lifts their minds to Sacred Mysteries about to be celebrated.

The Procession

The ministers along with the deacon and priest make their way from the gathering space to the sanctuary. In so doing, they are supposed to direct the attention of the assembly to the altar which is Christ. This is not a time for high fives or hellos, but of focusing on the mysteries at hand. The deacon and priest reverence the altar with a kiss acknowledging Christ's presence.



The Sign of the Cross and Greeting

Though all too often done without thinking, the Sign of the Cross at the beginning of Mass invites us into the mystery of the Holy Trinity and work of salvation accomplished by Christ on the

cross. The words of the greeting which follow likewise make real this invitation.

The Act of Penance

After the greeting and welcome, the presider invites the assembly to a moment of silent reflection wherein each person acknowledge that they have sinned and are in need of God's forgiveness.

The Confiteor is one of the Acts of Penitence that may be prayed...*I confess to Almighty God...*it helps us to understand that we sin by commission and omission and that ask the Blessed Mother, the Angels and Saints together with those gathered to pray that we be forgiven. During the Confiteor we strike our breast, according to Saint Jerome, as a physical sign that we wish to dispel evil from our hearts. Only one strike of the breast is required even though the common practice is to strike the breast three times.

Kyrie Eleison is the Greek text for the English, Lord, have mercy. This phrase is meant to praise God as we call upon His mercy. The focus is not us as sinners, but on God who loves us despite knowing that we have sinned. The prayer of absolution that follows does not have the same effect as celebrating the Sacrament of Penance.

Blessing and Sprinkling of Holy Water is an option that replaces the two Acts of Penitence above. On Sundays, especially during the Easter Season, the blessing and sprinkling of holy water during the introductory rites again unifies the assembly which in this act recalls baptism, the sacrament through which we enter the Church, the Body of Christ.

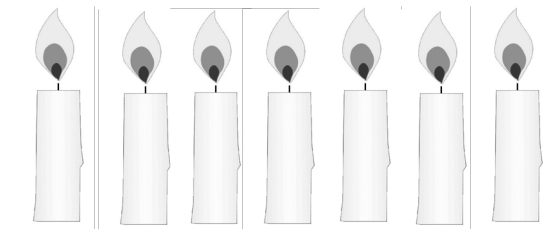
The Glory to God

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will" (Luke 2:14) is an ancient hymn of praise, echoing the song of the angels at Bethlehem proclaiming Jesus' birth. Having asked for God's forgiveness, now we praise Him for His goodness. We can think of this as being meant to cheer us up in case we get down about our sins. The Gloria is omitted during Advent as a reminder we are waiting for Jesus to come, so we hold off doing anything joyful until His birth; and it is also omitted during Lent because, in light of our sins, we subdue our joy until the celebration of His resurrection.

The text elaborates on this message of the angels, recognizing the goodness and mercy of the Lord God through his Son, Jesus Christ. This prayer dates back to the sixth century and began to be used only at Masses when a bishop was the celebrant, and then only on solemn feasts. However, the beauty of this prayer captivated the priests and faithful. Slowly, permission was granted for priests to use it, but at first only for Easter. By the 12th century, the Glory to God reached its current level of use within the Mass. Today, the Glory to God is sung or said at all Sunday Masses, solemnities, and feasts except during the seasons of Advent and Lent. Even during Advent and Lent, the Glory to God is sung or said at weddings, ordinations and other festive occasions in the life of the Church. Whether sung or said, this prayer is one of praise, and our voices should be lifted in praise as we say it!

The Collect or Opening Prayer

Rather than Opening Prayer this prayer is more properly called the Collect. The presider announces "Let us pray." During a moment of silence, the assembly does just that as they call to mind their needs before God. The prayer which follows and is particular to the Sunday or the particular celebration has the purpose of "collecting" the prayers of the assembly into one and offering them to the Father in the Son and through the Holy Spirit. All are then invited to say "amen" (I believe) in unison having been made one body ready and willing to listen to the Word of God.





Understanding the Mass

Part 2

The Liturgy of the Word

The Lectionary

At the Second Vatican Council, the Lectionary was developed based on studies that had been made of the early Church. Christians in the first centuries after Christ adapted the Jewish synagogue service for the celebration of the Eucharist. Like their Jewish elders, the Church chose continuous readings from the Law and the Prophets adding to them the letters of Paul and the stories of Jesus found in the Gospels.

