



Becoming a Living Liturgy

A seventeen-month, parish-wide exploration of the source and summit of our lives as Catholic Christians: The Mass!

1. The Gathering and the Assembly

In the Old Testament Books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, there are many references to God calling the people to gather as an assembly before him. The people were particularly commanded by God to gather as an assembly or congregation for the remembrance of the Passover of the Lord. Actually, assembling begins with our preparations at home: we read the Scriptures for the day, we get dressed to go to church. It includes driving to the church and meeting others in the parking lot, church halls, and gathering area. When we wave to friends, nod to strangers, or hold open a door for another we are becoming an assembly. We are not like strangers on an elevator – individuals with separate missions who do not speak during the ride. We assemble because we have a common mission. We form a community to join in prayer as one. We become a worshipping community to listen to God's Word and celebrate the Eucharist (give thanks). This is our primary role. The gathering could be compared to the time before a dinner party with friends. We visit with one another before the food is served. The meal brings about unity in the gathered community. That is why our time before Mass is important. We greet strangers and get to know people we recognize but don't know. As at a dinner party, we introduce ourselves and introduce friends to one another. For Mass, we gather, assemble, form a local community, worship, and eat.

We also spend some moments before Mass in silent, personal prayer before the Lord, who is present in the tabernacle. During this part of our preparation, we are not separate from the assembly – we are doing our part to be an active part of it. Together, we will offer the Sacrifice of the Mass, so our gathering and assembly is both "with others" and "with the Lord."

About this Series

As our three-year Eucharistic Revival begins across the United States, your priests and staff thought it would be good for all of us to revisit the "Parts of the Mass" series of inserts completed years ago by a dedicated group of volunteers. Since then, we have a new General Instruction of the Roman Missal, and the translation of parts of the liturgy has changed. But more than that, each of us is called by our Baptism to grow continually in our love for the Eucharist and the liturgy that forms the "source and summit" of our lives as Catholic Christians. We will be providing these inserts weekly during Ordinary Time and spending a moment considering them during Mass.



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2. The Entrance to Mass

Present at the Eucharist as the People of God, we share in an awesome task. Through Baptism we are called to be priest, prophet, and king. At Eucharist, the task of the whole people is priestly. We give thanks to God and offer the perfect sacrifice: the Body and Blood of Christ, together with ourselves. It is not the Presider alone who makes this offering - it is all of us. (Notice that in the updated translation of the Latin text of the liturgy – and that Latin text is unchanged – the priest says “Pray, brothers and sisters, that *my sacrifice and yours* may be acceptable...”). Consequently attention to our duty is critical for a meaningful celebration of the Eucharist. The Church asks us to act with reverence - for the Eucharist, for our role in it, and for the community. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal says the faithful should endeavor to make their role clear by their deep sense of reverence for God and their charity toward all who share with them in the celebration. Reverence and charity may take different forms. Entering the church, we greet those with whom we will celebrate this Mass. We sign ourselves with water that recalls our Baptism. We genuflect to the Real Presence of Jesus in the tabernacle. We spend some moments in quiet conversation with the Lord when we come into His Eucharistic Presence. We sing the songs. We make the responses. We listen to God’s Word. We pray all the prayers, even those voiced by the Presider alone. We share the Eucharist in faith.

“Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi”

This phrase about the Church’s understanding of Her own liturgical theology means “the law of praying is the law of believing, which is the law of living.” If you want to know what Catholics believe, look at how they pray! Want to know how Catholics should live? Look at what they believe and how they pray! Above, if one asks the question “Does only the priest offer the Sacrifice of the Mass?”, the answer can be found in the liturgical text: “my sacrifice and yours...”.

The Assignment of Parts

This week’s catechesis suggests that we pray all the prayers, even those “voiced by the Presider alone”. Our full, active, conscious participation at Mass means we are offering every moment of the liturgy, whether we are the ones speaking/singing or not.



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3. Holy Water and the Sign of the Cross

Holy water is blessed and kept either in the Baptistry or in a separate font. Smaller fonts are normally found near the entrances of the church for people to bless themselves.* A priest or deacon may bless water at any time of the year, but the blessing of all blessings happens at the Easter Vigil. We bless ourselves as we enter church and recall our Baptism and renew our commitment... “in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”. Holy water also reminds us that Baptism is the sacrament that opens the door to the other sacraments and incorporates us into the Body of Christ.

Genuflection to Tabernacle

We genuflect to the Real Presence of Jesus in the tabernacle. A genuflection is the action begun from a standing position in which a worshiper moves the right foot back a step, drops the right knee briefly to the floor, and then stands upright again. Many people naturally bow their head while performing this action; some make the sign of the cross. Genuflection is directed not toward the altar, not toward the cross, not toward one’s proximity to a pew... but to the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. In place of genuflection, it is also acceptable to make a deep bow from the waist. In churches where the tabernacle is not in the sanctuary, the faithful should instead bow to the altar before and after the service.**

*During the construction of our new church (dedicated August 22, 2015), we carefully followed the guidelines in the USCCB’s document *Built of Living Stones*, which offers standards of liturgical architecture for such projects. Because of the immense importance and requirement for the font to be a “focal point” (the Baptistry at the Cathedral in Florence, Italy is an entirely separate, eight-sided building!), we did not place additional holy water fonts at the main entrance to the space. Those can be found at all of the entrances to the church where the font is not easily accessible, but each and every time someone comes into the main entrance, they are reminded of baptism through the strong connection of dipping hands into the actual Baptistry.

**Notice that the priest, deacon, and other ministers do the same. When entering the sanctuary for the first time, they may genuflect to the tabernacle. After that, the altar becomes the focal point, and so they will reverence it instead during the celebration of Mass. Only when leaving the sanctuary at the end of Mass will the priestly genuflect once more to the tabernacle.



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4. Personal Prayer Upon Entering the Church

As we take our place before Mass, it is a time for personal prayer. As we prepare to participate in Mass, we immerse ourselves in the work of the people of God. This is to be a quiet time when we are to put ourselves in the presence of the Lord. If you don't have a personal prayer of your own, the following prayers are examples of prayers that may be used:

Prayer of St. Ambrose

I draw near to the table of your most delectable banquet, dear Lord Jesus Christ. A sinner, I trust not in my own merit; but, in fear and trembling, I rely on your mercy and goodness. I have a heart and body marked by many grave offenses, and a mind and tongue that I have not guarded well. For this reason, God of loving kindness and awesome majesty, I, a sinner caught by many snares, seek safe refuge in you. For you are the fountain of mercy. I would fear to draw near to you as my judge, but I seek you out as my Savior. Lord, I show you my wounds, and I let you see my shame. Knowing my sins are many and great, I have reason to fear. But I trust in your mercies, for they are beyond all numbering. Look upon me with mercy, for I trust in you, my Lord Jesus Christ, eternal king, God and man, you who were crucified for mankind. Have mercy on me, you who never cease to make the fountain of your mercy flow, for I am full of sorrows and sins. I praise you, the saving Victim offered on the wood of the cross for me and for all mankind. I praise the noble Blood that flows from the wounds of my Lord Jesus Christ, the precious Blood that washes away the sins of all the world. Remember, Lord, your creature, whom you have redeemed with your own Blood. I am sorry that I have sinned, and I long to put right what I have done. Most kind Father, take away all my offenses and sins, so that, purified in body and soul, I may be made worthy to taste the Holy of holies. And grant that this holy meal of your Body and Blood, which I intend to take, although I am unworthy, may bring forgiveness of my sins and wash away my guilt. May it mean the end of my evil thoughts and the rebirth of my better longings. May it lead me securely to live in ways that please you, and may it be a strong protection for body and soul against the plots of my enemies. Amen.

Prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas

Almighty and ever-living God, I draw near to the sacrament of your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. I come sick to the physician of life, unclean to the fountain of mercy, blind to the light of eternal brightness, poor and needy to the Lord of heaven and earth. So I ask you, most generous Lord: graciously heal my infirmity, wash me clean, illumine my blindness, enrich my poverty, and clothe my nakedness. May I receive the Bread of angels, the King of kings and Lord of lords, with such reverence and humility, such contrition and devotion, such purity and faith, and such resolve and determination as may secure my soul's salvation. Grant as I may receive not only the visible sign of the Lord's Body and Blood, but also all the reality and the power of the sacrament. Grant, most kind God, that I may receive the Body of your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, which he received from the Virgin Mary, and may receive it in such a way that I become a living part of his Mystical Body and counted among his members. O most loving Father, grant me your beloved Son. While on this earthly pilgrimage, I receive him under the veil of this sacrament; so may I come at last to see him face to face for all eternity. For he lives and reigns with you for ever and ever. Amen.



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5. Liturgical Colors and Vestments

The use of colors to differentiate liturgical seasons became a common practice in about the fourth century, but wasn't standardized until the 12th century with the use of colors: Violet, White, Red and Green. Briefly, the colors express emotions and ideas that are associated with each of the seasons of the liturgical year.

- White and Gold are used during the Easter and Christmas seasons, and on Feasts and Memorials of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Saints who are not martyrs. Gold is often used during Easter week and Christmas week, but it is simply a more elaborate form of white, liturgically speaking. White and Gold symbolize light, innocence, purity, joy, triumph, and glory.

- Red is used on Palm Sunday, on Good Friday, on Pentecost Sunday, on celebrations of the Lord's Passion, on the feasts of the Apostles and Evangelists, and on celebrations of martyrs. Red symbolizes the Passion, blood, fire (Holy Spirit), God's love, and martyrdom.

- Green is used in Ordinary Time which celebrates the spread of the Good News of Christ from its source to all nations on earth. Green symbolizes eternal life, hope, and growth.

- Violet or Purple is used in Advent and Lent. It may also be worn in Masses for the Dead. Violet or purple in Advent help us to remember that we are preparing for the coming of Christ. In Lent these colors remind us of repentance, penance and renewal. Besides Violet, in some churches, White or Black vestments may be worn at funerals. Rose may be used on *Gaudete* Sunday (3rd Sunday of Advent) and on *Laetare* Sunday (4th Sunday of Lent). Rose is associated with joy and used to suggest a pause in the focus of the season, a momentary rejoicing in what awaits the end of the season. Some are enriched by the distinction (though it is by no means an "official" one) that Advent is more bluish-purple, meant to symbolize the sky immediately before the arrival of the Sun (as the world awaits the arrival of the Son past, present, and future) while Lent is more reddish-purple, focusing on Christ the King who reigned by wearing a crown of thorns and embracing His Passion and Death.

- The alb is the garment of baptism, and may be worn by any liturgical minister, or indeed anyone who is baptized. (The surplice worn by servers and music ministers is a shortened alb.)

- The stole is the garment of priesthood. It is worn by priests and bishop over both shoulders, and by deacons over one shoulder. It is normally the color of the liturgical celebration.

- The chasuble is the large, round, sleeveless garment worn over the alb by the priest and bishop. It is the garment of Mass. The only time the chasuble is called for outside of Mass is on Good Friday.

- The dalmatic is the sleeved garment worn over the alb by the deacon. It is the deacon's garment of Mass.



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6. The Procession and Entrance Chant

The Roman Missal is the book from which Mass is celebrated, and there is a General Introduction to the Roman Missal (GIRM) in the front. This significant *praenotunda* (explanatory document) is a significant source of information for questions about how and why and what we do during the celebration of Mass. About “The Importance of Singing”, the GIRM has this to say:

“39. The Christian faithful who come together as one in expectation of the Lord’s coming are instructed by the Apostle Paul to sing together Psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles (cf. Col 3:16). Singing is the sign of the heart’s joy (cf. Acts 2:46). Thus St. Augustine says rightly, ‘Singing is for one who loves,’ and there is also an ancient proverb: ‘Whoever sings well prays twice over.’ 40. Great importance should therefore be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass, with due consideration for the culture of peoples and abilities of each liturgical assembly. Although it is not always necessary (e.g., in weekday Masses) to sing all the texts that are in principle meant to be sung, every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people not be absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and on Holydays of Obligation. However, in the choosing of the parts actually to be sung, preference is to be given to those that are of greater importance and especially to those which are to be sung by the Priest or the Deacon or a reader, with the people replying, or by the Priest and people together. 41. The main place should be given, all things being equal, to Gregorian chant, as being proper to the Roman Liturgy. Other kinds of sacred music, in particular polyphony, are in no way excluded, provided that they correspond to the spirit of the liturgical action and that they foster the participation of all the faithful. Since the faithful from different countries come together ever more frequently, it is desirable that they know how to sing together at least some parts of the Ordinary of the Mass in Latin, especially the Profession of Faith and the Lord’s Prayer, according to the simpler settings.”

