

MASS *Explained*

Our Lady of Perpetual Help (June 18th, 2018) Part II: Liturgy of the Eucharist and Concluding Rite

Introduction: Below you will find a detailed explanation of Part II: Liturgy of the Eucharist and Concluding Rite of the Mass, to assist you in learning more about the Mass and the changes that have occurred with the implementation of the third edition of the Roman Missal since Advent of 2011. This explanation was written by Fr. Victor De Gagné, The *Prayer Intentions* concludes the *Liturgy of the Word* and the focus of the Mass now shifts to the *Liturgy of the Eucharist*.

Liturgy of the Eucharist:

-The Collection & the Offering of the Gifts

The collection and the offering of the bread and wine have been present in Christian worship since the very beginning. The gifts of the community are presented to the priest for the needs of the Church and of the poor. Justin the Martyr describes this collection and offering of gifts in his letter dating from the 2nd century: "Then someone brings bread and wine to him who presides over the assembly. They who have the means, give freely what they wish; and what is collected is placed in reserve with the presider, who provides help to the orphans, widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in need, and prisoners, and traveling strangers; in a word, he takes care of all who are in need." By the collection, we exercise Christian charity; sharing our blessings with those who have nothing.

-The Preparation of the Gifts

Once the gifts of bread and wine have been carried to the altar, the priest offers a prayer of blessing to God for his generosity, for the produce of the earth and for human labour which have created the gifts to be used for the Eucharist. This prayer "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation..." actually comes from the Jewish prayers for the Passover meal (Matthew 26.17; Mark 14.12; Luke 22.15; John 13.1). This prayer of blessing may be spoken aloud by the priest, or silently while the people are singing the Offertory Song.

-The Mixing of Water and Wine

After the prayer of thanksgiving for the bread, the deacon or priest quietly says the following prayer as he pours water into the chalice of wine: "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." This action represents the two natures of Christ: wine for his divinity and water for his humanity. It also represents our relationship with Christ and our sharing in this Sacrament. Saint Cyprian in the 3rd century said this about it: "In the cup of the Lord, water alone cannot be offered, as wine alone cannot be. For if a person offers wine only, it starts to become the blood of Christ without us. But if the water is alone, it starts to become

the people without Christ. But when both are mingled, and are joined with one another by a close union, a spiritual and heavenly sacrament is completed.”

-The Private Prayer of Priest

The priest offers a private prayer, humbly asking God to accept the sacrifice that will be offered along with the people who have gathered to participate in it. The prayer originates from the story of the three young men in the fiery furnace (see Daniel 3.39). Azariah offers this prayer from within the flames, asking that the sacrifice of his very life be pleasing to God. The priest, mindful of his sins, offers his suffering together with the gifts on the altar. Since this is a private prayer, it is said quietly by the priest.

-The Incensing of the Gifts, Priest & People

The use of incense signifies a solemn occasion, the holiness of that which is incensed, and the prayers of the people going up to God. At more solemn Masses, for example Christmas and Easter, during the Preparation of the Gifts the offerings, the altar, the crucifix, the priest and the people are incensed. The incensation of the gifts, priest and people is a reminder that it is not only the bread and wine that are offered to God, but our very selves as well.

-The Washing of the Priest's Hands

Following the Preparation of the Gifts, and the incensing of the altar if done, the priest washes his hands at the side of the altar with the assistance of the servers. At this time, the priest quietly says: “Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin” (Psalm 51.4). The spiritual significance springs from the practical, just as the priest's hands are cleansed after preparing the gifts, so may his soul be cleansed so that he may worthily offer the Eucharistic sacrifice.

-“Pray, brothers and sisters”

Following the washing of hands, the priest calls upon the assembly to pray to God to accept the sacrifice which they entrusted to his hands. This dialogue between priest and the people has been part of the Mass since the 8th century. In the revised English translation, this Latin text was literally translated to better illustrate that both the priest and the people offer the sacrifice in their own ways. The word “holy”, which has always been present in the Latin edition, once again appears in reference to the Church in the revised English translation. It is a reminder, that although we are individually sinners, when the community gathers in the Lord's name and offer the sacrifice we exercise our sacred or holy duty “for our good and for the good of all his holy Church.”

-The Prayer over the Offerings

The priest offers a Prayer over the Offerings. This prayer asks that the gifts be pleasing to God, and it makes reference to the liturgical season or feast that is being celebrated. The assembly responds “Amen” to make this prayer their own.