Certain readings were assigned to particular festive celebrations or to places of pilgrimage commemorating the life of Christ.

The current Lectionary provides a continuous reading of the Sacred Scriptures—a three-year cycle for Sundays and a two-year cycle for week days. Each year of the Sunday cycle focuses on a particular Gospel (Matthew—A; Mark—B; and Luke—C). Passages from the Gospel of John appear at different times in all three years.

You may realize that the first readings and responsorial psalms were selected to highlight some aspect of the Gospel for the day. The second readings are generally a continuous reading from a particular letter of Saint Paul or another of the pastoral letters. During the Easter Season, the first reading comes from the Acts of the Apostles and the second reading sometimes from the Book of Revelation.

The Ministry of Lector

The Lector or Reader has a vital role in the Liturgy of the Word. He or she is charged with the responsibility of proclaiming the Word of God. As such, they must be excellent readers who study the Scriptural texts and prepare to proclaim them by practicing. Since the Church teaches that it is Christ who speaks to us in the Word, all in the assembly should

be able to hear and understand the readings when proclaimed without having to rely on reading a written text.

What is the Ambo?

The ambo is the place from which the readings, the responsorial psalm, the Gospel and homily are proclaimed. The Ambo is *the Altar of the Word*. It is to be substantial in nature and similar in design to the altar and sanctuary furniture and distinguished from a lectern or podium from which announcement are made or songs are led.

Silence is Key

The General Instructions of the Roman Missal encourage moments of silence after each reading so as to promote prayer and meditation through which each listener may hear the voice of the Lord. We must remember that we are not listening to “historical” narratives—the Lord is speaking to us *today and now* in this very moment.

The First Reading

As noted earlier, the first reading is taken from the Jewish Scriptures—the Law, Prophets, Wisdom Literature or the Historical Books. This reading usually foreshadows in some way the text of the Gospel to be read at the same Mass. In this way, the assembly comes to know that God has worked His salvation through history—in real people, like us.

During the Easter Season, the First Reading is taken from a continuous reading of the *Acts of the Apostles* so that we recall how the Holy Spirit gathered people of many languages and backgrounds into the community of the Church.

The Responsorial Psalm

The Psalms are the Hymn Book of the Church and in them are expressed the spectrum of human emotions. They are used in the context of the Liturgy of the Word to help us realize that, through generations, believers have sung these words making of them their own prayer to God...i.e. *the Lord is my Shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.*



The Second Reading

The second reading is usually taken from one of the Letters of Saint Paul or another of the Pastoral Letters of the New Testament. While the second reading does not intentionally connect to the first reading or the Gospel, it describes for us the wisdom offered by the Church's early pastors to their communities which, like ours today, struggled to understand how to apply Christian teachings to daily life. The response to both the first and second reading is: *Thanks be to God*—as we praise and thank God for speaking to us.

The Gospel Acclamation

The “Alleluia” which is sung during most of the liturgical year is not just a song—it is an action of the assembly by which we stand to welcome Christ, present in the Good News, with great joy. This acclamation is so important that the Roman Missal requires that it must always be sung, not recited.

During the Season of Lent, the Alleluia is not sung in anticipation of its announcing the Resurrection at Easter when of necessity the Alleluia is sung repeatedly. In Lent, a phrase praising Christ present in the Gospel are sung.

Alleluia!

The Proclamation of the Gospel

So important is the Proclamation of the Gospel that it is surrounded by rituals which are outlined below:

Change in Posture—with the singing of the Gospel Acclamation, the assembly stands. Standing is always a sign of the Resurrection and invites us to actively listen to the Words of the Gospel.

The Opening Dialogue—the deacon or priest proclaiming the Gospel informs us that it is Christ who speaks to us directly. *The Lord be with you. And with your spirit (words addressed to Christ). A reading from the holy gospel according to N. Glory to you, O Lord (notice the you is likewise addressed to Christ).* Christ then speaks to us today and now.

The Sign of the Cross—the act of making the sign of the cross three times (forehead, lips and breast) is a ritual gesture that we don't think about but it imitates what the deacon or priest does as they pray: “May the Lord be in my mind, on my lips and in my heart

that I may worthily proclaim the holy gospel.” Proclaim it in word and deed today and throughout the week.

The Book of the Gospels—The Gospels are so precious that they are collected in a Book separate from the other readings. The Gospels are of primary importance in the life of a Christian and are the lens through which we interpret all of the Sacred Scriptures. The Book of the Gospels may be highly decorated or be encased in a decorative cover.