The purpose of the Entrance Chant is “to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical theme or festivity, and accompany the procession of the Priest and ministers.” (GIRM 47). There is a proper antiphon indicated in the Roman Missal, and this is really the starting point of our singing (though another song may be chosen, we begin preparing the liturgy by looking at the appointed antiphon). The chant “is sung alternately by the choir and the people or similarly by the cantor and the people or entirely by the people, or by the choir alone.” (GIRM 48). For the last fifty years or so, we have definitely focused on the communal singing of the entire assembly to “foster unity”, but it is important to note that our full, active, conscious participation can also be shown by listening (for example, if a choir sang a piece during the procession).



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7. Introductory Rites and the Sign of the Cross

When the priest and ministers arrive at the steps of the sanctuary, they may genuflect or bow to the tabernacle, just as we did when we entered the church. After this, as the ministers enter the sanctuary, the focus turns entirely to the altars (of the Word and of the Eucharist) and the presider's chair. The ministers reverence the altar with a bow, and the priest and deacon also kiss the altar as the place on which the Holy Sacrifice will be offered. The altar also contains the relics of two saints, and so Mass begins, as it did throughout the ancient Church, "on the tombs" of those faithful witness to Christ who have gone before us.

The Introductory Rites include: Entrance Chant and Procession, Sign of the Cross, Greeting, Penitential Act, Gloria, and Collect. The purpose of these introductory rites have the character of a beginning, an introduction, and a preparation. They form a scattered group of the faithful into a single community, and they create within that community the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. These beginning rituals invite each of us to adopt a state of mind and heart that is open to listening properly to all that the Lord may have to say to us in the liturgy: in the words of the prayers, in the text of the Scriptures proclaimed, in the homily, in the Eucharistic Prayer, in the music, in the presence of Christ found throughout.

The Catholic Church teaches that Christ is present in four ways in the Eucharistic Liturgy: in the presiding priest, in the gathered community, in the Word proclaimed, and in a special way in the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine, transformed into His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. When our hearts and minds are prepared during the introductory actions of the Mass, we should be open to finding Christ's presence in any of those places! The whole assembly "celebrates", not the priest celebrant alone. Because of this, our own role within each liturgy to be priest, prophet, and king by virtue of our Baptism is both meaningful and important.

As the text and music of the Entrance Chant fades, the first words we hear are from the priest, who leads us in praying the Sign of the Cross, to which we respond "Amen!" Right from the start, our worship is Trinitarian (in fact, many hymns conclude with a verse praising the three persons of the Trinity). It is as if the priest is saying "Everything that has led us here, and everything we do during this liturgy we are beginning, and everything we will be going forth from here, is done 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.'" And we say "Amen – Yes! I believe!" We believe.



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8. Posture: Why We Stand, Sit, and Kneel (and When!)

42. *The gestures and bodily posture of both the Priest, the Deacon, and the ministers, and also of the people, must be conducive to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity, to making clear the true and full meaning of its different parts, and to fostering the participation of all. Attention must therefore be paid to what is determined by this General Instruction and by the traditional practice of the Roman Rite and to what serves the common spiritual good of the People of God, rather than private inclination or arbitrary choice. A common bodily posture, to be observed by all those taking part, is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community gathered together for the Sacred Liturgy, for it expresses the intentions and spiritual attitude of the participants and also fosters them.*

43. *The faithful should stand from the beginning of the Entrance Chant, or while the Priest approaches the altar, until the end of the Collect; for the Alleluia Chant before the Gospel; while the Gospel itself is proclaimed; during the Profession of Faith and the Universal Prayer; and from the invitation, Orate, fratres (Pray, brethren), before the Prayer over the Offerings until the end of Mass, except at the places indicated here below.*

The faithful should sit, on the other hand, during the readings before the Gospel and the Responsorial Psalm and for the Homily and during the Preparation of the Gifts at the Offertory; and, if appropriate, they may sit or kneel during the period of sacred silence after Communion.

In the Dioceses of the United States of America, they should kneel beginning after the singing or recitation of the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy) until after the Amen of the Eucharistic Prayer, except when prevented on occasion by ill health, or for reasons of lack of space, of the large number of people present, or for another reasonable cause. However, those who do not kneel ought to make a profound bow when the Priest genuflects after the Consecration. The faithful kneel after the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) unless the Diocesan Bishop determines otherwise. (In the Diocese of Cleveland, the Bishop has determined that the faithful are to remain standing until the end of the Communion Procession.)

For the sake of uniformity in gestures and bodily postures during one and the same celebration, the faithful should follow the instructions which the Deacon, a lay minister, or the Priest gives, according to what is laid down in the Missal. (from the General Instruction of the Roman Missal)

In the celebration of the Mass we raise our hearts, minds, and voices to God, but we are creatures composed of body as well as spirit, and so our prayer is not confined to our minds, hearts, and voices, but is expressed by our bodies as well. When our bodies participate in our prayer, we pray with our whole person, as the embodied spirits God created us to be. This engagement of our entire being in prayer is to help us pray with greater attention.

During Mass we assume different postures: standing, kneeling, sitting, and we are also invited to make a variety of gestures. These postures and gestures are not merely ceremonial. They have profound meaning and, when done with understanding, can enhance our personal participation in Mass. In fact, these actions are the way in which we engage our bodies in the prayer that is the Mass. Each posture we assume at Mass underlines and reinforces the meaning of the action in which we are taking part at that moment in our worship.

Standing is a sign of respect and honor, so we stand as the celebrant, who represents Christ, enters and leaves the assembly. This posture, from the earliest days of the Church, has been understood as the stance of those who are risen with Christ and seek the things that are above. When we stand for prayer, we assume our full stature before God, not in pride, but in humble gratitude for the marvelous thing God has done in creating and redeeming each one of us. By Baptism we have been given a share in the life of God, and the posture of standing is an acknowledgement of this wonderful gift. We stand for the Gospel, the pinnacle of revelation, the words and deeds of the Lord. The bishops of the United States have chosen standing as the posture to be observed in this country for the reception of Communion, the sacrament which unites us in the most profound way possible with Christ who, now gloriously risen from the dead, is the cause of our salvation.

The posture of kneeling signified penance in the early Church: the awareness of sin casts us to the ground! So thoroughly was kneeling identified with penance that the early Christians were forbidden to kneel on Sundays and during the Easter Season when the prevailing spirit of the liturgy was that of joy and thanksgiving. In the Middle Ages kneeling came to signify the homage of a vassal to his lord, and more recently this posture has come to signify adoration. It is for this reason that the bishops of this country have chosen the posture of kneeling for the entire Eucharistic Prayer (from after the Sanctus or Holy Holy until the Lord's Prayer).

Sitting is the posture of listening and meditation, so the congregation sits for the pre-Gospel readings and homily and may also sit or kneel for the period of meditation following Communion.

EVERYTHING that happens at liturgy is prayer. A common posture, observed by all in the assembly, is a sign of the unity of the entire Christian Community, gathered for the Sacred Liturgy. Common posture is meant to both express and foster the intention and spiritual attitude of the participants.

At the point we are in our parish-wide study of the Mass, we have already learned several times how the liturgy fosters unity: through our singing, through the rites themselves, through a common posture, etc. This is why the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* makes the point that within a single celebration, a common posture observed by all fosters the very purpose of the liturgy. The liturgy can never be just about "me", it is about Christ and His Church, especially the assembly gathered in His Presence at THIS Mass. You may go to different churches around the world (or even within the same diocese) where the common posture varies, but by uniting your heart and your posture to the common posture of the assembly, you not only show charity but you foster the virtue of charity in your own heart by recognizing the importance of the community of believers.

At St Raphael, great attention is given to our faithfulness to how the Church asks us to celebrate liturgy. The liturgical formation of the entire parish, from pastor to parishioners who just moved in yesterday, is ongoing. But sometimes, we may think "That's not the way I THINK it should be done!" We've all had this thought at one time or another. Perhaps it's not the Entrance Chant YOU would prefer to sing; perhaps it's not the posture YOU would adopt; perhaps it's not the homily YOU would've given, and so on. When we find ourselves confronted with these thoughts (and we all do!), the Lord is inviting us in a special way to grow in virtue through the very actions of the liturgy itself.



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9. The Greeting

"50. When the Entrance Chant is concluded, the Priest stands at the chair and, together with the whole gathering, signs himself with the Sign of the Cross. Then by means of the Greeting he signifies the presence of the Lord to the assembled community. By this greeting and the people's response, the mystery of the Church gathered together is made manifest. After the Greeting of the people, the Priest, or the Deacon, or a lay minister may very briefly introduce the faithful to the Mass of the day."

(General Instruction of the Roman Missal)

The priest greets the assembly. This is no ordinary greeting like Good Morning or Good Evening. The priest chooses from one of several greetings taken from Holy Scripture:

The Lord be with you!

[2 Thessalonians 3:16b and 2 Timothy 4:22a]

The grace and peace of God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you!

[Beginning of 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Ephesians]

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

[2 Corinthians 13:13]

The priest's greeting and the assembly's response – "And with your spirit" (Galatians 6:18) – express the hopes and desires of the community. They announce the awesome and profound mystery of God's presence in the assembly gathered for worship. When we participate in this dialogue, we express our faith that the priest is acting in the person of Christ, and that the Lord will be present in and among all His people gathered. Everyone gathered will be conscious of His presence in our celebration.

There is definitely reflection each of us could have about how we greet one another throughout each day of our lives: how we greet strangers, fellow travelers on the road, parishioners, family and friends. How has technology helped us "greet one another with a holy kiss" (2 Corinthians 13:12, Romans 16:16), and how has it perhaps hindered us in our greetings of one another? Are we challenged to make the connection that our liturgical greeting, which "signifies the presence of the Lord to the assembled community", should be matched by our "greetings" outside of Mass, and that those greetings should also make Christ present to others? These parallels are how we make our entire lives a Living Liturgy.



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10. The Penitential Rite

"51. After this, the Priest calls upon the whole community to take part in the Penitential Act, which, after a brief pause for silence, it does by means of a formula of general confession. The rite concludes with the Priest's absolution, which, however, lacks the efficacy of the Sacrament of Penance. From time to time on Sundays, especially in Easter Time, instead of the customary Penitential Act, the blessing and sprinkling of water may take place as a reminder of Baptism.

52. After the Penitential Act, the Kyrie eleison (Lord, have mercy) is always begun, unless it has already been part of the Penitential Act. Since it is a chant by which the faithful acclaim the Lord and implore his mercy, it is usually executed by everyone, that is to say, with the people and the choir or cantor taking part in it. Each acclamation is usually pronounced twice, though it is not to be excluded that it be repeated several times, by reason of the character of the various languages, as well as the artistry of the music or of other circumstances. When the Kyrie is sung as a part of the Penitential Act, a "trope" precedes each acclamation."

(General Instruction of the Roman Missal)

Form 1 is most commonly used and has many variations for the priest or deacon's call:

Call: You came to call sinners; Lord have mercy.

Response: Lord, have mercy.

Call: You plead for us at the right hand of the Father; Christ, have mercy.

Response: Christ, have mercy.

Call: You come to us in Word and Sacrament; Lord, have mercy.

Response: Lord, have mercy.

Form 2 (Tobit 8: 4, b, and Psalm 8: 5-8)

Call: Lord we have sinned against you: Lord, have mercy.

