

THE PARTS OF THE MASS

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.... When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. ~ Luke 24:27, 30



AT THE LAST SUPPER, on the night when Jesus was betrayed, he instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout all time until that day that he would come again. Through the celebration of the Mass, the Church remembers his death and Resurrection, brings the saving effects of his sacrifice into the present, and nourishes her people with the Paschal Banquet in which Christ is eaten and the heart is filled with his grace.

The Mass is a celebration of the Paschal mystery of Christ. The Paschal mystery refers to his saving work accomplished by his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. A step-by-step walk through the Mass can help us understand how this central mystery of the faith is celebrated and made present every time the People of God gather to worship.

Opening Rites

Processional: The Mass begins with a processional.

The altar is revered by all in procession because it represents the table of the Lord. It is the place of sacrifice, the holy place. Those in the procession include the altar servers, reader(s), a deacon if present, concelebrating priests (if any), and the main celebrant who is the priest (or bishop) that will preside over the celebration. They process in where the people are gathered, make a sign of reverence toward the altar, and take their appropriate seats.

Greeting: “[W]here two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20). The priest leads the people in the sign of the cross and greets them in the name of the Lord.

Penitential Rite: “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mt 9:13). In order to celebrate the Mass worthily, the priest invites all those present to participate in the penitential rite, which the whole congregation carries out through a communal confession of sin and absolution from the priest. True worship

requires repentance of sin and reconciliation; we must be reconciled with God and one another. This rite can be carried out in several ways but the two most common forms are the Confiteor (which means “I confess”) and the Kyrie Eleison (which means “Lord, have mercy”). Both prayers are our recognition of sin and plea for God’s mercy. Confident that God never turns away a contrite heart and resting on the assurance of the Church entrusted with his mercy, the priest then leads the people in a hymn of praise.

The Gloria: “Ascribe to the Lord, O Heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy array” (Ps 29:1-2). Forgiveness of all venial sins, the people

are now ready to praise God with the great hymn called the Gloria. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased” (Lk 2:14). This is an ancient hymn of praise and thanksgiving for all God has done, is doing, and will ever do for his people. In this way, those gathered unite themselves with those in Heaven who continually worship God in the same manner: “And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen’” (Rv 7:11-12). The Gloria is either

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Wheatfield at sunset

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sung or said on all Sundays except for the seasons of Advent and Lent, on solemnities and feasts, and on special, more solemn celebrations.

Collect: *“The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord accepts my prayer”* (Ps 6:9). After the Gloria, the priest invites the people to pray, and together with him they observe a brief silence to place themselves in the presence of God and call to mind their petitions. The priest then prays the opening prayer, also known as the *collect*, which expresses the main theme of the Mass. The priest’s final words of the prayer address a petition to the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

The Liturgy of the Word

“Blessed ... are those who hear the word of God and keep it” (Lk 11:28).

Readings: *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”* (Mt 4:4). Christ is present when his Word is proclaimed, and his Word is food for the soul. Here we meet Christ at the Table of his Word. The Word of God feeds and instructs us and prepares us to receive the Body of Christ in the Eucharist. The **first reading** is usually from the Old Testament and is followed by a **response** from the book of Psalms in Scripture. If the celebration is a solemn one, a **second reading** from the New Testament other than the Gospels is read. Following these is the proclamation of the **Gospel**. The Gospel is especially venerated because it is an account of the life of the Lord and contains the message of salvation. Frequently, the book of the Gospels is carried in procession with candles, accompanied by the singing of an Alleluia verse. The people stand while the Gospel is read.

The Homily: *“I strive ... for all ... that their hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* (Col 2:1-2). After the readings,

the bishop, priest, or deacon explains these Scriptures and encourages reflection on the Word of God in order to prepare the people’s hearts and minds for the Eucharist. He exhorts the people to live by the Word that gives life.

The Profession of Faith: *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God”* (Jn 6:68-69). The Profession of Faith or Creed is a summary of all that the Church believes. It is an ancient formula that expresses the central truths of the faith. Every Sunday (and on other solemn feasts) the

Creed is prayed to remind those present of their baptismal declaration of faith and to unite the congregation as a community of believers preparing to approach the table of the Lord’s Body and Blood. The Nicene Creed includes the phrase, “by the power of the Holy Spirit, he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man,” at which point the people bow (and on the feasts of Christmas and Annunciation they genuflect).

The Prayers of the Faithful: *“The Lord answers you in the day of trouble! ... May he remember all your offerings ... May he grant you your heart’s desire ... and fulfill all your petitions”* (Ps 20:1-5). The Prayers of the Faithful or General Intercessions remind

the congregation that they are united with the whole Church in their concern for their own needs and the needs of others. Petitions are made at this time for the Pope and bishops, government leaders, the poor and the sick, and any other special needs present in the local community or the universal Church. There is often a time of silence so individuals can offer their own personal needs and unite them to the prayer of the whole Church.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

“This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk 22:19).

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A cantor leading the responsorial Psalm at Mass

The Preparation of the Gifts: *“The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise”* (Ps 51:17). *“I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship”* (Rom 12:1). At the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the altar is prepared and the gifts of bread and wine which will become Christ’s Body and Blood are brought forward by the altar servers or representatives of the congregation. These gifts are received by the celebrant and are placed upon the altar. He blesses them, washes his hands (a sign of purification), and invites the people to pray that the sacrifice will be acceptable to God.

The Eucharistic Prayer: *“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come ... he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption”* (Heb 9:11-12). The Mass is truly a *sacrifice*, a re-presentation of Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary. Christ’s death is *made present* in sacrament and thus the congregation is actually at Calvary, present at the foot of the cross. The Eucharistic Prayer contains many elements, but the most important is the consecration of the Eucharist, which uses Jesus’ *words of institution* at the Last Supper. When the priest says these words, he acts in the person of Christ; at that moment, the bread and wine are changed into the actual Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The Consecration is the most sacred act of the priesthood and from it springs the very source and life of the Church, the Eucharist.

The Lord’s Prayer: *“And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him”* (Mt 6:7-8). After the Eucharistic Prayer, the people pray in the words that Jesus taught his disciples to pray, the *Lord’s Prayer*. This prayer is a petition for both natural and supernatural nourishment and again implores God for his mercy to grant forgiveness from sin so that

what is holy (the Eucharist) may be given to those who have been made holy through God the Father’s love and mercy.

The Sign of Peace: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid”* (Jn 14:27). The priest invites the congregation to exchange a sign of peace (either a handshake or kiss).

The Lamb of God: *“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing”* (Rv 5:12). The *Agnus Dei* (“Lamb of God”) reminds the people that the Body and Blood of Jesus which they are about to receive is truly the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Communion: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, 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 has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day”* (Jn 6:53-54). *“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?”* (1 Cor 10:16). To receive the Lord in the Eucharist is the greatest privilege of those in complete union with the Church. The Christian should approach the Eucharist humbly, and without any stain of serious sin; also the Church requires that a one-hour fast from food be observed by those going to Communion. After a sign of reverence (a bow), Holy Communion is received either in the hand or on the tongue. A time of meditation and thanksgiving follows this momentous gift.

The Concluding Rite

The concluding rite consists of the priest’s greeting and final blessing, followed by the dismissal, which sends each of those present back to the world to do good works while praising and blessing the Lord: *“Go in peace to love and serve the Lord”* (*The Roman Missal, Concluding Rite*). The congregation responds: *“Thanks be to God.”* The celebrant and those who had processed in with him then process out.

(CCC 1348-1355)

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