-The Eucharistic Prayer

The Eucharistic Prayer is the center and high point of the entire liturgical celebration. It offers praise and asks God to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. For most of the Middle Ages, the priest recited this prayer quietly often as the choir sang.

With the liturgical changes of Vatican II, the people were given acclamations to recite and at other times to join their hearts and minds with the priest as he offers aloud the prayer on their behalf.

***The Preface**

The Preface is a prayer of thanksgiving in which the priest, on behalf of the assembly, glorifies and gives thanks to God the Father for the work of salvation. It is written to reflect the feast that is being celebrated or the liturgical season. By the 5th century each day of the liturgical year had its own unique Preface, however in the Middle Ages that number diminished. Vatican II restored many of these Prefaces, and in the current Roman Missal the priest has 99 from which to choose for each Mass. The opening dialogue to the Preface (“Lift up your hearts... Let us give thanks to the Lord....”) finds its origins in the Old Testament and from Jewish worship. This dialogue has existed within the Mass since the beginning of the 4th century and has not been altered in any way.

***The Sanctus – “Lord God of Hosts”**

The conclusion of the Preface calls us to join with the angels and the saints in praising God by singing or saying the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy). This text combines the Scripture passages of Isaiah 6.3, Revelation 4.8, Matthew 21.9 and Psalm 118.26. The Sanctus gathers into one voice the praise of the all Church not only throughout the world, but all of heaven as well. Through it, our worship of God on earth is joined to the worship of the angels and saints in heaven. Let us all sing this hymn of praise on earth, in the hope that one day we will sing it as a Saint in the heavenly kingdom. In the new English translation of the Sanctus, we now proclaim “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Hosts” which is the literal translation of the original Latin text. The term “Host” refers to the angels. Just as a flock is a group of birds, a herd is a group of cattle, a host is a group of angels.

***The Ringing of the Altar Bell**

Following the Sanctus, the server may ring the altar bell and the people kneel. The altar bell was introduced into the Liturgy during the Middle Ages when the priest faced the altar and said the Mass prayers in a low voice. The bell was meant to alert the people that it was time for the Consecration. Following the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, the 1970 Roman Missal discontinued the ringing of the altar bell after the Sanctus. The reason for this was because Vatican II restored the custom of the early Church of having the priest face the people and speak the prayers in a loud voice, thereby allowing the people to see and to hear what was happening at the altar. This made the ringing of the bell redundant. In the reforms of the 2011 Roman Missal, the ringing of the altar bell was made optional and is left to the preference of the priest.

***The Eucharistic Prayers**

From the time of the Council of Trent until Vatican II, Roman Catholics were accustomed to hearing the Roman Canon as the only Eucharistic Prayer at Mass. There are many others that were composed and used in the early Church which

were translated and placed in the Roman Missal for use following Vatican II. Today there are twelve Eucharistic Prayers available for use depending upon the liturgical season or feast being celebrated: the four traditional Eucharistic Prayers; two for Masses with Children; two for Masses of Reconciliation (can be used in Advent and Lent); and four for Masses for Various Needs and Occasions. All twelve Eucharistic Prayers follow the same format.

***The Epiclesis**

Following an introductory passage, the priest places his hands over the gifts and invokes the Holy Spirit, that by his power the gifts presented and offered will be consecrated and become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ for the salvation of all who partake in Holy Communion. During the epiclesis in Eucharistic Prayer II, the people hear the word “dewfall.” This word is found in the Old Testament. In Hosea (14.5-6) God promises to be like dew for the sake of Israel, bringing forth new life. In the Psalms, dew is a symbol of God’s blessing descending upon the Israelites. A prophecy from Isaiah (45.8) refers to the coming of the Messiah as a dewfall on the earth, since the Messiah will bring salvation and justice to a morally parched earth. The epiclesis, or invocation of the Holy Spirit, concludes with the priest making a sign of the cross over the gifts.

***The Institution Narrative & Consecration**

The priest recounts the events of the Last Supper, holding the bread and the chalice as Jesus did, and repeating the words that Jesus said. The constant Faith of the Church understands these to be the words of Consecration, in which the bread and wine are changed by the power of the Holy Spirit and truly become the Body and Blood of Christ. The words of Consecration conclude with the Lord’s command to do this in memory of him. In this single moment, the priest fulfills his purpose of being ordained, to offer the sacrifice for the salvation of the people entrusted to his care.