Response: Lord, have mercy.

Call: Lord, show us your mercy and your love.

Response: And grant us your salvation.

Form 3 is called the *Confiteor* (James 5:16 and 1 Thessalonians 5:25)

I confess to Almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words,

in what I have done and in what I have failed to do. *(Then, striking the breast three times:)* through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.

Therefore, I ask Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord, our God.



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11. The Gloria

Paragraph 53 of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*:

53. The Gloria in excelsis (Glory to God in the highest) is a most ancient and venerable hymn by which the Church, gathered in the Holy Spirit, glorifies and entreats God the Father and the Lamb. The text of this hymn may not be replaced by any other. It is intoned by the Priest or, if appropriate, by a cantor or by the choir; but it is sung either by everyone together, or by the people alternately with the choir, or by the choir alone. If not sung, it is to be recited either by everybody together or by two choirs responding one to the other. It is sung on Sundays outside Advent and Lent, and also on Solemnities and Feasts, and at particular celebrations of a more solemn character.

The *Gloria* is an example of a composition of a private prayer composed in imitation of the songs of the Psalter. Other examples that survive include the *Te Deum Laudamus* and the *Phos Hilaron*. The Latin text of the *Gloria* is usually credited to St Hilary of Poitiers (Bishop and Doctor of the Church who lived from c.300-368). Of note, the Latin translation of the Bible was not commissioned until 382.

Though it had been the custom in some places over the last half century, it is not permissible to replace the *Gloria* with another song, even one which contains parts of the text. Various Scripture passages are either quoted or referenced in the text of the *Gloria*, and these include Luke 2:14, Revelation 19:6, Revelation 22:9, Ephesians 5:20, Revelation 7:12, 2 John 1:3, John 1:29, Romans 8:34, Luke 4:34, Revelation 15:4, Luke 1:32, and John 14:26.

Throughout music history, composers have set the *Gloria* to music in various “Masses”. These almost surely were never meant to be sung during the liturgy, as a performance of Vivaldi’s *Gloria* would take about half an hour, and even an even more elaborate setting in Bach’s famous Mass in B Minor runs around thirty-five minutes. These beautiful pieces are meant to “illuminate” the text for our person prayer outside the liturgy. Take a moment to listen to a beautiful setting of the *Gloria* this week as you contemplate this gorgeous text. Which is your favorite? Which *Gloria* do you enjoy singing the most at Mass?



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12. The Collect (Opening Prayer)

The Collect (CAHL-lect) literally collects (cuh-LECTS) the prayers of the people into one prayer, verbalized by the priest. This Opening Prayer, like the Gathering Hymn, expresses the general tone and character of the particular liturgy being celebrated. It is one of four prayers that are vocalized by the priest Presider (Opening Prayer, Prayer Over the Gifts, the Eucharistic Prayer, and the Prayer After Communion). The priest invites the people to pray with the words “Let us pray”, which may sound odd, because each part of the Mass from the entrance chant on has also been prayer, so it’s not as if we haven’t already been praying the whole time! The invitation “let us pray” is followed by a moment of silence, not to await the arrival of the Roman Missal at the priest’s chair, but so that each of us can offer our own prayer to be “collected” into the vocalized prayer of the priest. All of us observe a brief silence so that we may be conscious of the fact that we are in God’s presence and here to pray. The Opening Prayer is read from the book used by the Presider containing all of the prayers and instructions (rubrics) used by the priest to celebrate Mass. The Roman Missal normally gives an alternate Collect for Sunday Masses, so the priest chooses from among the two options. The priest prays uniting the intentions of all those gathered in the assembly. The priest extends his hands in a gesture recalling the praying figures found in the catacombs of Rome. In accordance with the ancient tradition of the Church, the prayer is usually addressed to God the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit. Most of the prayers of the Mass are addressed to the Father. The assembly makes the prayer their own with the acclamation “Amen”. We respond “Amen” not only to the prayer voiced by our priest, the Presider, but to the prayers of those around us and our own. “Amen” is an expression of agreement or confirmation used in worship by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The word derives from a Semitic root meaning “fixed” or “sure”. The Greek Old Testament usually translates it as “so be it”; in the English Bible it is sometimes translated as “verily” or “truly”. It has been used in the Liturgy of the Eucharist since the 2nd century. (1 Chronicles 16:36)

We have now completed the Introductory Rites of the Mass. We need this time together in prayer to step out of the normal routine of life, and into a prayerful composure to focus our hearts and minds on the rest of the liturgy.



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13. Liturgy of the Word – Introduction

Early in the life of the Church, listening to readings from the Bible was joined to the celebration of the Lord's Supper (as it was initially called) or the Breaking of Bread (Acts 2:42 and Luke 24:35). This liturgical act of listening to readings proclaimed was a continuation of the Jewish practice of reading Scripture in the synagogue (the original "Liturgy of the Word" for the Jewish followers of Jesus would have been the Sabbath synagogue service, and then on Sunday morning the community would gather in a large home for the Breaking of the Bread (what has become our Liturgy of the Eucharist). When the Sacred Scriptures are proclaimed in the Church, God himself speaks to his people. God's Word is alive. Therefore, all present must listen with reverence to the readings from God's Word, for they make up an element of greatest importance in the Mass. Jesus is truly and fully present in the Gospel. The main part of the Liturgy of the Word is made up of readings from Sacred Scripture together with chants (Responsorial Psalm and Alleluia or Verse Before the Gospel). The homily, Profession of Faith (Nicene Creed or Apostles' Creed) and Universal Prayer (Petitions) conclude the Liturgy of the Word. The Liturgy of the Word prepares the assembly and leads them into the second part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Thus the two parts of the Mass form one act of worship. The purpose of the Liturgy of the Word is not to communicate information about God and the works of God. As an important part of our worship of God in the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word is present to forge a common identity and spirituality based upon the action of God among God's people today. The goal of the Liturgy of the Word is to touch, move and transform hearts through the blending of proclaiming, listening, responding, meditating, and entering into silence. (Revelation 1:3)

We can prepare ourselves by reflecting on the Scripture readings ahead of time (during the week, the night before, or before Mass). The readings are meant to be heard during the liturgy rather than read, so reading them ahead of time is commendable. When we hear them as part of the liturgy, they are meant to transform our hearts, and the more prepared we are to hear them by having studied and prepared them beforehand, the more open our hearts are to their transformative power in our lives.



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14. Liturgy of the Word – Liturgical Books

There are many liturgical books in our churches' Sacristies, but the ones we see most frequently are the Lectionary, the Roman Missal, and the Book of the Gospels. The Lectionary contains all the Scripture texts: the First and Second Readings, the psalm and response, and the Gospel reading. The Roman Missal contains all of the prayers offered by the presiding celebrant and all of the instructions (rubrics) needed to celebrate correctly. The Book of the Gospels contains only the Gospel readings and is usually a large and beautiful volume. Most revered of all the books, it is carried in procession, enthroned upon the altar, kissed, and incensed. At St. Raphael Parish, our Book of the Gospels is displayed in a place of reverence on the front of the ambo (pulpit) where the Word of God is proclaimed. Christian tradition has long connected the authors of the four canonical Gospels with the four "living creatures" that surround God's throne, as in Rev. 4:7. Our cover shows images or icons representing the four evangelists: Matthew by the winged man, Mark by the winged lion, Luke by the winged ox, and John by the eagle. Liturgy of the Word – Sitting, Standing, and Silence The Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated in such a way as to promote meditation. Any sort of haste that hinders time to think about the Word must clearly be avoided. The faithful are seated during the proclamation of the Scripture readings. This includes the First Reading, Responsorial Psalm, and Second Reading if there is one (Sundays and major Feasts). The congregation should stand for the Alleluia chant before the Gospel and while the Gospel itself is proclaimed. They should be seated for the homily. During the Liturgy of the Word, it is also appropriate to include brief periods of silence, provided to the gathered assembly, in which, at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God may be grasped by the heart and a response through prayer may be prepared. It may be appropriate to observe such periods of silence, for example, before the Liturgy of the Word itself begins, after each reading, and after the homily.

Of significant note, though perhaps unnoticed in any one liturgy, the Book of the Gospels is not carried out in the procession at the end of Mass. Since Christ is truly present in His Word, when it is proclaimed it becomes present in us. Just as we go forth strengthened by His Eucharist Presence (which is sacramental), we also go forth as bearers of the Word, and so it would be redundant to carry the Book of the Gospels out at the end of Mass.



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15. Liturgy of the Word – The First Reading

The Liturgy of the Word begins with the proclamation of the Scriptural texts. A lector moves to the ambo to proclaim the readings that precede the Gospel. A person does not need to be an ordained deacon or priest to serve as lector at Mass. The lector joins the entrance procession with other ministers. If there is no deacon, the lector carries the Book of the Gospels. When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the church, God speaks to his people, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation and offering them spiritual nourishment. Christ Himself is present in the midst of the faithful through His Word and in His Word. By both their silence and singing, the people make God's Word their own. In the celebration of the Mass with a congregation, the readings are always proclaimed from the ambo, and the ambo is consecrated and set apart, to be used only for liturgical proclamation. The Scripture readings demand heedful concentration. We sit for the readings, the responsorial psalm, the homily, the preparation of the altar and the gifts, and usually during the thanksgiving after communion. Even when we sit, we do something at Mass. We listen. We receive. We meditate. We pray. We reflect. We open our hearts to God's Spirit. We rest in the Lord. Instead of using the same readings every year, Vatican II changed to a three-year cycle of readings for Sundays, which offers a broader exposure to more of the Books of the Bible. The cycles are labeled A, B, and C. 2020 was Year A, 2021 was Year B, 2022 is Year C, etc. In Year A, we read mostly from the Gospel of Matthew. In Year B, we read from the Gospel of Mark and chapter 6 of the Gospel of John. In Year C, we read from the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel of John is read during the Easter season (and at other times throughout the year) in all three years. The First Reading on Sundays and solemnities is generally taken from the Old Testament. During the Easter Season it's taken from the Acts of the Apostles, and on feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, it may be from the Book of Revelation. We sit to hear the Word of God from the Old Testament. The Lector begins by saying "A reading from the book of..." . In the liturgy of early Jewish communities and today, reading of the Torah (Law) and Haftorah (Prophets) held and holds a central place. Early Christian churches continued some practices of the synagogal liturgy but always added a reading from the Gospel. This serves to enlighten as well as fulfill the Law and the Prophets. The Lector concludes the First Reading by saying "The Word of the Lord", and the assembly responds with "Thanks be to God". The cantor and assembly may also sing this dialog.

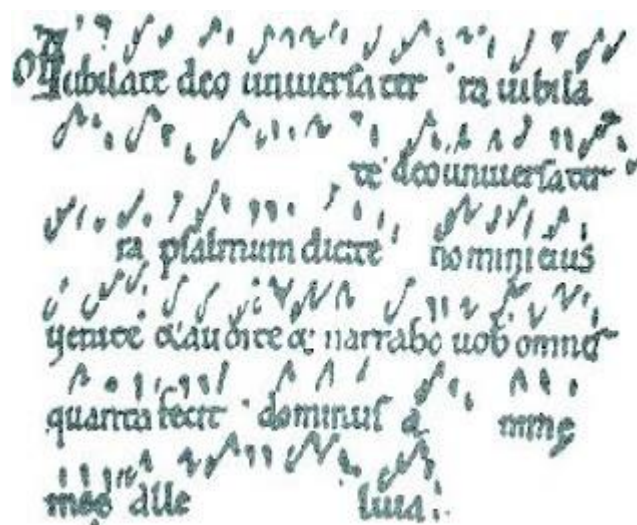


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16. Liturgy of the Word – The Responsorial Psalm

The Psalm follows the First Reading in a pattern from the Jewish synagogue service adopted by early Christians. The Psalm and Response is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word and holds great liturgical and pastoral importance, because it fosters meditation on the Word of God during the celebration. The Psalm and Response are taken directly from the Lectionary Scripture readings for the day and correspond with the First Reading or Gospel text. The source is from the 150 Psalms or an Old or New Testament Canticle. The Psalms were composed to be sung and are most appropriately sung as a dialogue between the assembly and cantor, or with verses being sung in alternation by sides of the assembly. The cantor intones the Response for the assembly to repeat after the cantor sings each part of the Psalm. If there is no cantor or other psalmist, the Psalm and Response may be recited in dialogue fashion. Often people like to recall the Psalm Response or a line from the Psalm. This may be used as a lead-in to further meditation upon the readings during the day or week. The words stay on their lips and in their minds and hearts.