The Gospel Procession—so important is the proclamation of the Gospel that the Book itself is carried with honor and dignity from the altar to the ambo. Like all processions, this is a moment for the assembly to be unified in its focus.

Other Reverences at the Gospel—the Book of the Gospel and proclamation of the Gospel are revered by being accompanied by candles, and on special occasions, by the use of incense. In addition, the page on which the Gospel is recorded is reverently kissed by the deacon, priest or bishop. And when the bishop presides at liturgy, he may bless the assembly with the Book of the Gospels after the proclamation of the Gospel.

The Proclamation—the words of Christ spoken to the assembly are generally proclaimed in spoken word. However, on special occasions, the words are sung to highlight their importance and to encourage attentive listening by the assembly.

The Homily

After the proclamation of the Gospel, the presider is charged with the responsibility of addressing the assembly—connecting the words proclaimed to the Christian life. Homilies require preparation but the faithful need to remember that not all priests and deacons are gifted orators. The homily is not intended to be entertainment, it is a serious call to believers encouraging them to live the Gospel.

The Profession of Faith

Again, the Church proclaims its unity by together stating what we believe in common.

The Prayer of the Faithful

The most immediate response to hearing the Word of God proclaimed and restating the tenets of our Faith is through the action of prayer. These Universal Prayers are not announcements, they are prayers offered for the Church in general, civil authorities, for common needs, for the poor, the sick and for those who have died.



Understanding the Mass

Part 3

Preparing the Altar & Gifts

In Between Time

The movement between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist requires a moment of transition. At a dinner party, there is ultimately a moment when the host invites those gathered to move from the living room to the dining table. At Mass, this transition must happen as well—though the transition doesn't involve us changing our seats.

Setting the Table of the Lord, the Altar

When a church is consecrated or a new altar is installed in a church, the altar must be consecrated. The beautiful rite of consecrating an altar requires that the bishop anoint the altar with Sacred Chrism, the Christ oil. As such the altar bears the presence of Christ, the "anointed one."

For this reason, only those things needed for the celebration of the Mass should ever be placed upon the altar. Those items are:

The Book of the Gospel—at the beginning of Mass, the Book of the Gospel is placed on the altar to signify the connection between the Word and the Eucharist.

The Altar Cloth—the Roman Missal requires that one white altar cloth cover at least the top of the altar (the mensa). If a second cloth is used, it may be white or a festive or seasonal color. Prior Missals required three cloths with the one in between being a cerecloth (a linen cloth imbedded with wax) so that a spill of the Precious Blood could be easily cleaned.

The Corporal—a corporal is a square linen cloth onto which is placed the prepared ciborium (container for the hosts) and chalice (cup for the wine/Precious Blood). Corporals are usually marked with a cross and are ironed in such a way that when folded, any particles of the Blessed Sacrament are

contained within.

The Purificator—a purificatory is another linen cloth, rectangular in shape that is used to wipe the chalice. It is likewise marked with a cross and ironed in a particular manner so as to fit across the top of a chalice. Along with the corporal, a purificator, which may have absorbed the Precious Blood, are purified by being soaked in the sacrarium (a special sink in the sacristy that drains directly into the earth instead of the sewer system). After having been soaked, they may be machine washed and then ironed by hand.

The Pall—a pall is square of dense paper or plastic that is covered with linen and often decorated. It is used to cover the chalice during the celebration of Mass so as to prevent insects or debris from falling into the chalice.

The Chalice Veil and Burse—the paten (plate for the large host used by the priest) and chalice are assembled in a particular manner. The purificator is placed over the chalice; the paten is placed on top of the purificator. The pall is then placed over the paten. A veil, usually made of fabric that matches the priest's vestments or the altar cloth, is placed over chalice and paten. On top is placed a burse—a square "pocket" covered with linen and usually decorated into which is placed the corporal.

Candles—out of reverence for the altar which is Christ, candles are placed on or near the altar. At least two candles are required. More may be used in accord with the solemnity of celebration. When the bishop visits a parish church, a seventh candle is added. The tradition of adding a seventh candle is of unknown origin but likely relates to "fullness" as expressed in the days of the week, the Sacraments and even to the Jewish seven-branched menorah.

The Roman Missal and Stand—the prayers for the entire Liturgy are found in the Roman Missal. It therefore must be placed on the altar for the celebration of Mass. In accord with the presider's preference, a stand may be used so that he can see the texts more clearly.