***The Memorial Acclamation**

Following the Consecration, the priest introduces the Memorial Acclamation by saying “The mystery of faith.” Before 1970, this statement by the priest was said during the Consecration of the wine. In 1970 when the liturgical reforms of Vatican II took effect, this phrase was moved to its present place following the Consecration, and the Memorial Acclamation of the people was added. The texts of the three options for the Memorial Acclamation are all derived from Scripture. By the Memorial Acclamation, the people who up to this point, have listened devoutly and quietly to the Priest, actively acclaim that they will hold to the mystery of faith until Jesus comes again.

***The Anamnesis**

The Eucharistic Prayer then continues with the Anamnesis, or the prayers of remembering and the offering of the sacrifice of the Mass to God the Father. We remember and celebrate the major events of Jesus’ life through which he achieved our salvation: his suffering and Passion, his Resurrection and his Ascension into heaven. These events in the life of Christ are referred to as the “Paschal Mystery.”

***The Oblation**

The Eucharistic Prayer then continues with the Oblation, the prayer in which the Priest on behalf of the people gathered for that particular Mass, offers the sacrifice in the Holy Spirit to the Father. The intention of the Oblation prayer is for the people to learn to offer not only the sacrifice of the Mass to the Father, but by living holy lives offer their very selves to God and to work for unity in the Church.

***The Intercessions**

The Eucharistic Prayer then concludes with the Intercessions, the reasons for which the Mass is being celebrated. They are offered in the name of the entire Church, both in heaven and on earth, and for all its members, the living and the dead. It concludes with a prayer that all who partake of the Body and Blood of Christ on earth will one day be united with the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph and all the Saints in heaven. During the commemoration of the dead, the people should quietly call to mind their deceased loved ones and pray for the repose of their souls.

***The Doxology**

The Eucharistic Prayer reaches its conclusion with the Doxology. All honour and glory for ever is offered to the Father, through, with and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. The people's response is commonly called the "Great Amen."

-The Communion Rite

The Liturgy of the Eucharist continues with the Communion Rite when the faithful immediately prepare themselves to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. The Lord's Prayer is offered, signs of peace and reconciliation are made, the consecrated Host is broken and prepared for distribution.

-The Lord's Prayer

The Gospels illustrate that Jesus was a person of deep prayer and his disciples were amazed at his ability to pray. After being asked to teach them how to pray, Jesus gives them his own prayer. The Lord's Prayer is the perfect prayer: offering praise to God, imploring surrender to God's will, petitioning for our daily bread (signified by the Eucharistic Bread), forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of the soul against temptation and evil.

-“Deliver us, O Lord...”

Following the Lord's Prayer, the priest prays that the entire community may be delivered from every evil and all distress as it awaits the second coming of Christ. This prayer is called the "embolism" as it develops the last petition of the Lord's Prayer. This prayer is based upon Titus 2.13 which is the second reading for Christmas Midnight Mass. It reminds us that Jesus will come again and until that time, he will protect us from the dangers and temptations that we encounter in life.

-“For the kingdom...”

The embolism prayer ends with a doxology that is well known among Protestant Christians, but that Catholics did not retain as the conclusion to the Lord's Prayer. This doxology "For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for ever" was in use

as a conclusion to the Lord's Prayer in the early Church and it appeared in versions of Matthew's Gospel and in the *Didache*. Its use during Mass became less popular among Catholics when King Henry VIII decreed its use in Anglican services of his newly established Church of England. During the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the doxology was once restored to the Mass. There were several reasons for this: this prayer was part of the early tradition of the Catholic Faith, it is biblical in nature, for ecumenical reasons and to add another element of participation for the people.

-The Rite of Peace

The Rite of Peace begins with the priest asking Jesus, the Prince of Peace, to bestow his peace on the community just as he once did upon the Apostles when they were gathered in the upper room (see John 20.19-23). This prayer can be traced back to the 11th century and was officially added to the Mass in the 1474 edition of the Roman Missal.

-The Exchange of Peace

The sign of peace is then exchanged by all present. This practice comes directly from Scripture (Matthew 5.23-24) where Jesus admonishes his followers to be reconciled with one another before offering their gift at the altar. From the very beginning, this practice was a very important element of the Mass. In the early Church, individuals that had a grievance with one another went and asked for forgiveness. It was only after everyone was reconciled that the Mass continued. However; in the Middle Ages, the exchange of peace among the people slowly declined, and in 1474 was made optional. Following the reforms of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI required the exchange of peace be restored to the Mass. The exchange of peace is a serious moment of reconciliation and preparation to receive Holy Communion.