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17. Liturgy of the Word – The Second Reading

A second Scripture Reading is used on Sundays and special feast days during the liturgical year (which begins on the First Sunday of Advent). It is normally taken from the Epistles (the letters written to the various communities). Most of these letters were written by St. Paul. In the Second Reading, the assembly often encounters the early Church living its Christian faith. The purpose of these letters was to instruct the faithful in the Christian life. Since the Word of God is living and never loses its effect, these letters are applied to us as an assembly and individually for our edification and meditation. In some cases, the Second Reading theme will correspond with the message from the First Reading or Gospel, but this is not normally the situation. In most cases it speaks to us independently. At the end of the reading, as with the end of the First Reading, the Lector proclaims, —The Word of the Lord." The assembly responds, —Thanks be to God." Just as we are fed in the Eucharist, which means thanksgiving, we are thankful for having been fed by the Living Word which brings us new understanding of how to live our lives.

We are all encouraged to prepare the readings before attending Sunday Mass (those involved in preparing the liturgy as ministers usually prepare early in the week, or even weeks or months ahead of time). You may want to read the readings the evening before you attend Mass: they can be found at www.bible.usccb.org/readings . The proclamation of the Word will be a more "living interaction" if the assembly hears the Word rather than reading along with the proclamation. Christ in the Word seeks our full attention. At St Raphael Parish, with compassion for those who are hearing impaired, special headsets are available to assist in full participation, and the hymnals contain the readings for most Sunday and Holy Day liturgies.

Some of the epistles are fairly short, and you might want to make a goal of prayerfully reading one through in an evening. We read from 2 Timothy this weekend, and then from 2 Thessalonians for the remainder of Ordinary Time.



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18. Liturgy of the Word – The Gospel Acclamation

The reading of the Gospel, the good news of our salvation in Jesus Christ, is the climax of the Liturgy of the Word and is so vital to our understanding of salvation and to our worship that we stand up for its proclamation and greet it with a joyfully sung acclamation. It serves as the greeting of welcome of the assembled faithful, to the Lord (who is about to speak to them), and as an expression of their faith through song. If it cannot be sung, it is omitted. Candles, incense, procession, and a special Book of the Gospels are employed to honor this reading and highlight its primacy. The minister who properly proclaims the Gospel is the deacon. If no deacon is present, it is proclaimed by a concelebrant or by the principal celebrant. The bright and wonderful Hebrew word *alleluia*, meaning — “Praise to the LORD!”, is the cry used to herald this reading on most Sundays and weekdays of the year. The most universal liturgical change during the season of Lent is the directive that strikes the use of "Alleluia" from any and every celebration. Both Advent and Lent share the same liturgical color, and both drop the Gloria from the seasonal Masses, but only Lent forbids the use of "Alleluia." The ban is far-reaching: no "Alleluia" before the Gospel at Mass, no "Alleluia" at the Introductory Verse for Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, no "Alleluia" in any other text, including choral music, vocal music and hymns. Alleluia, or "Hallelu-yah" occurs in Scripture, particularly in the Psalms, and is associated with joy and festivity. In Lent a verse may be substituted.

הללiah



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19. The Gospel Reading

The proclaiming of the Gospel is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word. If a deacon is not present, the Gospel is proclaimed by a concelebrant or the principal celebrant. The deacon bows before the celebrant and prays, — “Father, give me your blessing.” The celebrant prays over him and blesses him with, — “The Lord be in your heart and on your lips that you may worthily proclaim his Gospel. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The deacon, making the sign of the cross in blessing, responds, — “Amen.” If a priest proclaims the Gospel, he bows before the altar and prays, — “Almighty God, cleanse my heart and my lips that I may worthily proclaim your Gospel.” The deacon or priest approaches the Altar, bows, picks up and slightly elevates the Book of Gospels, and processes to the ambo where he places it, after the Alleluia is finished. He bows to reverence Jesus present in the Word and prays, — “The Lord be with you.” The assembly responds, — “And with your spirit.” The deacon or priest continues, — “A reading from the Holy Gospel according to (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John).” The assembly responds, — “Glory to you, O Lord.” Everyone signs themselves with a cross on the forehead, lips, and breast and may say silently, — “May the Word of the Lord be in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart.” If incense is used, the deacon incenses the Book as an expression of reverence and of prayer. To better familiarize the faithful with the Gospels, Vatican II set up a three-year cycle of readings. In year A we hear Gospels from Matthew, year B is from Mark, and year C is from Luke. John is heard during Christmas and Easter seasons and for special occasions. Remember Jesus is present in many ways at Mass. The Gospel is one of them. Twice the people are given an opportunity to make acclamation as they hear the Good News: after the announcement of the title and at the end of the reading. All rise to honor the words of Jesus. Everything contributes to making the reading the pinnacle of the Liturgy of the Word. Rather than the printed text that is read, it is a Person that is honored and whose living Word is received with thanksgiving. After proclaiming the Gospel the deacon or priest proclaims, — “The Gospel of the Lord.” All respond, — “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.”



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20. The Homily

The homily is a very important part of the Liturgy of the Word and is as essential to the Liturgy as are the scriptural proclamations. The homily is necessary for the nurturing of the Christian life. Its purpose is to create a bridge between the biblical faith expressed in the readings and our own lives in the community by interpreting and applying the scriptures just proclaimed. The Word of God, proclaimed and celebrated in the Liturgy of the Word, does not necessarily answer questions uppermost in our mind. The Word is more likely to raise questions, all sorts of questions that we had never even considered. Our human point of view must give way to God's point of view. The Word of God works to this end - so does the homily, in explaining the Word. The homily is reserved to the ordained ministry and should ordinarily be given by the priest celebrant who —breaks open God's Word just as he will later break the bread. The homily should relate the sacred readings to the daily life of Christians, much in the way that Jesus did for his audience in the synagogue of Nazareth: "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). There is to be a homily on Sundays and holy days of obligation at all Masses that are celebrated with the participation of a congregation; it may not be omitted without a serious reason. It is recommended on other days, especially on the weekdays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter Season, as well as on other festive days and occasions when the people come to church in greater numbers. After the homily a brief period of silence is appropriately observed. The Holy Spirit guides us through the Word as explained in the homily to help us resolve our problems, to enliven our hearts for the living out of the Gospel, and to become doers of the Word and not hearers only. We can prepare ourselves for the homily by reflecting on the Scripture readings ahead of time, perhaps the night before, or perhaps by arriving at church early. The homily does not end with the last word but should take root in our hearts.

The celebrant has the challenge of preaching to the young and the old, to women and men, to people in every conceivable situation of life, to those who are joyful and those who are grieving. If the homily on any given Sunday isn't striking you, pray for the people around you who may desperately need to hear the message being delivered. In addition, write your own homily! This can be a terrific family opportunity on the way home or later on Sunday. "What homily would you have given?" is a great conversation starter, and keeps us actively engaged with the Word.



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21. The Creed (Profession of Faith)

We respond to God's Word and prepare ourselves to celebrate the Liturgy of the Eucharist by professing the essential truths of our faith in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These prayers are called "creeds" because their first word in Latin is *credo* (I believe). They are called "professions of faith" since they summarize the faith that Christians profess and are also called "symbols of faith". Whoever says "I believe" says "I pledge myself to what we believe." Communion in faith needs a common language of faith, normative for all and uniting all in the same confession of faith. From the beginning, the apostolic Church expressed and handed on her faith in brief formulas for all. It was gathered from the Scriptures, to present the summary of faith in a few words: the whole knowledge of the true religion contained in the Old and New Testaments. The Creed is a sign of recognition and communion between believers. To say the Creed with faith is to enter into communion with God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and also with the whole Church which transmits the faith to us and in whose midst we believe. This Creed is the spiritual seal, our heart's meditation, and an ever-present guardian; it is a treasure of our soul. The Creed is divided into three parts: "the first part speaks of the first divine Person (God the Father) and the wonderful work of creation; the next speaks of the second divine Person (God the Son – Jesus Christ) and the mystery of his redemption of men; the final part speaks of the third divine Person (God the Holy Spirit), the origin and source of our sanctification. Through the centuries many professions or symbols of faith have been articulated in response to the needs of the different eras. None of the creeds from the different stages in the Church's life can be considered superseded or irrelevant. They help us today to attain and deepen the faith of all times by means of the different summaries made of it. Among all the creeds, two occupy a special place in the Church's life: The Apostles' Creed, while (perhaps surprisingly to you) younger than the Nicene Creed, is believed to express the creedal statements of the Apostles. The Nicene Creed draws its great authority from the fact that it stems from two early Church Councils and remains common to all the great Churches of both East and West to this day. The words of the Nicene Creed can be found on the next page.

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come.

Amen.



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22. The Universal Prayer (General Intercessions)

The Liturgy of the Word concludes with the Universal Prayer (sometimes called the General Intercessions of the Prayers of the Faithful), in which the people respond to the Word by offering prayers to God for the salvation of all. One of the components of the ancient Jewish synagogue liturgy was a series of 18 (in Judaism this number symbolizes life) blessings containing requests for individual and universal needs. From very early on, the Mass incorporated similar prayers. These prayers are also referred to as “Universal Prayer” or “General Intercessions” because they extend beyond the needs and concerns of the local assembly to the universal Church and the changing events of our world. The series of intentions/petitions used during Mass reminds us that our local Church is united with the universal Church in prayer:

- a. For the needs of the Church;
- b. For public authorities and the salvation of the whole world;
- c. For those burdened by any kind of difficulty;
- d. For the local community including special private intentions;
- e. For the dead;
- f. For the particular intention of the Mass and those in our hearts.

The priest directs this prayer from the Presider’s chair. He begins with a brief introduction, inviting the faithful to pray. The assembly stands. The intentions are announced from the ambo or other suitable place by the deacon, cantor, lector, or one of the lay faithful. This order as listed in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (the document that explains how we are to celebrate Mass) suggests a preference to sing some part of the Universal Prayer, at least on occasion. The assembly gives expression to their prayer by an invocation sung or said together after each intention, such as “Lord, hear our prayer.” The priest concludes with a prayer offering the intentions to the Father.



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23. Liturgy of the Eucharist – Introduction

We now move into the second major part of the Mass. It extends from the Preparation of the Gifts through the Prayer After Communion. The altar is the focus of attention from this moment onward, whereas the ambo held the central position during the Liturgy of the Word. At the Last Supper Christ instituted the Paschal Sacrifice by which the Sacrifice of the Cross is sacramentally made present in the Church. The priest, representing us, offers this prayer to the Father on behalf of the entire congregation; the prayer is being made by all of us. At the same time, the priest, acting in the person of Christ the head, does what He did: Christ took the bread and the chalice and gave thanks; he broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take, eat, and drink; this is my Body; this is the cup of my Blood. Do this in memory of me.” (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25) Accordingly, the Church has arranged the entire celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist in parts corresponding to precisely these words and actions of Christ. At the Preparation of the Gifts, the bread and wine are brought to the altar, the same elements that Christ took into his hands. Almsgiving during Eucharistic celebrations is for the Church’s needs and for the poor. The social dimension of the Eucharist is created and the faithful are encouraged to help those in need. In the Eucharistic Prayer, thanks is given to God for the whole work of salvation, and the offerings become the Body and Blood of Christ. The Church is perceived in the light of the Trinity, with her beginning in creation, her summit in the paschal mystery, and in the end in bringing together in unity all things in Christ. Through the breaking of the bread and Communion the faithful, though many, receive from the one bread of the Lord’s Body and from the one chalice the Lord’s Blood just the same way the Apostles received them from Christ’s own hands. Jesus said of Himself that He is the bread of life, come down from heaven to give life to the world (John 6:33). He is bread given to us by the Father. In the Sacrament, the bread is not just a symbol or image of a reality. As Roman Catholics we believe in transubstantiation. This means that the bread and wine becomes in reality the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ. During the Liturgy of the Word we participated by opening ourselves fully to the Word of God proclaimed to us. Now we prepare ourselves to join our sacrifices with the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ that is offered in this Mass. The connection between the Eucharist and the Church is so close, so intimate, that the French theologian Henri de Lubac (1896-1991) wrote: “The Eucharist makes the Church, the Church makes the Eucharist.”