The Collection and Presentation of the Gifts

Following the Prayer of the Faithful, the assembly is seated and an *Offertory Song* or an instrumental piece is played. An offertory collection is taken among the faithful—these monetary offerings are gifts from our work and so represent us. They are

used for the support of the Church, its mission and the care of the poor. Once completed the monetary offering along with the bread and wine, also works of human hands that represent us, are brought to the sanctuary in procession. Like other processions in the Liturgy, this again is a moment for the assembly to be united as their offerings and individual intentions are brought to the Lord.

This is a significant moment in the Liturgy because, as noted above, the gifts brought to the altar symbolize us humans. The bread and wine, made by human hands which nourish us in our daily lives, are presented and transformed into Body and Blood of Christ meaning that we too are transformed. And then they are given to us as Holy Communion to effect that transformation—that we, indeed, may become what we receive.

For this reason, aside from the monetary collection, only bread and wine are presented in the presider. Water or flowers are not made by human hands, they are already divine gifts, so they do not represent us. Empty vessels are not be transformed in the Liturgy and so should not be included in the presentation of the gifts.

Preparation of the Chalice

The ciboria and hosts are placed adjacent to the corporal while the chalice is prepared. The priest or deacon adds a drop of water to the chalice while praying: *by the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbles himself to share in our humanity.* Water, a divine gift, here represents Christ who, by the mystery of the Incarnation, joined in our humanity, represented by the wine—a work of human hands.

This ritual dates to a time when water needed to be added to the wine which was stored in concentrated form so as to make it drinkable. As with many practical things in the Liturgy, the action was given religious meaning.

Prayers of the Priests Over the Gifts

After the deacon, or the priest himself, has prepared the chalice, the presider quietly prays over the ciborium or paten: *Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life.* To which, if there is no music, the people respond *Blessed be God for ever.* A similar prayer is prayed over the chalice: *Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness*

we have received the wine we offer you: fruit of the vine and work of human hands, it will become our spiritual drink. Again, the people respond: *Blessed be God for ever.*

The priest then bows and silently prays: *With humble spirit and contrite heart may we be accepted by you, O Lord, and may our sacrifice in your sight this day, be pleasing to you, Lord God.* The priest then turns and washes his hands while saying: *Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.*

Again the action of the priest washing his hands is rooted in the time when actual gifts were presented (the bread, wine, animals, fruits, vegetables, etc...). His hands, being dirty, needed washing. When such things were no longer presented, the hand washing took on spiritual significance taken from Psalm 51 which recounts David's unworthiness before God.

The Prayer Over the Gifts

As the priest calls upon the assembly to pray: *pray my brothers and sisters that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.* The people respond: *May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands, for the glory and praise of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.*

The assembly, now standing, are ready to hear the prayer prayed over the gifts which unites the actions, prayers and gestures into a single prayer that offers the bread and wine.



Understanding the Mass

Part 4

The Eucharistic Prayer

Lift Up Your Hearts

The Eucharistic Prayer begins with a dialogue which describes the action to come—it is right and just that we should lift up our hearts to Lord and give thanks. The word Eucharist is derived from the Greek, meaning “to give thanks”. The series of prayers that follow this dialogue are central to the action of the Mass, but are all too often “missed” by those gathered whose minds tend to drift as the priest prays.

Hutzpah!

Before looking at the parts of the Eucharistic Prayer, it is important to know that they are derived from the traditional Jewish table prayers recited at the Passover and at the weekly Sabbath meal. The Jewish people prayed with attitude—with hutzpah. They praised God for his actions throughout history beginning with Creation and concluding with the present day. They thanked God for redeeming them through Exodus and with firm faith and hutzpah they would ask (petition) God to do it all over again for them **today!**

The Preface

At Mass the *Preface*, which is specific to the particular celebration (the liturgical season or feast) narrates the great saving deeds of God through our history which includes what he has done for the Jewish people. It reminds us that Jesus is our Exodus—that in and through him, his life, death and resurrection, and his sending the Holy Spirit (the Paschal Mystery) we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven. Catholics should listen to these words and with hutzpah ask God to once again, here and now—

today realize our redemption by our participation in these sacred mysteries.