-The Fraction Rite

During the Fraction Rite, the priest breaks the consecrated Host over the paten, places a small piece in the chalice and offers a prayer that this mingling will bring eternal life to those who receive it. The practice of reserving part of the consecrated bread from the general Communion appeared in the 3rd century when Pope Innocent would send a piece from the host he consecrated at his Mass to the other churches in Rome. Before Communion, the priest would take this piece of the Host and place it in his chalice. This practice symbolized the Eucharistic communion among all the churches in Rome with the Pope. As the Church grew, it was impossible to maintain such a practice, but a vestige of it remained. Now all priests break off a small piece of the consecrated Host and places it in the chalice as a reminder of the shared communion held throughout the entire scattered around the world.

-“Lamb of God”

During the Fraction Rite, the people sing or say the “Lamb of God.” When the first Christians gathered for Mass, they called this action “the breaking of bread” (see Acts 2.42). The significance of this activity gave its name to Eucharistic worship. The breaking of the bread symbolizes the suffering that Jesus endured for us, while sharing it recalls the Last Supper. In the breaking of the bread the many individuals who have gathered are made one body by receiving Communion from the one bread that is broken and shared for the life of

the world. The Lamb of God is meant to be said or sung during the entire Fraction Rite. The invocation is to be repeated as many times as is necessary, and only on the final time is “grant us peace” said.

-The Preparation Prayer of the Priest

The priest says a private prayer to prepare himself for receiving Holy Communion. Private prayers of the priest became common in the Middle Ages, and this prayer alludes to 1 Corinthians 11.29, where Saint Paul warned the faithful not to receive Holy Communion unworthily. The people after singing the Lamb of God, also pray silently preparing their hearts to receive the Lord present in the Eucharist.

-"Behold the Lamb..."

Prior to receiving Holy Communion, the people express their unworthiness and pray for healing. The priest invites them to make this statement of faith by showing them the consecrated Host, now broken in two, above the chalice as he says “Behold the Lamb of God....” This statement first appeared in the Mass around the 15th century and is taken from two passages of Scripture. First, the priest quotes John the Baptist, who points out the Lamb of God to his disciples (see John 1.29), then he quotes Revelation (19.9), that those invited to the supper of the Lamb are blessed. This text reminds us that those who faithfully gather around the Lord’s altar and receive his Body and Blood in this life, will hopefully be gathered together one day to share in the rich fare in the banquet halls of heaven.

-"Lord I am not worthy..."

The priest and the people then express their unworthiness to receive so great a Sacrament. The text is only recited once and the striking of the breast was omitted, as this gesture was incorporated into the recitation of the Confiteor during the Penitential Act in the Introductory Rites. This text originates in the story of the healing of the centurion’s slave (see Matthew 8.8 and Luke 7.6). The biblical words “my child” become the liturgical words “my soul” since the congregation seeks a general spiritual healing more than a specific physical one. Although we are unworthy of Jesus’ healing power, he gives himself anyway to those who have faith.

-The Communion Prayer of the Priest

The priest receives Holy Communion while reciting prayers quietly. He is to receive from the bread and wine consecrated at that Mass and not from consecrated Hosts kept in the tabernacle. The texts (“May the Body/ Blood of Christ keep me safe for eternal life.”) that accompany the receiving of Holy Communion by the priest came into use during the Middle Ages. Various texts were in use and none became universal until 1474, when the current texts were adopted.

-The Communion Song

The people sing a hymn for the Communion procession. It begins when the priest receives Holy Communion in order to unite his communion with that of the rest of the assembly. Evidence for singing hymns during Holy Communion is quite ancient going back as far as the 4th century.

-Holy Communion

For most of the Middle Ages, only the priest received Communion at Mass and the people received usually only once a year. Their Communion had little connection to the rest of the Mass, and they received from previously consecrated hosts reserved in the tabernacle, just as the sick and the homebound did. It was only in 1970, that Communion for the people was integrated into the official ritual books of the Church. It was also at this time that the offering of the chalice to the people became permissible as well. Today, in Canada, Holy Communion under both forms may be administered to the people. As the Communion chant is sung, the faithful process to the altar and receive Holy Communion. The deacon and other ministers, if required, assist the priest. In Canada, the faithful make a simple bow of the head before receiving Holy Communion. The priest and other ministers say "The Body (Blood) of Christ" and each person answers, "Amen." The communicant is not to add anything to their response, for in answering "Amen" each person affirms his/ her belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The formula "The Body (Blood) of Christ" and the response "Amen" have been in constant use since the time of Saint Ambrose in the 4th century.