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24. Liturgy of the Eucharist – The Offertory

What happens during the Offertory? When the priest elevates the host on the paten and the wine in the chalice he is showing God what we are offering him as a community. That means the bread and wine, certainly, but it is much more than that. We are offering ourselves to him. Like the bread and wine, we are inadequate as a sacrifice to God, finite as we are. When we offer ourselves with the host and the chalice, we unite ourselves with Christ and He makes us acceptable as an offering to his Father. As a community, we place ourselves and all those we pray for, the sick, the dying, those in spiritual pain on the paten for the priest to hold up for God to examine and listen to throughout the beautiful Eucharistic Prayer. The offering is a sacrifice presented in worship, something that becomes holy. In the Mass, the sacrifice is of bread and wine and ourselves, but also of Christ, once again offered in a bloodless and sacramental way to His heavenly Father. The Father will always accept the sacrifice of his Son because it is perfect. By joining ourselves to him we are the ones who receive, because in accepting our sacrifice God feeds us with the flesh and blood of his own Son and we are strengthened and nourished beyond our understanding. At Sunday Mass there is usually an Offertory hymn. Although not a hymn that must be sung by all (as the Entrance and Communion chants are), it is often sung by the congregation. Whether singing or listening, we make this musical text our prayer as we bring the gifts of our lives to the altar, as well as those things we need to lay on the altar in sacrifice and those other things are we offering up to the Lord. The Offertory is a reminder and opportunity that the Mass is not just a once-a-week, one-hour commitment that we fulfill before returning to the rest of our life. We are invited to bring all our baggage with us as we enter the church. All our struggles, burdens, sufferings, as well as our joys, accomplishments and thanksgivings are offered to God along with our weekly contribution and the gifts of bread and wine. The gifts are also symbolic of what we have done with what God has given us: God gives us wheat, we must bake bread (a highly intensive process if you've ever done it!); God gives us grapes, we must make wine (again, a process that is quite complex). We offer our heavenly Father our very selves, good and bad, happy and sorrowful, along with Christ, at the Offertory.



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25. Liturgy of the Eucharist – Preparation of the Gifts

The first part of the Liturgy of the Eucharist is the preparation of the gifts. It is here we prepare to offer ourselves and our gifts, along with the celebrant, to God the Father in union with the one sacrifice of Christ. The altar, the Lord's table, which is the center of the whole Liturgy of the Eucharist, is prepared. The altar is the center of the Liturgy of the Eucharist much in the same way the ambo was the center of the Liturgy of the Word. Servers bring the Missal, chalice, ciborium (a sacred vessel used to hold the bread that will be consecrated at Mass), corporal (a square linen cloth that the chalice and paten rest upon used to catch any particles of the consecrated Host), and purificators (small sacramental linens) from the credence table (side table) to the altar. Since this is a ministerial task, it is carried out by someone other than the presiding priest, i.e., a deacon or server. At the very beginning of the Mass there was a procession in which the Book of the Gospels was held aloft. Now there is another procession involving members of the congregation. In the early Church, bread and wine were actually brought from home by the faithful and given to the presiding priest at this time. Though we no longer do this, the bread and wine still belong to the community and are brought forth and presented to the priest and deacon by representative members of those assembled. The gifts represent us and the people who bring them to the front emphasize the fact that —we the congregation are asking the celebrant to take these gifts and to offer them to God in our name. The priest and deacon then carry the gifts to the altar. The priest will say many prayers during this part of the Mass, he is saying them for all of us who are offering this Mass to God with him. This is also the time monetary gifts are collected from the faithful. This weekly collection humbly expresses the community's faith. The act is done in a spirit of selflessness and sacrifice and unites us believers. We express our desire to share. Giving in the collection is a symbolic but very real way of dying to ourselves. Just as the Body and Blood of Christ bring heavenly nourishment to our community, so the collection brings material aid. What we have comes from God, and we know it was given for the enjoyment of all. A habit of giving comes from a heart that has learned the satisfactions of generosity. Scripture recommends a tithe – giving ten percent of what we earn to charities. By giving from what we receive, we share God's love with the world (Acts 4:35; II Corinthians 9:12-13). The practice of accompanying the presentation of the gifts with music may have originated in the fourth century in Africa where it was known by St. Augustine.



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26. Liturgy of the Eucharist – The Procession (Presentation of the Gifts and Offertory Chant)

After the altar is prepared the gifts are brought forward and given to the priest and deacon. The gifts of wine and bread are then placed on the altar and the monetary gifts are put safely away. The preparatory rite for the gifts is concluded with a prayer by the priest: the Prayer Over the Gifts. This type of prayer which blesses God for a goodness he has bestowed upon us, comes from Christianity's Jewish roots and is known in Hebrew as the *berakah*. When the priest shows the bread in the ciborium to God, he prays, adding one line to the *berakah*: "For us it will become the Bread of Life". The priest, or deacon if present, prepares the wine and the water. When Christ died on the cross a soldier pierced his side with a sword, and blood and water flowed from it. So too does the Lord pour out his blood and water for us in this Eucharistic celebration. The priest or deacon pours the wine and a little water into the chalice and prays: "*By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.*" The mingling represents the union of Christ with humanity: just as the wine receives water, so Christ takes us and our sins to himself. (You might also ponder the chemical miracle at work: as a chemist how to get that one drop of water out of the wine: it's nearly impossible. That's just how one with us Christ has become.) The priest then shows the chalice to God by holding it slightly raised above the altar and says: "*Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received this wine we offer you, fruit of the vine and work of human hands, it will become our spiritual drink.*" When these prayers are said aloud (and they frequently aren't at weekend Mass because they occur during the Offertory Hymn, the congregation responds: "Blessed be God forever." The priest bows and prays, asking God to receive and bless our offering. This prayer is taken directly from Daniel 3:39-40, and is also in the New Testament book of Hebrews 12:28. He says: *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 theology of the upcoming Eucharistic Prayer is already evident here: we are all offering sacrifice to the Father in the action of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We approach humbly and with awareness of our failings, offering a sweet-smelling oblation to the Lord.



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27. Liturgy of the Eucharist – Washing of the Hands

This ancient ritual was taken from Psalm 51 and was used in times past when the priest literally would accept gifts from the people for his support and the support of the church. These gifts were often in the form of grains, fruits, pigs, chickens, eggs, flour, etc... His hands became dirty, and there was a real need to wash them. But the ritual of washing the hands is also tied to the Jewish liturgy, where a ritual washing occurred both before the priest would offer sacrifices, and even today at the beginning of the Passover Seder. In this ritual washing, we ask to be cleansed of something more than our dirty hands: we ask to approach what we are about to do with purity of heart and mind and voice. The priest prays: *Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.* (Psalm 51:2) Then the priest faces the people and asks them to pray with him to God that this offering of bread and wine is acceptable. *Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.* (Psalm 50:23) The congregation joins in this prayer with their response: *May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.* Through this dialogue, which is always recited, priest and people remind each other what it is that we are doing together. Through the mouth of the priest, at the hands of the priest, the communal sacrifice of the entire assembly is offered up. It is not something “Father does up there”; it is something we do actively during this part of the Mass in our hearts and minds.

At this point all of these prayers are gathered by the Presider in a prayer that takes to heart the special circumstances of the day and asks God again to accept the gifts that we offer him in faith through our Lord, Jesus Christ. This final “Prayer Over the Gifts” is taken from the prayer of the Church for the season and day. One example is: Lord, may these gifts which we now offer to show our belief and our love be pleasing to you. May they become for us the Eucharist of Jesus Christ your Son, who is Lord for ever and ever. We, the congregation, respond with: Amen!



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28. The Eucharistic Prayer – Background

Jesus was celebrating the ritual Passover (in some Gospels) commanded by God to be a perpetually celebrated remembrance. God indicated the significance of the command when he reminded Moses and the Israelites to celebrate it the very next year and again the second year (Exodus 12:14 & 17; Leviticus 23:4-5; Numbers 9:2-3). The Hebrew understanding of this remembrance from the *Haggadah*, the book used to celebrate the Passover Seder, is that —In every generation one is obliged to regard herself as though she had actually gone out from Egypt. —For in every past, present, and future generation, we are to recall our ancestors' hardships as if we ourselves were personally led out of Egypt from slavery. —Its importance is not to be taken for granted. In reality it is made present in the current moment. The Jewish Passover brings past and present together in a kind of “remembering” that doesn't simply recall the past, but binds them as one, making them present to each other. Jesus's words over the bread and the wine about Himself established a new covenant. The apostles learned and understood and passed on to us that as often as they celebrated this new Breaking of the Bread, Jesus' Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension were made present in its complete reality (1 Corinthians 11:25). We are really there (sacramentally). With this fundamental belief, the Mass is the most perfect way the Church has to offer adoration to God. We have the Eucharistic Prayer, because Jesus commanded, —Do this in memory of me. This was interpreted to include not just the breaking of the bread and sharing of the wine but the thanksgiving and blessing which preceded Jesus's actions. The Acts of the Apostles tells us the disciples gathered for the Breaking of the Bread (Acts 2:42). After a regular shared meal, the person presiding at the table followed Jesus's Last Supper actions as closely as possible. Over time, the language and thought became more distinctively Christian. God's gift to mankind is the gift of redemption. We are incapable of giving an equal gift in return. When the gift transcends the ability of the recipient to give in return, the only possible response is gratitude; in our case, thanksgiving and praise. During the first centuries there was no fixed text. The bishop followed the basic model or format and prayed his own words of praise over the bread and wine. The Council of Trent (1545-1563 AD) reaffirmed traditional Christian teaching that the Mass is the same Sacrifice of Calvary offered in an unbloody manner: This sacrifice is truly propitiatory (wins or regains the good will of God). From the fifth century until the reforms of Vatican II, the Latin (Roman or Western) rite used one Eucharistic prayer, termed "the Roman Canon". Eucharistic Prayer I is a translation of this prayer. Christ's sacrifice brought about our redemption from sin and eternal death. Offered once for all on Calvary, it becomes present again in the Mass for us here and now. We join in Christ's perfect offering, and we are called to participate in His perfect worship.