The Sanctus

This song of the angels found in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah recounts the prophet’s vision of God’s throne located in the Temple. Isaiah saw—the glory of God represented by the train of his garment and a cloud of incense filling the Temple—all of heaven and earth—every nook and cranny. To this is added, from Saint Matthew’s Gospel, the words shouted at Jesus as he entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday—*hosanna in the highest*. “Hosanna” is an expression of praise and rejoicing addressed to the one who saves. *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord* reminds us that the Son of God deigned to descend from the glory of heaven; that he entered into the Holy City of Jerusalem to suffer and die for us; and that in this Eucharist, he comes under the form of bread and wine to save us **today**.

It is with hutzpah that we should sing this hymn, our response to the *Preface*, and recount the great love that God has for us in sending his son redeem us.

Kneeling

The bishops of the United States requested and received an indult from the Holy See that has the faithful kneel

from the end of the *Sanctus* until the *Great Doxology*. This change in position reminds us that we come humbly before God as we silently join the priest in prayer—attentively listening to the words of the *Eucharistic Prayer*. In doing so, the sacred actions at the altar also transform the hearts of the faithful gathered uniting them as the Body of Christ.

The First Epiclesis (Ehp—eh—clee—sis)

The words prayed by the priest after the *Sanctus* acknowledge the trinitarian nature of God who is indeed holy. It is God who gives life and holiness to us and who gathers us from the corners of the world inviting us to make a continuous sacrifice *from the rising of the son to its setting*.

Then extending his hands over the bread and wine, the priest calls down the Holy Spirit by whose power these gifts (and us) will be transformed—a divine, not a human, action.



The Institution Narrative

Faithful to the Lord's command at the Last Supper, "Do this in memory of me," the Eucharistic Prayer continues with the priest narrating, in word and ritual, what Jesus did on the night before he suffered. The telling of this story *and* the work of the Holy Spirit *consecrates* the bread and wine which become the Body and Blood of the Lord.

Part of the ritual action has the priest elevate the Body of Christ (Host) and the Blood of Christ (Chalice). This dates

back to the medieval Church when the faithful rarely received Holy Communion and therefore at least wanted to see the Host and Chalice. The priest

then reverently genuflects in humble adoration and while not required, bells are often rung at this moment to add solemnity and too call the faithful's attention to this moment. In the past, the church's main tower bell would also be rung so that the faithful outside could pause for a moment of silent adoration.

The Anamnesis (A-nahm-knee-sis)

The *Memorial Acclamation* is a response made by the faithful to what has just happened at the consecration. Anamnesis is a fancy Greek word that simply means "remembrance". This moment of remembering, however, has a triple significance. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, "The Eucharist (i) looks to the past, commemorating the passion of Christ... (2) it looks to the present, signifying the unity of the Church...and (iii) it looks to the future, prefiguring our enjoyment with God in heaven (Summa IIIa 73.4).

The Offering and Second Epiclesis

As the Eucharistic Prayer continues, the Body and Blood are offered to God—these gifts given to us and representing us—help us to learn to offer ourselves by joining our lives to Christ's. He emptied himself for our salvation and calls us to similarly pour out our lives for others. Again, the priest calls down the Holy Spirit to form us into the Church—"grant that we, who are nourished with the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with the Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ."

The Intercessions

Again, like the prayers offered by the Jewish people at Passover and Sabbath table, the Eucharistic Prayer contains specific petitions for the Church, the Pope, the bishops, for the members of the Church, for the dead, and for our future joining with Christ and the communion of saints in eternal glory.

The Great Doxology

Elevating the Host and Chalice, the priest says or sings a hymn that sums up what has just happened in the Eucharistic Prayer. We have recounted God's great love for us in redeeming us through his Son and sending the Holy

Spirit to make us into his holy people. It is a recognition that everything we have is graciously given to us by our loving God. Our response in one word is profound—"Amen"—a word that means "I believe." *All glory and honor are yours, for ever and ever.*

About the Eucharistic Prayers

The Church in the United States has ten different Eucharistic Prayers to choose from. However, most often we hear one of the four traditional prayers.

Eucharistic Prayer I is called the Roman Canon and was exclusively used from the time of the Council of Trent (mid-16th C) until the Second Vatican Council—it is rooted in the tradition of the ancient Church at Alexandria in Egypt.

Eucharistic Prayer II (most people's favorite since it is the shortest) is attributed to a 3rd C Roman priest named Hippolytus...but has its roots in the tradition of the ancient Church at Antioch in Turkey.

