

The Mass – an Instruction

Before Mass begins

The Church suggests that before Mass begins, quiet and silent reflection on the part of the Priest, and Deacon(s) in the sacristy, and the people in the pews will help those about to enter this great mystery to be better prepared for what will follow. The celebration of Mass begins with the Entrance Chant or Hymn, which accompanies the procession of the Priest and Deacon(s) to the altar. As the opening act of the celebration it is intended to help those present to become one in mind and heart as they begin their worship together, to put aside their own individual cares and distractions and to enter fully into the prayer and praise of the gathered assembly.

During this hymn, the Priest and Deacon(s) process to the sanctuary and, with a deep bow and then a kiss, the Priest and Deacon(s) reverence the altar, the Holy place on which the Sacrifice of the Cross is made present and the table from which God's people are fed with the Body and Blood of Christ. They then take their places and the Priest-celebrant begins the Mass with the Sign of the Cross, reminding us that this holy action now beginning is done in the name of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and through the power of the Cross whose lines they trace on their bodies. A greeting with texts drawn from Scripture is then exchanged between the Priest-celebrant and those gathered.

After the Priest has reached the altar and made the Sign of the Cross

Penitential Act and Rite of the Blessing and Sprinkling of Water

All who participate in the celebration of Mass, the Priest, Deacon(s) and people are most basically sinful creatures, freely chosen and redeemed by God through Baptism. As the Mass begins, the Priest invites all present, himself included, to reflect briefly on this truth, on their own sinfulness and to ask mercy of the great and loving God whose supreme act of love they are about to celebrate. After a brief period of silence the community expresses sorrow for its sins in the Penitential Act which concludes with an absolution, a prayer by the Priest for forgiveness and is a powerful plea for God's mercy made by the Priest on his own behalf and on behalf of all who join with him in this Eucharist. This 'absolution' however applies to VENIAL sins only and not to GRIEVOUS/MORTAL sins which still must be confessed in the Sacrament of Penance by the individual to a Priest,

The Kyrie (Lord, Have Mercy)

The Kyrie or Lord, have mercy is a short litany that follows the Penitential Act unless this prayer form has been used in the text of the Penitential Act itself.

The Gloria

The Gloria is an ancient hymn which follows the Penitential Act and Kyrie. It is an act of joyful praise to God the Father and to his Son, the Lamb of God. The Gloria begins with the words sung by the angels announcing the birth of the Lord as the story is told in the Gospel of St. Luke. Because it is a hymn, whenever possible the Gloria should be sung rather than recited.

The Collect (Opening Prayer)

The Introductory Rites end with the Collect (Opening Prayer) of the Mass.

The term 'Collect' is used to describe this prayer form because as the prayer begins, the Priest says, Let us pray, then pauses for a brief period of silence during which the people form their own intentions. The Priest then prays the prayer, gathering or 'collecting' the intentions of the people and offering them to God.

After the Collect and before the Readings.

The Liturgy of the Word

The Church makes it clear that the Liturgy of the Word plays an essential role in the Mass and it is not subordinate to the Liturgy of the Eucharist, but rather the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist are so closely interconnected that they form one single act of worship.

In the Liturgy of the Word, God reveals himself to us through the proclamation of his Holy Scriptures. We respond to his revelation and his challenge to follow his ways with attentive listening, song, prayer and silence. It is for this reason that the Liturgy of the Word is considered a dialogue: God speaks and we respond.

The Responsorial Psalm is a reflection on the First Reading in the inspired words of the psalmist, and periods of silence after the acclamation concluding each reading offers a quiet opportunity to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit working through God's Word.

Our Reception of the Word of God

The Church tells us that 'all must listen with reverence to the readings from God's Word' those of us who can hear are asked to listen intently. This attentive listening and our reflection in periods of silence during Mass, is intended to allow the Holy Spirit to speak to each of us.

Most compelling of all is the Church's conviction that 'When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself is speaking to his people, and Christ, present in his own Word, is proclaiming the Gospel'

And so, the Liturgy of the Word is a dialogue in which God speaks to us in the readings and we, his people, listen attentively and respond in song and prayer. What is more, the Liturgy of the Word has a structure which finds its highpoint in the proclamation of the Gospel, when Christ himself speaks to his people.