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29. The Eucharistic Prayer – Introduction

The word Eucharist stems from the Greek word *Eucharistia* which means “to show or give favor or thanks”. Most Catholics have been made aware from their earliest days that during the Eucharistic Prayer the bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. What many Catholics are not aware of, however, is that the Eucharistic Prayer is about more than adoring Christ who becomes present in our midst. The Mass is the highpoint and heart of liturgical worship and is the ACTION of Christ and His Body, the Church. In the celebration of Mass, during the Eucharistic Prayer, Christ becomes fully, really, truly, sacramentally present: Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity under the forms of bread and wine. Christ's saving action – his Passion, death, and Resurrection – are offered to the Father by Christ himself in the person of the priest and by all present. Historically, Christ suffered, died, was buried, and rose from the dead around the year AD 30. His redemptive act occurred only once for all mankind. (Hebrews 10:12-14) Now, each time Mass is celebrated, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are made sacramentally present to that one, perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Reading any of the Eucharistic Prayers, you will see they are offered, not to Christ, but to the Father: Father, you are holy indeed ...; Father, we bring you these gifts ...; Father, we ask you.... When the priest prays this prayer he prays: we bring you these gifts; we ask you ...; we offer. That “we” signifies that all the Baptized present at this Eucharistic celebration make this offering in union with Christ. It is worship offered to the Father by Christ as it was at the moment of his Passion, death, and resurrection, but now it is offered through the priest acting in the person of Christ, and it is offered as well by all of us who are part of Christ's Body, the Church. During the Eucharistic Prayer, we have more to do than look forward to the words of institution or kneel and watch the priest pray. We make prayer of praise and thanksgiving in our singing of the *Sanctus*, which represents the prayer of praise and thanksgiving we are offering through. The *Mystery of Faith* is our proclamation of the faith we have during this praise and thanksgiving. And the *Great Amen* following the Doxology affirms that we have joined our own prayer to the words of the priest. We who are privileged to make our own offering through, with, and in Christ respond with the most important acclamation of the Mass: “Amen!” I believe what has just happened: we have offered gifts that represent us; we have been placed upon the altar; our sacrifices are joined to the sacrifice of Christ; we offer ourselves to the Father just as Christ did and is, and God see fit to transform our gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ.



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30. The Eucharistic Prayer – Parts

Parts of the Eucharistic Prayer: The Roman Missal calls the Eucharistic Prayer the Canon, which means norm or rule. The chief elements making up the Eucharistic Prayer may be distinguished in this way: Thanksgiving: (expressed especially in the Preface): We glorify God the Father and give thanks for the whole work of salvation or for some special aspect of it that corresponds to the day, festivity, or season celebrated. It imitates Christ's act of thanksgiving. Acclamation: (*Sanctus*) The whole congregation, joining with the heavenly powers, sings the Holy, Holy, Holy... (Isaiah 6:2-4 and Matthew 21:9) Epiclesis: We ask God the Father to send his Holy Spirit upon the gifts offered by human hands which will be consecrated and become Christ's Body and Blood. The spotless Victim to be received in Communion will be for the salvation of those who will partake of it. Institution Narrative: By means of words and actions of Christ, the Sacrifice is carried out which Christ himself instituted at the Last Supper when he offered his Body and Blood under the species of bread and wine, gave them to his Apostles to eat and drink, and left them the command to perpetuate this same mystery. Anamnesis: The Church, fulfilling the command that she received from Christ the Lord through the Apostles, keeps the memorial of Christ, recalling especially his blessed Passion, glorious Resurrection, and Ascension into heaven. The faithful are caught up in the action of remembering. They remember the death and resurrection of Christ and are offering the bread and wine to the Father: "Do this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24) Offering: In this very memorial, the Church (and in particular the Church here and now gathered) offers the spotless Victim to the Father. The Church's intention, however, is that the faithful not only offer this spotless Victim but also offer themselves, and so day by day to be consummated, through Christ the Mediator, into unity with God and with each other, so that at last God may be all in all as Jesus prayed at the last Supper. Intercessions: Expression is given to the fact that the Eucharist is celebrated in communion with the entire Church, of heaven as well as of earth, and that the offering is made for her and for all her members, living and dead, who have been called to participate in the redemption and the salvation purchased by Christ's Body and Blood. Its theme is the same as that of the earlier intercessions. However, this time it is intended for those who partake of the Body and Blood of Christ during this liturgy whereas the intercessions (after the Nicene Creed) are intended for the entire universal Church. Final doxology: The glorification of God is expressed and is confirmed and concluded by the people's acclamation, —Amen.



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31. The Eucharistic Prayer – Thanksgiving

The Eucharistic Prayer begins with the dialogue:

Priest: The Lord be with you.

People: And with your spirit.

Priest: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Priest: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

People: It is right and just.

This dialogue has not been changed since the second century, and it tells us what we are about to do by praying the Eucharistic Prayer together: we are lifting up our hearts to give thanks to the Lord, because that is the right thing to do. When “The Lord is with you” is used in Scripture, the person addressed is being called by God and told that God will be with them. (Genesis 26:24; Joshua 1:7-9; Judges 6:12-16; 2 Chronicles 15:1-4; Luke 1:26-33) This dialogue calls us to worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24) completely giving and uniting our whole selves with everyone else present, to be the community of prayer. Jesus, in the person of the priest celebrant, has invited us to lift up our hearts to the Lord in prayer, in thanksgiving, and in praise. The celebrant unites us with himself in this prayer of glory that he addresses in the name of the entire community to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. The meaning and intention of the Prayer is that we should join ourselves with Christ and his representative in professing the great deeds of God. In the offering of the Sacrifice, all should participate with reverence and thanksgiving. The prayer called the Preface follows the dialogue. The Preface is a prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification addressed to the Father through the Son. It goes all the way back to the early Church when Christianity was still a sect within Judaism. Most of the elements of the Preface, including the *Sanctus* (Holy) were part of a prayer said every morning in the synagogue. God, who has no need of praise or thanks, delights in our offering it to him. The Roman Missal now has more than 80 Prefaces. Each is intended to develop, in a different way, the theme of thanksgiving in the Eucharistic Prayer, and to bring out more clearly the different facets of the mystery of salvation that are being celebrated, for example: Sundays, Mary, angels, Joseph, martyrs, saints, and other specific celebrations on the church calendar. The body of the Preface is a statement of the special reason for praising God, especially God’s work in creation and redemption. Prefaces are beautiful prayers and really worth reading/praying. They can be found fairly easily online.



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32. The Eucharistic Prayer – The *Sanctus* (Holy) and Acclamations

The Preface is concluded by an acclamation which is based on an angelic hymn from one of Isaiah's visions. As the angels praised Jesus at his birth, we now join them again in their heavenly acclamation (Isaiah 6:3; Mark 11:9-10; Revelation 4:6-11). At every moment of every day the Eucharist is being celebrated in many places throughout the world - a continuous, reverberating, echoing chorus of untold voices joining . . . with all the choirs of angels and saints in proclaiming God's glory . . . Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. *Sanctus* is the Latin word for holy. *Hosanna* in Aramaic translates to "Help, I pray" or "Save, I pray" and was used as Jesus entered Jerusalem, because the people were looking for deliverance from their oppressors. In liturgical usage *Hosanna* means "We praise you." As we sing the *Sanctus*, we acclaim the Triune God as three-times holy. God is far greater than us, and in Christ will give himself to us, and elevate us to him, making us holy as he is holy. As we prepare to relive the Offering of Christ for us, at the priest's invitation, we all unite in the *Sanctus* with its exclamation of Hosanna. As we say "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" we are using the words of those who waved palm branches as Jesus entered Jerusalem before his crucifixion (Matthew 21:9; Psalm 118:26). This hymn is among the most ancient in the Mass, dating to the second century. Even the Latin version contains some words from Hebrew, showing a continuity of worship between the Old and New Testament prayers. We call God "*Dominus Deus Sabaoth*" or "Lord God of Hosts", and we use the Hebrew acclamation of praise "*Hosanna!*" Imagine the presence of countless angels and saints, praying in reverence and singing in unison with the faithful: Holy, holy, holy! St. John Chrysostom observed this reality saying, "The whole sanctuary and the space before the altar is filled with the heavenly powers come to honor him who becomes present upon the altar." Like Isaiah, we fall on our knees in awe, for we realize the presence of something greater than ourselves.



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33. The Eucharistic Prayer – The Epiclesis

Epiclesis is a Greek word meaning “to call down upon”. In this prayer the Church, through the celebrant, implores that the Father send the power of his Holy Spirit to consecrate this bread and wine, the gifts offered by human hands, and change them into the Body and Blood of his Son, and that the spotless Victim to be received in Communion be for the salvation of those who will partake of it. After praising God’s power, we now call upon it. Christ is about to become present on the altar, hidden under the form of bread and wine. In Nazareth, Our Lady was told that God’s Son would become present within her, his divinity hidden under the form of an unborn child. The Angel explained to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Luke 1:35). Christ’s presence on earth required God’s power. Though he willed Mary’s collaboration, her “yes” (or “*fiat*”) was also needed. Faith in God does not exclude the need for his people to cooperate with their part, as Mary exemplifies. Throughout the Mass, we too have given our “yes” to God, expressed our willingness to receive Christ into our hearts, into our lives, and through us into our world. At this point of the Eucharistic Prayer, we pray for the presence of God in a special way. (Jesus is already present in the congregation - as he promised that he would be present whenever two or three persons are gathered in his name (Matthew 18:20). He is present through the Word proclaimed and preached, and he is present through the priest.) Now we call upon the Holy Spirit to come upon the gifts we bring, and transform them into his Real Presence. The priest extends his hands over the offerings in prayer. He invokes God’s power for the offerings to be consecrated and transformed into Christ’s body and blood, and God’s power that we who will receive him in Communion may likewise be transformed into him. God’s “*fiat*” “let there be...,” created the universe at the beginning of time. Mary’s “*fiat*”, “let it be...” brought forth the Redeemer of the universe two thousand years ago. As we invoke the Holy Spirit at this part of the Mass, let us prepare to embrace the miracle of Christ’s presence by likewise saying “yes” with our whole lives. One example of an Epiclesis is this one, from Eucharistic Prayer II:

“You are indeed Holy, O Lord, the fount of all holiness. Make holy, there, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.”



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34. The Eucharistic Prayer – The Institution Narrative

Jesus Christ came into this world to bring all humanity back to the Father. His whole earthly life, from his Incarnation through his Resurrection, is for our Redemption. The culmination of that life is the Paschal Mystery: the Passion, Death, and Resurrection, which is the “theme” that we celebrate at every Mass, regardless of season or feast. This culmination is the focus of the Institution Narrative, when we use the very words of Jesus at the Last Supper. The priest carries forward the priesthood Jesus instituted that first Holy Thursday night. Christ is the priest and the altar and the victim of sacrifice. The priest acts *in Persona Christi* (“in the Person of Christ”) as he consecrates the Eucharist. This part of the Eucharistic Prayer is called the Institution Narrative, because it recalls when and how Christ instituted the Eucharist, and with it, his holy priesthood. “On the night he was betrayed...” Jesus knew well that some of his followers throughout time would reject the fruits of his sacrifice and his teaching on his presence in the Eucharist. His actions are direct and clear; his words are simple and straightforward. However, he knew some would not believe and would even leave him. This is foreshadowed at the end of his discourse on the Eucharist, in John 6, when some of his disciples will no longer follow him because they could not believe Jesus will give his flesh to eat and his blood to drink. Throughout the world, at this part of the Mass, Christ comes again into the world. His eternal sacrifice is made present now in reality, in an unbloody manner, upon the altar. The bread and wine are consecrated separately because that is what Jesus did at the Last Supper. However, the Church believes and teaches that he is fully present in both the Sacred Host and the Precious Blood. The resurrected and glorified Christ cannot be divided.

“On the day before we was to suffer, he took bread in his holy and venerable hands, and with eyes raised to heaven to you, O God, his almighty Father, giving you thanks, he said the blessing, broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples, saying: TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND EAT OF IT, FOR THIS IS MY BODY, WHICH WILL BE GIVEN UP FOR YOU. In a similar way, when supper was ended, he took this precious chalice in his holy and venerable hands, and once more giving you thanks, he said the blessing and gave the chalice to his disciples, saying: TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND DRINK FROM IT, FOR THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD, THE BLOOD OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL COVENANT, WHICH WILL BE POURED OUT FOR YOU AND FOR MANY FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME.”