Eucharistic Prayers III and IV were composed during and after the Second Vatican Council but are likewise patterned after the prayers found in Antioch in Turkey. Eucharistic Prayer IV is unique because it comes with its own *Preface* meaning that its use is restricted to Ordinary Time on days not commemorating a saint or feast.

Other Eucharistic Prayers were also composed in the years after the Second Vatican Council—including those for Masses with Children; Masses of Reconciliation; and others adopted from other countries and focused on other needs.





Understanding the Mass

Part 5

The Rite of Communion

Introduction

On the Road to Emmaus, the two disciples listened to their fellow traveler and their hearts burned within them. At table, he gave thanks and broke the bread and that action, they recognized the Risen Lord. At every Mass, we listen, we give thanks, and we share the Body and Blood of Christ so that in fact we may become what we receive.

The Lord's Prayer

The first preparation for the reception of Holy Communion is to pray the prayer that Jesus himself taught his disciples—reaffirming who we are as members of His Body.

United in prayer to “Our Father,” the community acknowledges the holiness of God’s name which should never be taken in vane (Second Commandment). It prays for the coming of the Kingdom in its fullness and that God’s will, not our own, be done on earth just as it is in heaven. The community also asks for sustenance, most especially in the daily bread of the Eucharist, and seeks forgiveness and freedom from temptation and evil.

Gestures During the Our Father

No where in the General Instructions of the Roman Missal are directions given instructing the faithful to join hands for the Our Father. In fact, the practice is discouraged for the simple reason that joining hands can be considered intimate contact that may be difficult for some who are expected to hold hands with a stranger. While not forbidden, great care should be taken not to impose the practice at Mass. In the same way, only the priest is instructed to extend his hands during the prayer.

The question “why?” should be asked when gestures not called for by the Missal are introduced.

Embolism & Doxology

The words spoken by the priest after the Our Father are called an embolism. With these words, he restates the assembly’s request for freedom from evil and sin, for relief from all distress and for peace. For all of this, we must rely upon God’s mercy, especially in this present time while we await the second coming of Christ.

The people respond with an antiphon of praise. *For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever.*

The Rite of Peace

This simple rite has been placed at various points in the Mass over the course of Church history—each with its own significance. For some time it was placed at the beginning of Mass between the Penitential Act and the Gloria as a way of signifying unity among the assembly. At other times it was placed before the Preparation of the Altar in keeping with the Scriptures that tell us to *leave your gift at the altar and go first to be reconciled with your brother*. It was, however, Saint Augustine who placed it where we find it today—between the Eucharistic Prayer and the Reception of Holy Communion. Here, it shows the unity of the assembly created by the Holy Spirit during the Eucharistic Prayer and which will be effected by sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ.

During this rite, the deacon or priest invites the people, *let us offer each other a sign of peace*. The sign given has and can be interpreted in accord with the circumstances. While a couple may wish to offer each other a kiss, a hand shake or a wave can be sufficient. People should not get upset when the person next to them does not wish to shake hands—they may be trying to preserve you from the common cold or COVID.

Fraction

There are two parts to the Fraction Rite—the breaking of the bread and the mingling of the Body with the Blood.

The Breaking of the Bread signifies that the many faithful are made one body from the one Bread of Life which is Christ. It is Christ Himself who feeds us and who is not diminished by being broken just as love given away is never lessened. We each share in the whole Christ.

The mingling of the Body and Blood of Christ is that moment when the priest breaks a small piece of the Host and places it into the Chalice. As he does so, he prays: *May this mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.* This action has a very long history in the Church's liturgy. In the ancient Church, the bishop alone celebrated the Sunday Mass in his church. When parishes were founded to carry out the work of the Church more locally, the pastor of every parish participated in the bishop's Mass and carried to his parish church a small fragment of the Eucharist. During Mass celebrated at the parish, this fragment was placed into the Chalice to remind all gathered that they were united to their bishop and the other parishes of the diocese. Again, emphasizing the unity of the Church.

The Agnus Dei

The *Lamb of God* is a 7th C addition to the Mass. Sung or recited during the Breaking of the Bread, it is an acclamation that provides the faithful another opportunity to praise God for the sacrifice of His Son, the Lamb of God, which has won for us the gift of salvation.

Quietly the priest prays: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, who, by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit, through your Death gave life to the world, free me by this, your most holy Body and Blood, from all my sins and from every evil; keep me always faithful to your commandments and never let me be departed from you.* As a sign of reverence, he genuflects.