If we pay attention, it will be clear from the actions taking place that the Gospel is 'special'. As the account of the words and deeds of Christ himself, it is surrounded by symbolic marks of respect: the reading is heralded by the procession with the Book of the Gospels from the altar to the ambo as the congregation stands. Flanked by lighted candles and incense, the Book is carried, held high by the Deacon or Priest, while the Alleluia or Gospel Acclamation and Verse acclaiming the works of the Lord is sung by the cantor and all present. Finally, at the conclusion of the Gospel reading, it is acclaimed as The Gospel of the Lord with the faithful responding, Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ. The Book is then revered with a kiss.

The Homily

The reading of the Gospel is followed by the homily, preached by the celebrating Bishop or Priest, or, in certain circumstances, by the Deacon. The purpose of the homily is to 'break open' the Word for the gathered assembly, helping them to make the Word their own and to apply it to their striving for God in their daily lives, with all their joys and sorrows. A period of silent reflection concludes the homily, once again allowing time for the Holy Spirit to speak to the hearts of the faithful.

After the readings and the Homily

The Profession of Faith (Creed)

In Masses celebrated on Sundays, on days of special significance called 'Solemnities', and on the Feasts of the Lord (on a Sunday) the gathered assembly stands and all join their voices in the Profession of Faith or Creed, a ringing affirmation of our common belief in the truths that unite us as one Body in Christ. The Creed used is that formulated at the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople in the fourth century.

The Prayer of the Faithful

The Liturgy of the Word concludes with the Prayer of the Faithful, in which we ask God that what has been proclaimed in the readings, explained in the homily, and in which we have professed our faith, may be actualised in us and in our world. The Prayer of the Faithful is an ancient prayer form in which the faithful exercise in a special way the priesthood they have received in Baptism. At Baptism each person receives a share in the priesthood of Christ. This common priesthood of all baptised believers gives them the ability and the responsibility to participate in the liturgy, the sacramental life of the Church. One aspect of this responsibility is our prayer for others.

As the Prayer of the Faithful begins the faithful stand if they are not already doing so and the Priest briefly invites all present to pray. Intentions addressed to God the Father are then announced by the Deacon or a lector and to each intention those gathered respond with a petition such as Lord, hear our prayer.

In the intentions, the local Church assembled at Mass prays for the needs of the world and leaders of governments, for the universal Church, for the sick and all who suffer and for its own needs. Also called the Universal Prayer, the Prayer of the Faithful is a sign of the ties binding close together all members of Christ's Body throughout the world. The concluding prayer, prayed by the Priest, gathers together all the intentions, presenting them to the Father and asking, through the Holy Spirit, that these petitions be granted in the name of Jesus in whose name all Christian prayer is made.

After the bidding prayers and before the Offertory

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is the pinnacle of the entire celebration of the Mass. Challenged and formed by God's Word, those gathered in faith move to celebrate and to participate in the sacred action of Christ which brought about our salvation.

Attention now focuses on the altar. The offerings are brought forward and the altar and offerings are prepared. The congregation is invited to join its offering with that of the Priest who prays in the person of Christ, and the Eucharistic Prayer with its three acclamations (the Sanctus, the Memorial Acclamation, and the Amen) is solemnly proclaimed.

The Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts

As this rite begins, the corporal, the purificator, the Missal, and the chalice (chalices, if more than one is needed for Communion under both kinds) are brought to the altar by the servers and placed upon it. Representatives of the faithful bring to the sanctuary entrance the offerings of bread and wine, the physical substance of the sacrifice, together with the monetary gifts representing the sacrifices of the faithful. The gifts are received by the Priest. He places the gifts of bread and wine on the altar with prayers acknowledging them as gifts of God in which the work of human labour has played a part. The faithful are then invited to pray that the sacrifice to be offered, a sacrifice which the Priest designates in the invitation as my sacrifice and yours, will be acceptable to God the Father. The rite concludes with the Prayer over the Offerings.

After the offering of the gifts of Bread and Wine

The Eucharistic Prayer

The Eucharistic Prayer is the most solemn of all prayers in the Mass, 'the centre and summit of the entire celebration' It begins with the dialogue between Priest and people that opens the Preface and concludes with the great Amen.

The Preface

The dialogue with which the Preface begins is an invitation to the faithful by the Priest, asking them to lift up their hearts and to join him in giving thanks and praise to God. The Preface itself is an enumeration of some of the reasons we, his creatures, have to thank the Lord. While each Preface draws on some of the innumerable motives we have for giving thanks, all Prefaces conclude with the greatest motive of all, the Father's gift of his only Son whom he sent to save us from sin and to restore our relationship with him.

