



Celebrating the Sacred Liturgy of the Mass: A Review of New Diocesan Norms—Part IV

The Church teaches us that Christ is present in the Sacred Liturgy of the Mass in four distinct ways: in the person of the priest, in the assembly of the faithful, in his word, and in the Eucharistic species. We have already considered the Liturgy of the Word and Christ's active presence among us in Sacred Scripture; now we turn our attention to the Liturgy of the Eucharist and in particular to Preparation of the Gifts. It is important, however, to keep in mind that while we talk about the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist individually, these two parts of the Mass form one act of prayer and worship following the pattern of the Last Supper.

Preparations before Mass

In most parishes before the Mass begins two tables are prepared with the elements, vessels, and linens which will be used for the Eucharistic sacrifice. Near the area where the procession usually forms, a table should be arranged with a large paten (dish-like vessel) or ciborium (a goblet-like container holding the bread which will become the Body of Christ). The altar bread is always made only from wheat and water. For those who suffer from celiac disease and cannot tolerate wheat gluten, specially prepared hosts with a minimum of wheat gluten may be obtained, or these individuals may choose to receive only the Precious Blood. It is not possible to use breads made from rice flour or other grains. Also found on this table is the wine which will be brought forward to become the Blood of Christ.

The other table, placed somewhere near the altar, is called the credence table. On the credence table are placed the main chalice, which the priest celebrant will use, and other chalices which may be needed for distribution of the Precious Blood of the Lord during the Communion Rite. The chalices are made of noble materials and

always at least gilded. The main chalice should be larger and distinct from additional ones. There may also be additional patens for distribution of the Sacred Body.

The credence table also holds a pitcher of water (water is not included in the presentation of the gifts), a basin and towel for the washing of the priest's hands, and the altar linens which will be used during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Among the linens is the corporal, the cloth on which the sacred vessels containing the bread and wine will be placed. The corporal is positioned on top of the white altar covering during the Preparation of the Gifts and should not be in place earlier. Only the gifts for the Eucharistic sacrifice should be positioned on it. For each chalice to be used there will also be a purificator, the cloth used to wipe the lip of the chalice during the distribution of the Precious Blood and to assist in the purification of the chalice after Holy Communion.

At the conclusion of the Liturgy of the Word at Sunday Mass, the deacon (if one is present) and acolytes or altar servers begin to prepare the altar, and the ushers collect from the faithful gifts for the needy and for the Church. Frequently, a chant or hymn or instrumental music also begins at this time and continues throughout this part of the Mass. In addition to vocal or instrumental music, silence may accompany these actions.

From Our Tradition

From the earliest days of the Church, the faithful have brought their offerings to the Eucharistic celebration—for use in the Sacrifice, for the support of the Church, and for the needs of the poor. Although we no longer bring bread and wine to Mass to be shared with others, we continue to offer

money (or sometimes gifts of food) which will be used for the support of the Church and the needs of the poor. This is an expression of our complete dependence on God and our loving care for one another. Whether we have much more than we need or barely enough to get by, it is important that we return a first portion of what we have received through God's generosity—not what is left when our needs and wants have been satisfied.

"In the bread and wine that we bring to the altar, all creation is taken up by Christ the Redeemer to be transformed and presented to the Father."

—Pope Benedict XVI in *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 47.

After the corporal, purificators, chalices, and Sacramentary (the Missal which contains the prayers for the Mass) have been placed on the altar and the collection completed, representatives from the assembly process with the collection and the gifts of bread and wine to the edge of the sanctuary where the priest or deacon meets them. Money or other gifts for the poor are received and taken to an appropriate place away from the altar. The wine and bread are then received and placed on the recently unfolded corporal. No other items are to be part of the presentation of the gifts.

Prayers from the Time of Jesus

The priest then recites beautiful and ancient praises as he raises the paten with the bread slightly—words which were used to bless bread and wine during a Jewish meal in the time of Jesus. The priest presents bread “which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.” Wine is then poured into the chalice and a small amount of water is added as the deacon or priest says quietly, “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.” Through the incarnation God became a human being to redeem us and to allow us, in the fullness of time, to have a share in Divine Life.

Once the water has been added to the wine, the priest presents the chalice saying quietly: “Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink.” We are reminded that the wine and the bread are gifts from the earth and of human making and that they are ours to offer only through God's generosity. In

an even greater act of generosity, God will transform these humble gifts into nourishment for our spiritual lives, the very Body and Blood of Christ.

With Humble and Contrite Hearts

After praying, “Lord God, we ask you to receive us and be pleased with the sacrifice we offer you with humble and contrite hearts,” the priest may incense the gifts, cross, and altar. The deacon or other minister may then also incense the priest and the people.

The priest then washes his hands and prays silently. While this action was originally a necessity (and still is in parts of the world where gifts include foods, plants or even animals for the support of the Church and the poor), the washing of hands has taken on important symbolic meaning. It is a sign of interior purification for the priest and a reminder to all of us that we should have prepared ourselves to enter into the action of the Sacred Liturgy with deep devotion, reverence, and contrite hearts.

As the priest concludes the washing of hands he addresses the assembly: “Pray, brethren, that our sacrifice may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.” We stand and reply to this invitation. The priest then offers the Prayer over the Gifts. Our “Amen” at the conclusion of this prayer marks the joining of our lives to the gifts which are offered and the priest who offers them for all of us.