Elevation of the Body and Blood

Having prayerfully prepared his own heart, the priest raises the Host and Chalice and proclaims: *Behold the Lamb of God; behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.* The word *behold* or in Latin *Ecce* should bring to mind several Scripture passages. The first, in the Gospel of John—John the Baptist points to Jesus and says “*Behold the Lamb of God.*” Then, also in the Gospel of John—Pontius Pilate presents Jesus to the jeering crowd saying “*Behold the man!*” And on Good Friday we say “*Behold the wood of the cross.*” The word “*behold*” has us fix our gaze on depths of a mystery—in which is revealed God's love for us.

The only possible response—*Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.* Like the many sinners Jesus welcomed to his table, so we are welcomed.

The Communion Procession and Song

As we have seen with other processions in the liturgy, the movement of the faithful towards the altar for the reception of Holy Communion has a purpose. It is not a time to greet friends and family or to contemplate the hair style or clothing of the person in front of you. It is a time to seriously reflect on what you are about to receive—the very Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Communion Song is not simply intended to cover the sound of people moving, it is to encourage contemplation on the Mystery we receive—listening to the words and signing them can help one to prepare their mind and heart to encounter the Lord who gives himself to us.

How to Receive

The Church provides two options for receiving the Body of Christ. One may receive on the tongue or in the hand. The priest, deacon or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion presents the Host and states—The Body of Christ. Names are not to be used at this moment (the Missal does not call for it) because the encounter is between the Host and communicant—not the with the minister. The communicant should loudly reply *Amen!* Which means I believe.

If receiving on the tongue, the communicant opens their mouth and extends their tongue onto which the minister places the Host.

If receiving in the hand, the communicant places their “writing hand” under their other hand into which the minister places the Host. Then using their “writing hand,” the communicant places the Host into their mouth.

Please remember that what we receive are the Body and Blood of Christ. It is incorrect to call the Sacred Species the bread and wine and displays a level of ignorance about what is offered at this most holy time.

Return to your seat and give quiet thanks to God.





Understanding the Mass

Part 6

The Concluding Rites

Continued from Last Week

Before delving into the Concluding Rites of the Mass, we need to finish the Rite of Communion. We left off with returning to your place after receiving Holy Communion and taking a moment to give thanks to God for Gift of His Son and the salvation He won for us.

Moment of Silence

The General Instructions remind us here of the need for moments of silence in the Liturgy. As it does after the readings and homily, the Missal calls for the priest and the faithful to “spend time praying privately.” A song may be sung at this point, but the same instructions expect that it sung by the whole assembly together as a sign of the communion they now share.

The Prayer After Communion

After a suitable time of private prayer, the priest rises and invites the people to pray. According to the Missal, this prayer has a specific purpose—to pray that the Communion we have just received may bear fruit in our lives, in the Church and for the world.

The Concluding Rites

Announcements

Here is the appropriate time for making announcements. If there are relatively few, the people may remain standing or the presider may ask them to be seated. Announcements should NOT be made as part of the *Rite of Communion*. However, they may be made before the beginning of Mass.

The Final Blessing

Again, the priest greets the people and the deacon invites them to bow down for the blessing. This blessing may be simple—the Sign of the Cross or it may be enriched on special occasions with a longer solemn prayer of blessing or a four-fold invocation before the Sign of the Cross.

The Dismissal

After the priest makes the Sign of the Cross in blessing, the deacon announces one of several forms of the dismissal—in Latin “*Ite Missa est!*” Literally, “Go forth, the Mass is ended.” The Latin word “missa” gives us the name for whole Eucharistic Liturgy, the Mass. The other dismissals help us to understand that— “*Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord*” and “*Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.*” The sense here is that we, having heard the Word of the Lord and received the Body and Blood of the Lord, are sent on mission. The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains that “the liturgy in

which the mystery of salvation is accomplished concludes with the sending forth (mission) of the faithful, so that they may fulfill God’s will in their daily lives” (CCC 1332). Sharing the mission of Christ, we are sent to use our God-given abilities to evangelize, to comfort and to help build up the Kingdom of God.



Reverence of the Altar

The priest and deacon then moves to the altar and kiss it. This is done, as

at the beginning of Mass, out of reverence for the presence of Christ who is himself the altar of sacrifice. The practice derives from the ancient Roman tradition of kissing the entrance to the pagan temples and the Roman family tradition of kissing the table when they sat down to eat. The Church “baptized” these practices by reverencing the altar, which contained a relic of a saint, with a kiss.