The Preface concludes with the singing of the acclamation Sanctus ('Holy, Holy, Holy...').

As the Priest introduces this acclamation, he reminds us that our celebration is done in the company of all the Angels and Saints, the Church in heaven as well as the Church on earth. The Sanctus reiterates praise for the glory of the Lord, which fills the whole earth and anticipates the coming of the Saviour with the words Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord ...

After the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy)

The Eucharistic Prayer and Our Part in It

Following the Sanctus the Eucharistic Prayer continues.

Contrary to the understanding of some, the Eucharistic Prayer, while prayed by the ordained Priest in the person of Christ, is a prayer that belongs to all the baptised. Certainly baptismal priesthood is not to be confused with the priesthood of the ordained, which gives to the one who receives this Sacrament a special character enabling him at the liturgy to act in the person of Christ. However, the priesthood conferred at Baptism on all believers has profound implications for the participation of the baptised in liturgy, and specifically in the Eucharistic Prayer.

The Church tells us that liturgy (and Mass is the highpoint and heart of liturgy) is the action of Christ the Priest and of his Body which is the Church. While most Catholics have been taught that during the Eucharistic Prayer the bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, many are not aware that the action to which we are called during the Eucharistic Prayer is about more than adoring Christ who becomes

present in our midst. In the celebration of the Mass, during the Eucharistic Prayer, not only does Christ become present, Body and Blood, soul and divinity under the forms of bread and wine, but Christ's saving action, his Passion, Death and Resurrection are once again enacted and they are offered to the Father by Christ himself, through his Priest, and by all present. For this reason, as can be verified by reading any of the Eucharistic Prayers, that Prayer is addressed to the Father. It is an act of worship offered to the Father, by Christ, in the Holy Spirit, just as it was at the moment of Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection.

This is a truth of enormous significance. The action of Christ which brought about our redemption from sin and eternal death, the action he offered once for all on Calvary becomes present again for us here and now, in this time and place. What is more, the presence of this saving action gives us the opportunity to become part of Christ's perfect offering, allowing us to participate in Christ's perfect worship of the Father.

This is the action of Christ's Body the Church at Mass. In union with the Priest we offer Christ . . . and ourselves! The Priest prays in the person of Christ, and the 'we' or 'us' so often spoken signifies that all the baptised present at this Eucharistic celebration make this offering in union with Christ, pray this prayer in union with him. This is the hard, the demanding part for us, for Christ's offering becomes truly our offering when, as we offer him, we also offer ourselves: our lives, our individual efforts to do the will of the Father, however difficult this may be; our efforts to grow more like Christ, as well as our efforts as a community of believers to spread God's Word and serve God's people.

Most wonderful of all, although our offering is itself imperfect, joined with the offering of Christ it becomes part of his perfect praise and thanksgiving.

In the Consecration of the Mass, Christ becomes present under the forms of bread and wine, and in our acclamation of this mystery of faith our adoration of Christ reaches its climax: And so, adoration of Christ, gratitude for the redemption he won for us and for his promise that he will come again, is a significant part of our action during the Eucharistic Prayer.

By our close attention to the words and meaning of the entire Eucharistic Prayer, by praying it as our own, we join Christ's perfect offering to the Father, and with Christ we offer ourselves to the Father.

Immediately before the Lord's Prayer (Our Father)

The Communion Rite

The purpose of all liturgy is to glorify God and sanctify his people.

The Mass is a sacrifice and a holy meal. Having offered Christ — and ourselves — to the Father in praise and thanksgiving, we now prepare to complete the Eucharist by feeding

on the food Christ left for us, his Body and Blood in the Communion Rite. This Rite begins with the Lord's Prayer (Our Father) and continues with the Rite of Peace. The Breaking of the Bread and the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) follow, after which each of us acknowledges our unworthiness to take the Lord 'under my roof' in the prayer of the Centurion. We then receive Communion. The Rite ends with the Prayer after Communion.

As baptised members of the Body of Christ, our primary task is to become like Christ; to be Christ for the world. In Holy Communion Christ comes to us to nourish us and strengthen us to live his life. When we think of ordinary eating, we think of food that becomes part of us to give us strength for life and health. When Christ comes to us, however, it is not so much that he becomes part of us as that we become part of him. And through our sharing in this great gift, gradually, little by little, if we are open to his grace, we are transformed into that likeness.

The Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer opens the Communion Rite. It belongs to the people and is sung or recited aloud by all. At the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, the Priest prays an additional brief prayer expanding on the petition deliver us from evil and introduces a note of peace and hope in the Lord's coming. The faithful respond with the words of an ancient doxology which goes back as far as manuscripts of the Gospel of Matthew:

“For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever”.

The Rite of Peace:

The Communion Rite continues with the Rite of Peace, the rite by which the Church asks God to grant peace and unity to all her members as well as to the whole human family. This prayer is followed by a symbolic gesture in which all in the assembly exchange a greeting of peace with those around them.

The greeting is conveyed in words and through a sign: a handshake or embrace. The gesture is symbolic in that those nearby in the assembly with whom the peace is exchanged represent all those whose lives touch our own and with whom we need to be at peace. Each of us gives the sign of peace to the person next to him, and so in effect gives it to the whole assembly.

The exchange of peace is a solemn religious action and whatever gesture is chosen for this rite should be dignified and carried out in a reverent manner.

The Breaking of the Bread

The Breaking of the Bread follows the Rite of Peace. It is an ancient rite that has its origins in the action of the Lord at the Last Supper: 'He took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to his disciples. . .'

Before the distribution of Holy Communion, the Priest breaks the consecrated bread into smaller pieces, then takes a piece of this bread and drops it into the chalice. These actions have great symbolic value.

The breaking of the bread which is to be distributed to all present is a sign that we who are many are made one body by receiving Communion which is Christ, the one Bread of Life. In Baptism we were given a share in the life of Christ; we became members of his Body. Our common sharing in the life of Christ also unites us to one another and each time we receive the Body and Blood of the Lord in Communion our unity with him—and with each other — is strengthened. When we come to Mass we do not come simply as individuals; we gather as the community of the baptised, made one by our common life in Christ.

The Agnus Dei (Lamb of God):

During the Breaking of the Bread, the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) is sung or said by the people.

After the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God)

The Invitation to the Banquet of the Lord

After the Breaking of the Bread and the prayers prayed privately by the Priest in preparation for Communion, the Priest lifts up the host and the chalice and invites the members of the assembly to take part in the Eucharistic Banquet. Both Priest and faithful make an act of humility before the Body and Blood of the Lord that is raised before them. Their response uses words taken from the Gospel account of the Centurion who, with great humility, answers Jesus' offer to come to his house to heal his servant.

It is significant that this response is made not just by the faithful, but by Priest and faithful together, a clear sign they are part of the one Body of Christ, that together they form one community, joined in the same Eucharistic Meal.

The Eucharistic Meal

The Communion Procession

In the Communion Procession, these humble gifts of bread and wine, now transformed into the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, are given back to God's people as spiritual nourishment to strengthen them on the journey of life.

The Communion Procession is a religious action, a religious event. It is not the same as 'standing in line' or viewing a parade. In the Procession to receive Holy Communion, the

assembly of believers, already united by the life of Christ they share through Baptism, move forward to receive the Body and Blood of Christ who, in this Sacrament, unites them even more closely with himself and with each other. For this reason the Church describes this procession as an action that both signifies and fosters our unity with Christ and with one another. In the Communion Procession we move toward the Gift we are to receive with solemnity and with the dignity befitting the redeemed children of God.

Receiving Holy Communion

When the individual receiving Communion reaches the Communion station, a gesture of reverence is made. This gesture should not be done before reaching the station as in that case the significance of the act of reverence directed to the consecrated host and consecrated wine is lost and the act appears to be directed to the back of the person ahead.

The Church allows to each individual the option of receiving the host on the tongue or in the hand. Both options are permitted; neither is preferred. If Communion is received in the hand, the right hand should be placed under the left hand which is held palm open and facing upward. The host is then placed in the left hand and the communicant takes it with his or her right hand and places it in the mouth. A person who is left-handed reverses the hands so that the right hand rests on the left hand, and the left hand brings the host to the mouth.

Communion under Both Kinds

Communion offered both under the form of bread and the form of wine is strongly encouraged because ‘in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more perfectly evident and clearer expression is given. In considering this issue, the teaching of the Church should be made clear: Christ is present, whole and entire in the consecrated bread and in the consecrated wine, so that a person who receives under one form but not the other is not deprived of any grace.

After Communion

The Prayer after Communion

The Communion Rite concludes with the Prayer after Communion and the people of God are sent off with a dismissal and a blessing to take Christ from the Mass to the people they meet and work and socialise with as living out their baptismal commitment.