(from the Roman Canon, Eucharistic Prayer I)



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35. The Eucharistic Prayer – The Elevation

“When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself” (John 12:32). He was lifted up on the Cross, but is also lifted up at every Mass. We are with Jesus at His table and at the foot of His Cross as the priest elevates the Sacred Host and Chalice. As the Host is raised, we can make an act of faith, like St. Thomas the Apostle, who at first doubted but came to believe, praying “My Lord and My God!” (John 20:28) in the silence of our hearts. As the Chalice is elevated, we can renew our Covenant with the Lord, and appreciate the forgiveness it brings us, praying “My Jesus, Mercy!” in the silence of our soul in adoration. In this moment, we can look upon the Lord and contemplate Him, exchanging gazes, and pray: “Lord, I believe, I adore, I trust, and I love you. I ask pardon for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not trust, and do not love you.” Confess in your heart and with your whole being your belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist: not mere symbol, but Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. Tell Jesus how much you love Him. Praise and thank the Father and Holy Spirit for making Jesus present. As the priest genuflects in profound adoration, our souls also bow down before the Divine Majesty, present on the altar, and the majesty of Christ’s love poured out for us in his Body and Blood. (When congregations are standing, they make a profound bow as the celebrant genuflects, just as concelebrants do.) We recall the words of St. Thomas Aquinas: “Blood, that but one drop... has the power to win all the world forgiveness of its world of sin”. Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper as the new and everlasting covenant in his Blood. In the Old Testament, covenants between God and his people were ratified through a bloody sacrifice. The blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the people by Moses as a sign of their acceptance of the covenant at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:8). The priest elevates the Host and the Chalice during the Consecration to allow the community to acknowledge and accept this sacrifice of the new covenant. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass completes and fulfils all the sacrifices of the Old Covenant (Catechism of the Catholic Church #1330). At Mass, Holy Thursday unites with Good Friday and Easter Sunday.



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36. The Eucharistic Prayer – Transubstantiation

“This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.” (John 6:50-51) “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you... he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him” (John 6:53-56). Twelve times in this chapter of John’s Gospel Jesus says He is the bread that came down from heaven, and four times that they would have to “eat my flesh and drink my blood”. These words of Christ present us with an awesome truth, but how can we even begin to understand them? St. Thomas Aquinas tried to explain it by using the philosophical terms identified by the Greek philosopher Aristotle. There are two key elements: substance and accident. For Aquinas (and Aristotle), “substance” is the quality that makes a particular thing be that thing, for example: the reality that makes a piece of wood be wood. All wood is wood. Even though different pieces may have different shapes, different colors, and different hardnesses, it is still wood. The quality that makes it “wood” is called “substance”. The differences between the various woods are called “accidents”. They are not essential to the reality that underlies them. Applying those principles to the consecration of bread and wine, St. Thomas explains that here the accidents, the external appearances, the color, smell, even the taste of bread and wine, all remain. BUT the “what it is”, the substance, changes. It is no longer bread and wine, but is the Body and Blood of Christ, now under the appearance (what theologians call the “sacramental species”) of bread and wine. Catholic doctrine maintains that the Presence of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine is real, not just a symbolic or spiritual presence. Hence, in writing, it is to be referred to as the Real Presence. During Christ’s life, His divinity was veiled through His human nature. It was His humanity that was apparent to us. To believe He was God required an act of faith. Now, in the Eucharist, both Christ’s divinity and humanity are hidden, veiled by the sacramental species. It requires a great act of faith to say that what appears to us as bread and wine is the Body and Blood of Christ. BUT we take Jesus at His word when he said at the Last Supper “This IS my body...this IS my blood”. This unique and miraculous act, by which something changes its substance while its accidents remain, is called “*transubstantiation*”. Since all that is required is faith, even young children can understand that this is not bread, but Christ Himself, as the “Bread of Life”. For this reason Pope St. Pius X lowered the age of reception of Holy Communion and encouraged the frequent reception of Communion.



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37. The Eucharistic Prayer – The Mystery of Faith

The words of the Institution Narrative end with Christ's command, "Do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19). The Mass makes his Sacrifice a reality on the altar. After the elevation of the Host and Chalice, we proclaim the Mystery of Faith. What was bread and wine is now the real person of Jesus (Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity) in everything except physical appearance. We kneel or stand before the Real Presence of Christ. A miracle has happened – the Miracle of Miracles. In the Eucharistic Prayer, after the invocation of the Holy Spirit to effect transubstantiation, and the Words of Institution, the priest invites the congregation to sing the Mystery of Faith by simply announcing what it is: "The Mystery of Faith". —Mystery comes from the Greek word that is translated into Latin as *sacramentum* or sacrament. The "mystery of faith" that we proclaim is not just the truth we say, it is the Eucharist. We make an act of faith together, proclaiming that the Eucharist before us is Christ, who died, rose from the dead, and will come again as he promised. He comes again in a real way in the Eucharist. There are currently three acclamations for the Mystery of Faith in the Roman Missal:

We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again.

When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again.

Save us, Savior of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.

In proclaiming this Mystery together as a congregation, we give our assent in faith to the Real Presence, the sacrifice of Christ once and for all made present again on this altar during this Mass. We transcend time itself and are united with the Paschal Mystery.



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38. The Eucharistic Prayer – Anamnesis and The Doxology

In the *anamnesis*, another Greek word meaning “remembrance”, we call to mind all that Christ has done for us. His Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension are present on the altar - not again - but in an eternal now. This is not a “remembering” in the customary understanding of the word today. It is a making present now something that occurred in the past. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. He knew what He was intending to establish forever when he said, “Do this in memory of me”. He planned to be personally present to us in all the ways already mentioned (priest, assembly, Word, Sacrament). Before us is His Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension as a pledge to what He holds in store for us. For the “I AM” there is no time - just an eternal now or singularity - as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Jesus said He will be with us until the end of time. We will be with Him after our earthly life ends, but our eternal lives began in our Baptism. Jesus, His words, and His promise are recalled, taken to heart, made present, and celebrated. Offering: We offer to the Father the timeless eternal sacrifice in great joy and with a deeper sense of thanksgiving. He has given us everything in Christ. “The Church’s intention, however, is that the faithful not only offer this spotless Victim, but also learn to offer themselves, and to day-by-day be consummated, through Christ the Mediator... so that at last God may be all in all.” Intercessions: This memory of God’s saving action leads to a series of petitions. The first is that all who receive Jesus may be united as one in the Holy Spirit. There is a series of prayers for peace and salvation of the world, for the Church throughout the world, the Pope, our Bishop, clergy, for all the people of God, and for the deceased. The priest prays for God’s mercy on all of us, that our sacrifice is acceptable, and that we might all, one day, through the intercession of the saints, come to that eternal banquet of which the Mass is only a foretaste. Final Doxology: With great and solemn joy the priest raises the Body and Blood of Jesus and offers a doxology, a prayer of glory and praise that announces that we have done what we set out to do at the beginning (to “give thanks to the Lord”), and acknowledge what God has chosen to do through our words in making Christ present: “*Through him, and with him, and in him, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, for ever and ever.*” Our Great Amen is an acclamation and confirmation of the glorification of God and loudly proclaims our agreement with the prayer and the sacrifice, and our active participation in it.



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39. The Communion Rite – Introduction

The Communion Rite, the culmination of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, begins directly after the Great Amen of the Eucharistic Prayer. The Communion Rite consists of the following elements:

- The Lord's Prayer
- The Sign of Peace
- The Fraction Rite
- The Communion Procession
- The Prayer After Communion

Every element of this rite is meant to focus on the unity we achieve by participating in this Sacrament of the Eucharist – unity with God in Jesus Christ and, through that, unity with one another. The Eucharistic Celebration is the Paschal Banquet, and in keeping with the Lord's command, His Body and Blood should be received by the faithful who are properly disposed to receive this spiritual food. Just as sharing a meal presupposes good relations, so the Eucharist is the Sacrament of those reconciled. The reception of Communion has, throughout the history of the Church, implied three kinds of "communion": communion with Christ, communion with the Church and Her teachings, and communion with our sisters and brothers in the assembly and in the Church. This is why non-Catholics may not receive Holy Communion, as it suggests a union that unfortunately does not exist. (This reality should inspire us to pray and work for the reunification of all Christian Churches.) It is also why those who are in a state of grave sin are not to receive Communion (under most circumstances) until they have been forgiven and strengthened through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Eucharist is the end of a journey of reconciliation with God and the Church through the Sacrament of Penance and the return to the state of grace. The Communion Rite is the immediate preparation for Holy Communion. Indeed, receiving Holy Communion with a contrite heart brings the grace of the Holy Spirit which can be of assistance in overcoming temptations and in bearing witness in the Christian life. In the Lord's Prayer we ask to be purified of sin and delivered from the Evil One. The Rite of Peace permits the faithful to share ecclesial communion and love with each other and at the same time serves to authenticate a general willingness to pardon others.



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40. The Communion Rite – The Lord’s Prayer

The celebrant introduces the Lord’s Prayer with the following words: “At the Savior’s command, and formed by divine teaching, we dare to say:”. The Lord’s Prayer is commonly called “The Our Father” as this prayer to our Father was taught and given to us by the Lord Jesus. Of the Lord’s Prayer, St. John Chrysostom wrote, “The Lord teaches us to make prayer in common for all our brethren. For he did not say ‘my Father’ who art in heaven, but ‘our’ Father, offering petitions for the common body”. The Lord’s Prayer appears twice in the Gospels: In Matthew 6:9, Jesus said, “This is how you are to pray”. In Luke 11:2, He said to them, “When you pray, say:”

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

The priest then says: *Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.*

We respond: *For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever.*

St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, “The Lord’s Prayer is the most perfect of prayers. . . In it we ask, not only for all the things we can rightly desire, but also in the sequence that they should be desired. This prayer not only teaches us to ask for things, but also in what order we should desire them.” The Catechism of the Catholic Church devotes explanation of The Lord’s Prayer from sections 2759 through 2865, and many saints have written reflections on each phrase of the Our Father.



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41. The Communion Rite – The Sign of Peace

For families, communities, and the entire Church, peace of heart is the gift of the Risen Lord. The Rite of Peace which follows The Lord's Prayer is a means by which the Church asks for peace and unity for herself and for the whole human family. The faithful express to each other their ecclesial communion and mutual charity. The peace promised by Jesus is pleaded for in the priest's words:

Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles: Peace I leave you, my peace I give you, look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and graciously grant her peace and unity in accordance with your will. Who live and reign for ever and ever.

The congregation responds with the affirmation: Amen.

The priest then extends the sign of peace to everyone by saying: The peace of the Lord be with you always. The assembled extend that peace back to the priest by saying: *And with your spirit.*

The invitation to extend the sign of peace among members of the assembly comes from the deacon (or the priest in his absence). The deacon directs posture, gesture, and the action in the liturgy. He tells us when to stand or sit, when to leave and when to show peace. *Let us offer each other the sign of peace.* At this powerful moment in the liturgy we now offer some very real gesture of mutual forgiveness and peace – a handshake, a kiss, an embrace to those around us. These are not greetings but rather pledges that the Lord's gift of peace and reconciliation will flow through us and out to others. We accompany these gestures with such words as: "May the peace of Christ be with you", or "Peace be with you". In some religious communities, the more senior community member says "Peace be with you" and the junior responds "and with your spirit" as they embrace.