Concluding Procession

The priest and other liturgical ministers then gather at the foot of the altar, they genuflect in unison, and then follow the cross in procession to the outside of the church—leading the faithful in the mission to glorify the Lord with their lives.

The Importance of Sacred Music

"The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as a combination of sacred music and words, it forms a necessary or integral part of solemn liturgy" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 112). The composition and singing of inspired psalms, often accompanied by musical instruments, were already closely linked to the liturgical celebrations of the Old Covenant. The Church continues and develops this tradition: "Address . . . one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart." "He who sings prays twice" (*Eph 5:19*; *St. Augustine, En. in Ps. 72,1:PL 36,914*; cf. *Col 3:16*).

– *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 1156

There is a great need in most American parishes to rekindle the appreciation for sacred music and communal singing. Some cultures, like the Welsh and African American, take great pride in their choral tradition. Lay people can have a great impact on the liturgy by volunteering to join the choir, serve as a cantor, or play an instrument—we are especially in need of young people willing to learn how to play the church organ. The pipe organ has pride of place among all instruments and without competent organists, the Church will lose its liturgical voice.

The liturgy requires authenticity, so the use of recorded music is not permitted. Sacred Music needs to be the product of human activity—by the use of voices and instruments.

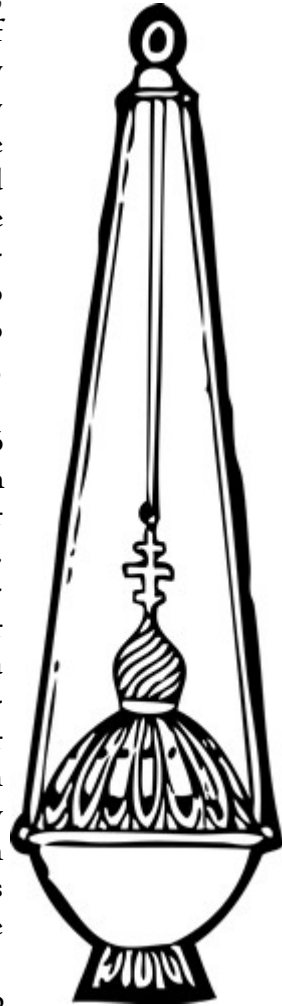
Sacred Music is NOT a performance. In many churches the music ministry is located at the front in the hopes of encouraging the assembly to sing. However for too many, it is seen as a concert that is to be enjoyed not an aid to their participation in singing.

The Tabernacle

In the Old Testament, the People of God wandered in the desert for 40 years. During that time, God made his dwelling among them in a tent or tabernacle. The word tabernacle literally means "dwelling." And so it is in the church that the tabernacle is the place where Christ dwells in the Eucha-

rist.

The tabernacle must be made of solid and opaque material. It must also have a locked door. In the Diocese of Camden it must also be secured by an alarm. All of this is to prevent the Eucharist from being profaned or desecrated. The Blessed Sacrament is kept in the tabernacle for two purposes: in order that the sick may receive Holy Communion, especially if they are dying; and also for private prayer—that any of us may go before the Blessed Sacrament for a time of prayer.



Liturgical Colors

The liturgical life of the Church involves the use of color to signify the meaning of particular seasons and/or celebrations. Green is worn during Ordinary Time (those weeks that are counted). Purple, a sign of penitence, is worn during Advent and Lent as the Church prepares for the important Solemnities of Christmas and Easter. It may also be worn for funerals and on days of penance. White is worn during the Christmas and Easter Seasons and on other feast days that honor Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints who are not martyrs. Red is worn at celebrations of the Passion of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Cross and on the feast of Saints who are martyrs. Black may also be used on the occasion of Masses for the Dead and funerals.

Incense

The use of incense in ancient religious rites is well documented—to ward off evil spirits and to create a cloud of "mystery." The use of incense in the Catholic liturgy is an adaptation of these ancient uses. For Catholics, incense purifies and blesses the persons and objects that are incensed. At the same time the holy smoke lifts up to heaven and takes with it the prayers of God's people.

Candles

The use of candles in the liturgy was both practical (the need for light) and symbolic—as candles add beauty and solemnity to the Mass. They represent Christ, the Light of the World and our call to bring that light to others. They also serve as a symbol of our prayers—who hasn't lit a candle for a loved one?