

## **The Mass Deconstructed**

### **Understanding The Liturgy of the Eucharist**

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is a Pascal Sacrifice and banquet, by which the Sacrifice of the Cross is continuously made present in the Church whenever the Priest, representing Christ the Lord, carries out what the Lord himself did and handed over to his disciples to be done in his memory.

Jesus said, “take this...” and so we take bread and wine and place them on the altar. Jesus blessed the bread, and so the Priest gives thanks for the gift of salvation in the great Eucharistic Prayer, and the gifts of bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. Jesus broke the bread and gave it to his disciples. So the Priest breaks the bread which has become Christ’s Body, so that we, though many, may “receive from the one bread of the Lord’s Body and from the one chalice the Lord’s Blood in the same way the Apostles received them from Christ’s own hands.

The 2 Main Parts of the Liturgy of the Eucharist

- Preparation of the Gifts
- The Eucharistic Prayer

### **The Preparation of the Gifts**

#### **Presentation of the Gifts**

Once the altar has been prepared with the corporal, purificator, Missal, and chalice, a few of the faithful bring forward the bread, wine and monetary offering and present them to the priest. This procession is accompanied by the Offertory chant or song.

This procession has profound meaning. The gathered faithful are not silent spectators. When the gifts of bread and wine are placed into the hands of the Priest, it is not just bread that is offered, but with those pieces of bread are mixed the sacrifices of our lives. And with the wine in that cruet are mixed the joys and sorrows, the longings and holy desires of each member of the gathered assembly. At this presentation the faithful are like the Magi bringing gifts to the Christ child. But these gifts are of an even greater value than gold, frankincense, and myrrh, for these are the gifts of our lives.

Not only gifts of bread and wine, of course, but monetary donations to support the work of the church and to assist those who are poor are likewise collected inspired by Christ “who became poor to make us rich.”

#### **Prayer Over the Gifts**

The priest offers the Sacrifice of the altar, even as the gathered faithful have offered the sacrifices of their lives. The priest takes the gifts of bread into his hands in the same manner the Lord would have done each time he took bread at the beginning of a meal with his disciples to bless God and the food they were about to eat. Then a little water is poured into the wine in the chalice. The priest takes the chalice and blesses and offers the wine. The priest then washes his hands asking that God might cleanse him from all his sins in order that he might be worthy to offer this great sacrifice.

### **The Suscipiat and the Prayer over the Offerings**

The Preparation of Gifts concludes with the priest asking the faithful to pray for him “that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Almighty Father.” His sacrifice is the one that only a Priest can offer. Our sacrifices are the ones we have presented with the gifts of bread and wine, and are now joined to the perfect sacrifice of Calvary. The people respond, “May the Lord accept the ...” This is the one instant during the Mass when the priest stands silent as the people respond as a Royal Priesthood, praying that God accept the sacrifice at the hands of the priest “for our good, and the good of all his Church.” Then the priest prays one final Prayer over the Offerings by which he asks God to receive our gifts and give to us the Body and Blood of His Son.

#### **The Eucharistic Prayer**

- The “center and summit” of the entire Mass.
- 4 Eucharistic Prayers
- 6 Eucharistic Prayers for Special Occasions

### **The Introductory Dialogue**

The Priest greets the people with the same greeting he used to greet at the beginning of Mass, “The Lord be with you.” “And with your spirit.”

He urges them to lift up their hearts and to join them with Christ and with him to prepare to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise to God the Father, “Lift up your hearts!” “We lift them up to the Lord.”

The dialogue concludes with an invitation that would have been known as a part of the Jewish Liturgy in the time of Jesus, “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” Which the people respond with an ancient Roman juridical formula, sealing and approving his intent, “It is right and just.”

### **The Preface**

In the name of the People of God, the priest gives thanks for all that God has done for us. The text of the Preface frequently changes throughout the liturgical year in

reflecting on the particular dimensions of the mystery of Christ and the saints whom we happen to be celebrating.

### **Sanctus**

“Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of Hosts, Heaven and earth are full of your glory.” This is taken from Chapter 6 of the book of the Prophet Isaiah.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. To the voices of the angels and saints is added the song of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem from Matthew’s Gospel.

This is a journey that is also the Christ’s entry into his Passion and Death. His coming to us is always by way of the Cross and the glorious banquet is always celebrated in the light of his Pascal sacrifice.

### **The Epiclesis**

The Priest asks the Father to send his Spirit down upon the gifts of bread and wine, joining his hands in a gesture of descent and imposition. He also prays that the gifts of bread and wine be changed into Christ’s Body and Blood.

Not only the gifts of bread and wine are transformed, but we who received Christ’s Body and Blood are gathered by the Holy Spirit “into one body” being made a spiritual offering to the Father.

### **The Consecration**

The Priest recalls the very words of Jesus at the Last Supper. A reference to the Passion begins in each of the Eucharistic Prayers because the words and actions of the Lord’s Supper draw their power and lead us to the sacrifice of Calvary. The sacrifice of the altar and the sacrifice of the Cross are one and the same.

Jesus did not say, “This is a symbol of my body/blood,” or “This will remind you of my body/blood,” Jesus said, “This is my Body/Blood, which will be given up for you.” In the Eucharist, Jesus is truly present as he was when he ate with his disciples after his Resurrection.

A bell is rung at the elevation of both the Host and the Chalice, just as at his incarnation, we can almost hear the angels sing: Venite adoremus! Come, let us adore him!

### **The Anamnesis**

The mystery of faith! These words are used as a proclamation of the saving sacrifice that has just been celebrated in the consecration of the Bread and Wine. The

response of the people to this acclamation of the Eucharistic mystery is a proclamation of their incorporation into this great Pascal Mystery.

### **The Offering**

The gathered liturgical assembly “presents to the Father the offering of his Son which reconciles us with him” and reaffirms participation in it along with the whole Church. In this they offer their lives along with Christ, the spotless Victim, to God the Father.

### **The Intercessions**

Prayers are offered for the Church in heaven and on earth: for the living and the dead and for all those who are in need. In particular, we pray for the Pope and the Bishop by name.

Prayers for those who have died at this moment in the Liturgy are of particular importance. As Catholics, we believe that the Mass can bring spiritual benefit to those who have died.

These prayers of intercession are always made in communion with the Saints, and especially Mary, the Mother of God and the Apostles.

### **Final Doxology**

The Eucharistic Prayer concludes with a Trinitarian praise of the Glory of God, sealed with the acclamation of the faithful.

The doxology asks that through, with, and in Christ, all glory and honor might be given to God in the Holy Spirit. Acting as a seal and affirmation of the whole Eucharistic Prayer by the gathered faithful, the “Great Amen” which concludes the doxology is the most solemn acclamation of the people at Mass.

### **For Discussion**

1. Why is the Presentation of the Gifts such an important rite?
2. In the Introductory Dialogue to the Eucharistic Prayer, what does the Priest mean when he says, “Lift up your hearts”?
3. Discuss the epiclesis and the consecration and why they are both so important?