-The Purification of the Vessels

Following the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest or deacon reposes the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle. The priest or deacon then purifies the chalice and the paten, or may do so after Mass. As he dries the chalice, the priest quietly says this prayer: "What has passed our lips as food, O Lord, may we possess in purity of heart, that what has been given to us in time may be our healing for eternity." The words of this prayer have remained unchanged since the 6th century.

-The Silent Prayer of Thanksgiving

The priest returns to his chair and all observe a time of silent prayer; praising and thanking the Lord for his many gifts, especially for receiving him in the Eucharist. This period of silent prayer is not to be rushed nor is it a time of "dead air." During this time you can reflect on the following questions: What are you most thankful for? Having been nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ, in what areas of your life do you need the Lord's help this coming week? How can I be more like Christ to others in my life?

-The Prayer after Communion

The Prayer after Communion concludes the Communion Rite and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, summing up its purpose in a single prayer to God. The priest leads the prayer and the people respond "Amen." Together with the Collect and Prayer over the Offerings, the Prayer after Communion forms the presidential prayers. This prayer has existed as a part of the Mass since the earliest of times. The priest has the option to offer this prayer from his chair or from the altar.

The Concluding Rite

The fourth part of the Mass is the Concluding Rites which consist of announcements (if required), the final or solemn blessing, the dismissal, the procession and recessional chant.

The Concluding Rites prepare us to be sent back out into the world to live the Gospel having been nourished by God's Word and by the Body and Blood of his Son, Jesus.

-The Announcements

A parish community gathers for more than the celebration of Sunday Eucharist. Prior to be dismissed, announcements can be made to inform the congregation of various events and activities taking place in the parish. The announcements are to be brief, made only when necessary and usually by the priest. In most parishes, general announcements are made as part of the welcome at the beginning of Mass, while more important announcements are made by the priest following the Prayer after Communion.

-The Final or Solemn Blessing

Before dismissing the people, the priest offers them God's blessing. This blessing comes from the devotional practice of receiving a bishop's blessing following Mass and originates from the 4th century. A blessing is a sign of God's protection over our lives and activities for the coming week. It is also a reminder that God walks with us in our journey of life. On Solemnities, the final blessing takes a more solemn form when the deacon invites the people to bow their heads and a threefold blessing is prayed over the people by the priest. When a Bishop offers the blessing he always makes the Sign of the Cross three times as he mentions the Persons of the Trinity.

-The Dismissal

The Dismissal is the final dialogue of the Mass and is begun by the deacon if present, who sends the people forth from Mass into the world and to perform the works of the Gospel in the week to come. While the dismissal has always been part of the Mass, it was not always at the end. For many centuries the dismissal was given prior to the final blessing. The Second Vatican Council restored the dismissal as the final element of the Mass. The new translation of the Mass has several new formulas for the dismissal, some of which were written by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

-The Procession

Following the dismissal, the priest and deacon once again show reverence for the altar by kissing it, just as they did upon entering the sanctuary at the beginning of Mass. The kissing of the altar is a sign of honour to the Lord for the sacrifice he made upon the cross, which is now made present to us on the altar. They then genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle and process down the aisle with the altar servers. Just as in the procession at the beginning of Mass, this procession reminds the people that the priest is the shepherd of the parish community, who journeys with them in the struggles and joys of life. Out of respect for the priest who represents Christ the Good Shepherd and to maintain order and decorum in the church, the faithful never leave before the altar servers and priest have first exited the church.

-The Recessional Song

Although a recessional chant is not necessary, when it is sung, it does form the final part of the Mass and accompanies the procession of the servers and the priest out of the church,

therefore none of the faithful should ever leave the church before the recessional chant has concluded so that they may fully participate in the celebration of Mass.

-Personal Prayer

Following the conclusion of the recessional chant, it is customary for all the faithful to kneel and pray silently in thanksgiving for God's blessings and for the grace to live the Gospel during the coming week. After this time of personal prayer, the faithful depart the church to joyfully live out the Gospel with renewed faith, hope and charity.