

THE MEANING OF THE MASS

Part Three: God Comes to Us – The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Having heard God first speak to us in a variety of biblical selections proclaimed throughout *The Liturgy of the Word*, the second half of the Mass now begins: ***The Liturgy of the Eucharist***.

At every Mass, Jesus' one sacrifice on the cross miraculously becomes present for everyone. The priest, who acts in the person of Christ (Latin: *alter Christus* or "another Christ") says and does what Jesus directed be done at the Last Supper in memory of Him (cf. Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24-25). We participate in the one self-donating act of Christ's perfect love offering on the cross that has rescued us all from captivity to sin and death.

PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS

Presenting gifts of bread and wine symbolizes the giving of our lives to God. Our financial support displays fruits of our hard work also shared generously with God, inspiring our own expansion of self-giving love and helping to advance God's Kingdom through the parish.

Offertory [Presenting bread, wine & also financial support]

- Bread and wine symbolize our lives and we *offer* them to God however we are. They are given to the priest and deacon who place them upon the altar – the place of sacrifice.

Ablution [mixing of water and wine]

- At the altar, the priest or deacon adds drops of water to the wine symbolizing our humanity (water) entering into Christ's divinity (wine). Christ invites us to share His Life and this action conveys our sincere desire for this to happen with God's help.

Hand Washing

- The priest washes his hands recalling Old Testament priestly washing before sacred duties were able to be performed, while quietly praying, "Wash me, O Lord from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin" (Psalm 51:2).

Invitation to Pray

- The people respond to the priest, expressing how *both* sacrifices – Christ's *and* their own – will be united and offered to the Father through the hands of the priest, acclaiming: *May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name for our good and the good of all his holy Church.*

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

The entire Eucharistic Prayer makes present Christ's saving action on the cross, enabling us to participate in its power – grace – more completely. In every Mass, Jesus permits us to associate with Him and His sacrificial love.

Preface Dialogue

- The priest rallies the awareness of all to God's saving action that sets to happen in our midst upon the altar.

Priest: *The Lord be with you.*

Priest: *Lift up your hearts.*

Priest: *Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.*

People: *And with your spirit.*

People: *We lift them up to the Lord*

People: *It is right and just.*

Preface Prayer

- Following the biblical blueprint for thanksgiving to God (Psalms), the priest addresses God the Father on behalf of everyone, expressing deep gratitude for His mighty works.

Holy, Holy, Holy

- All join together in the hymn of praise jubilantly sung by the angels and saints (Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8), while also repeating the greeting Jesus received entering Jerusalem (cf. Mt 21:9; Mk 11:9-10; Jn 12:13).
- The biblical word “Hosanna” (Hebrew) means “save us” (cf. Ps 118).

Epiclesis [(Greek) “invocation upon”]

- The priest extends his hands over the gifts of bread and wine and prays that the Father send the Holy Spirit to change the offering atop the altar into Jesus’ Body and Blood.

Words of Institution and Consecration

- Beginning as a Passover meal, Jesus unexpectedly (as Jew) and authoritatively (as God) speaks about his own body and blood being offered up and poured out in sacrifice.
- In speaking this way, Jesus identifies Himself with the sacrificial lamb, providing the interpretation of His sacrifice on the cross – a sacrificial offering accomplished for us and for our salvation.

The Mystery of Faith

- The priest voices wonder over the divine mystery unfolding atop the altar and the people respond with one of three biblically inspired expressions of God’s saving action.

Intercessions

- The priest voices several intercessory prayers on behalf of us all. *First*, the priest expresses prayers for all who will soon be nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ – the assembled Church. *Then*, the priest prays for the Church universal, naming the pope and (local) bishop and asking God to favor and protect the entire People of God, living and deceased.

Doxology (*Through Him, with Him and in Him ...*) **and Great Amen**

- The Eucharistic Prayer culminates with the priest praising God in an expression that dates to the early second century.
- The people respond with the vocalization heralded in the Roman Missals as the “Great Amen”. The biblical word “Amen” (Hebrew) means “so be it.” It signifies confident assent and, in this instance, the entire assembly – the whole church – earnestly acknowledges the entire Eucharistic Prayer as true.