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42. The Communion Rite – The Fraction Rite

The Fraction Rite, or Breaking of the Bread, occurs right after we have exchanged the sign of peace. The phrase “Breaking of the Bread” is the first name the early Christians used for the Mass and the Eucharist. To break bread signifies the sharing of one’s life and food with family. We see each other as members of one family at the one Table of the Lord. In breaking and sharing the one bread, which is Christ, we become one. Jesus allowed himself to be broken to save humanity. His mercy and peace allows us and calls us to be broken for others in ways we may not expect or anticipate. Only in opening ourselves to the possibility and reality of being broken now and in the future – receiving mercy and being merciful – receiving peace and giving peace and being at peace – can we recognize who we really are as individuals and as a community and family before God. Corporately and personally we simply acknowledge, Lord we are not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and you will heal us. The priest breaks the Eucharistic Bread while the Lamb of God is sung. Christ’s gesture of breaking and sharing bread at the Last Supper signifies that the many faithful are made one body by receiving Communion from the one Bread of Life which is Christ, who died and rose for the salvation of the world (1 Corinthians 10:17). Commingling: While the priest breaks the Sacred Host, he puts a small piece into the Chalice to signify the unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the work of salvation. The priest prays: *May this mingling of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.*



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43. The Communion Rite – *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God)

When the liturgy describes “The Breaking of the Bread,” it calls for the “Lamb of God” to be sung. John the Baptist first used the expression when he pointed out Jesus to some of his own disciples (John 1:29). John recognizes Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He draws the image from other passages of Scripture. One night the devastating angel delivered ancient Israel from the hands of the enemy; God’s faithful people sacrificed an unblemished lamb and sprinkled its blood on their doorposts (Exodus 12:3,7). Many generations later, when Israel found itself in bondage again, Isaiah compared God’s suffering servant to a lamb that is led to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7). Breaking bread and pouring wine are moments of sacrifice in our Mass. In these reverent actions, Christ, the sacrificial victim, is broken and poured out. “Lamb” and “bread” go together because the bread and the wine have become Christ, the Lamb, who is the sacrifice, and whose saving mystery we celebrate. *Agnus Dei* is a litany and is said to have been introduced into the Mass by Pope Sergius I (687 - 701). *Agnus Dei* is a Latin term meaning Lamb of God and is used to refer to Jesus Christ and the ultimate sacrifice he made by dying on the cross to pay for the sins of all. Sacrificial offerings have their roots in ancient Jewish Temple sacrifices. The Latin form (with translation) is:

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace.

The words “Lamb of God” are used again just prior to the reception of communion, when the priest holds the Host a little above the Chalice and says “Behold the Lamb of God...” (*Ecce, Agnus Dei...*), so you can see the importance of these words in our faith.



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44. The Communion Rite – The Procession (Reception of Holy Communion)

Throughout the entire Mass we have been preparing ourselves for this “Communion with our Lord”. In the Penitential Rite we accept Jesus as our Lord, by confessing and repenting of our sins and putting our total trust in him. In the Profession of Faith we accept the teachings of the Catholic Church. In the Rite of Peace we accept the peace of Jesus and open our hearts to share this gift with all those assembled. The priest prepares himself to receive Communion by joining his hands and praying these words privately:

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 brought 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 parted from you.

The priest genuflects in a final adoration of the Body and Blood of Christ and then raises the consecrated Host and Chalice, containing the Blood of Christ, and proclaims to the people: *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.* (Romans 16:16) The congregation responds: *Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.* (John 1:29) The priest consumes the Body and Blood of Christ and then distributes Communion to the deacon and extraordinary ministers. As we stand and process toward the altar of grace we demonstrate our love and unity in Christ by singing the words of the Communion song. When we stand before the minister, we bow our head as a sign of our reverence for the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The minister says: *The Body of Christ*. We can take advantage of the privilege to receive the Blood of Christ so that Communion stands out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated. As St. Augustine teaches, we are what we receive. By our response of “Amen” we affirm our belief in the Eucharist and we renew our Baptism, the Sacrament that made us part of the Church, part of the Body of Christ. Our “Amen” means “Amen, I believe this is the Body of Christ, given to me by the Church (the Body of Christ), and that I am called to be the Body of Christ to the world.”

In the Diocese of Cleveland all stand throughout the Procession, and all sit or kneel for a period of silent prayer after all have received. See www.dioceseofcleveland.org/offices/worship/faqs “Communion Rite Posture” for the teaching of the Bishop of Cleveland since 2004, affirmed by each of his successors.



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45. The Communion Rite – The Communion Chant

Communion means more than receiving – it means uniting. We have received Christ: Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity; and by this we also commune with Him. We share His very life. He becomes the Food of our souls, the Life of our life. He transforms us into Himself. Words fall short of the depth of this mystery. The Communion chant expresses this with poetic wonderment and joy. This union is the closest and most intense communion we can have with God on earth; God comes to us as Food. We become one with God. Through Holy Communion we draw close to Jesus and to each other. The Liturgy, after all, is the source and summit of the Christian Life. We continue to sing after returning to our pews. The priest or deacon purifies the vessels after Communion has been distributed. Silent Prayer: We take a moment to enjoy the Lord's company, to thank Jesus, and to tell him that we love him. Having prayed together through our singing of the Communion chant, we now pray together silently, each entering in to the intimate depth of communion on every level.

“While the Priest is receiving the Sacrament, the Communion Chant is begun, its purpose being to express the spiritual union of the communicants by means of the unity of their voices, to show gladness of heart, and to bring out more clearly the ‘communitarian’ character of the procession to receive the Eucharist. The singing is prolonged for as long as the Sacrament is being administered to the faithful.” (GIRM 86). The General Instruction envisions the entire congregation participating in singing from the communion of the Priest until the communion of the final member of the congregation.

The following is a prayer written by St. Thomas Aquinas for after receiving Holy Communion. Lord, Holy Father, almighty and ever-living God, I thank you. For though I am a sinner, you have fed me with the precious Body and Blood of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. You did this not because I deserved it, but because you are kind and merciful. I pray that this Holy Communion may not add to my guilt and punishment, but may lead me to forgiveness and salvation. May it be for me the armor of faith and a shield of good will. May it purify me from evil ways and put an end to my base passions. May it bring me charity and patience, humility and obedience, and may it strengthen my power to do every kind of good. May it be a strong defense against the deceit of my enemies, visible and invisible. May it calm perfectly all my evil impulses, bodily and spiritual. May it unite me more closely to you, the one true God; may it bring me full possession of the goal I am longing for. And I pray that you will lead me, a sinner, to the magnificent banquet where you, with your Son and the Holy Spirit are for all your saints the true light, total fulfillment, everlasting joy, gladness without end, exquisite delight, and most perfect happiness. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Once the priest returns to the Presider's chair, he offers his own silent prayer.



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46. The Communion Rite – The Prayer after Communion

The congregation rises as the priest stands to say or sing the Prayer after Communion from the Roman Missal. This prayer asks that the Body and Blood of Christ may help us live as faithful Christians so that one day we may have a place of joy at God's heavenly table. The Prayer after Communion concludes both the Communion Rite and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It is also the last of the presidential prayers of the Mass, prayers offered by the presiding priest on behalf of the entire assembly. The Prayer after Communion is a prayer of petition wherein God is asked that we may all be granted the full effects of the Eucharist we have just celebrated. This prayer often reflects the message we have heard in today's readings. In the Mass, only one Prayer after Communion is said. One example from the liturgical season of Ordinary Time is:

*Lord,
may your healing love turn us from sin
and keep us on the way that leads to you.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord.*

The people make the prayer their own by the acclamation, Amen.

As we prepare to conclude our year and a half long journey through the liturgy through catechesis, prayer, and reflection, what have you learned about the liturgy? What new understandings do you have about the work that each of us is called to do during the celebration? How does the liturgy call you to communal celebration with your sisters and brothers in the Church?



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47. The Concluding Rite

The Concluding Rites follow the Prayer after Communion. The priest may add any additional comments or make announcements as necessary. Greeting: The priest greets the congregation: *The Lord be with you.* We respond with: *And with your spirit.* Solemn Blessing or Prayer over the People: The priest then blesses the people. This act is based on the book of Numbers when the Lord told Moses (Numbers 6:23-27): “Speak to Aaron and his sons and tell them: This is how you shall bless the Israelites. Say to them: The Lord bless you and keep you! The Lord let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you! The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace! So shall they invoke my name upon the Israelites, and I will bless them.”

Option A: Simple Form

Priest: May almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Option B: Prayer over the People

Deacon or Priest: Bow your heads and pray for God’s blessing.

[The priest may choose from one or more invocations depending on the occasion or special need. Some feasts have proper Solemn Blessings. The people respond “Amen” to each one. The following conclusion is always used.]

Priest: May almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Dismissal: The deacon or priest dismisses the people so they may go forth to do good works, praising and blessing God. The deacon or priest says: *Go forth, the Mass is ended -or- Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord -or- Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life -or Go in peace.* All respond with: *Thanks be to God.*

The priest and ministers reverence the altar and genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament before they process out of church. The Roman liturgy has never included a “Closing Hymn”, although there is the option for the congregation to sing a Hymn of Thanksgiving after the period of silent prayer at the end of the Communion Rite. The concluding rites form one continuous action which may culminate in the priest's personal greetings at the church door.



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48. The Blessing and The Dismissal

"Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life."

The command *"Ite, missa est"* ended the Latin Mass. Today, we use the translation: "The Mass is ended. Go in peace." Mass comes from the Latin word *missa*. *Missa* has related meanings: to send, mission, commission, and dismiss. The dismissal rite is the part of the Mass where we are sent back into our daily lives. It translates into "Go" or "You, go." It is the imperative form of the word, which means it's an order – sort of like a military command. So translating *Ite, missa est* in terms of our modern liturgy, is something like this: "Go, you're being sent on a mission." "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." That's the mission we're being sent on: to love and serve God and one another. It's the same mission Christ entrusted to His disciples: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8) These words, and similar ones in John 20:21, Matthew 28:19-20, and Mark 16:15 – tell us that the Lord commissioned (commanded) His disciples to proclaim the Gospel, the Good News of the Kingdom, to everyone in every place and time. That's the commission we've also been given. It's what we're told to do at the end of every Mass. Catholics who have participated in the Sacrifice of the Lord cannot be content with just going back home, satisfied at having accomplished their duty and obeyed the law. We must strive to radiate justice and charity around us. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (no. 1332) tells us the same: "Holy Mass (*Missa*), the liturgy in which the mystery of salvation is accomplished, concludes with the sending forth (*missio*) of the faithful, so that they may fulfill God's will in their daily lives." So, we are being sent on a mission. We have a job to do, a mission to accomplish. The end of Mass is only the beginning. One last thing about the phrase *"Ite, missa est."* *Est* is a verb of being, like "is" or "will be." So, the translation is most closely: "Go, the Mass is." The Mass is – the mission is – ongoing. We are always being sent. We go to Mass to celebrate the Eucharist, but the Mass (like Eucharist) doesn't end. When we are baptized into Christ, it is for eternity. At Mass, we're just being strengthened and reminded of that – and sent out anew to proclaim it to others. THANKS BE TO GOD!!

This is one reason it is important for the entire community to remain until the end of Mass, and not simply leave after personally receiving Communion (which suggests one's attendance is only about something personal and not, as we have spent the entire year learning, about all of us as a community of believers). We all need to hear the commissioning words of the dismissal. Then we go out together to be the Body of Christ for the world.

"Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord."



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49. Becoming a Living Liturgy

During the Second Vatican Council, the Church promulgated *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. It is filled with powerful texts about why the liturgy is important enough that we have spent the last seventeen months growing in it. There are 130 paragraphs in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, all of which merit study (you can find this and all universal Church teachings at www.vatican.va), but even if we home in on two short paragraphs we can conclude our catechetical journey. “[T]he liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows” (SC 10). Our individual lives, our lives as families, as a parish, as a diocese, and as a Church constantly flow to and from the liturgy. We bring everything to it, and we take the grace of Christ out to the world from it. “[R]enewal in the Eucharist of the covenant between the Lord and man draws the faithful into the compelling love of Christ and sets them on fire” (SC 10).

Liturgy, as we’ve seen, requires work on our parts. “But in order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds should be attuned to their voices, and that they should cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain” (SC 11). We prepare to celebrate by reading the readings ahead of time and by being aware of the “stuff” of our daily lives that are in need of transformation; priests and liturgical ministers don’t have a corner on preparation. We celebrate fully, with participation that is both internal (attention, prayer, reflection, and confession of faith) and external (communal prayers, singing, postures, and gestures).

“Pastors of souls must therefore realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the mere observation of the laws governing valid and licit celebration” (SC 11). We have a duty to celebrate the liturgy faithfully and well, as the Church asks us to. Pope Benedict says that the best catechesis is liturgy well-celebrated. But our participation only begins with everyone doing their part to celebrate according to the rubrics; for “it is their duty to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects” (SC 11). May we continually grow as a parish community in our love for and celebration of the sacred liturgy, and may it bring us all together to everlasting life!