

## **A Walk Through the Mass: A Step-by-Step Explanation**

### **Week Three: The Liturgy of the Eucharist**

#### **Meal sharing (Liturgy of the Eucharist)**

After the Liturgy of the Word, we move to the altar for the sacred meal of sacrifice, sharing, and thanksgiving. As at a meal in the home of a friend, we 1) set the table, 2) say grace and 3) share the food (eat and drink). At Mass these ritual actions are called 1) the Preparation of the Altar and Gifts, 2) the Eucharistic Prayer, 3) the Communion Rite.

#### **Preparation of the Altar and Gifts**

The early Christians each brought some bread and wine from their homes to the church to be used for the Mass and to be given to the clergy and the poor. Today a similar offering for the parish and the poor is made with our monetary contributions.

The priest receives bread and wine brought forward by members of the congregation, keeping the spiritual efficacy and significance of the early church offerings.

He then mixes water with the wine and washes his hands. (Mixing water with wine and washing hands are things all Jews did at meals in Jesus' day.)

Finally, he invites us to pray that the sacrifice be acceptable to God. We respond "Amen" to the Prayer Over the Gifts.

#### **The Eucharistic Prayer**

The prayer which follows is addressed to the Father and brings us to the very center of the Mass and the heart of our faith. While the words of the prayer may vary from Sunday to Sunday, the prayer always has this structure: 1) We call upon God to remember all the wonderful saving deeds of our history. 2) We recall the central event in our history, Jesus Christ, and in particular the memorial he left us on the night before he died. We recall his Passion, Death and Resurrection. 3) After gratefully calling to mind all the wonderful saving acts God has done for us in the past, we petition God to continue those deeds of Christ in the present: we pray that we may become one body, one spirit in Christ.

**Invitation.** The prayer begins with a dialogue between the leader and the assembly. First, the priest greets us with "The Lord be with you." He then asks if we are ready and willing to approach the table and to renew our baptismal commitment, offering ourselves to God: "Lift up your hearts." And we say that we are prepared to do so: "We lift them up to the Lord." We are invited to give thanks to the Lord our God. And we respond: "It is right and just."

To "give thanks" translates the traditional Greek verb which now names the whole action: Eucharist.

#### **Preface and Acclamation**

**Institution Narrative: Consecration.** The priest continues the prayer, giving praise and thanks, and calling upon the Holy Spirit to change our gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. He then recalls the events of the Last Supper—the institution of the Eucharist. At this important moment in the prayer, we proclaim the mystery of faith. Several texts are possible, for example: "We proclaim your Death, O Lord, / and profess your Resurrection / until you come again." The priest continues recalling the wonderful deeds of salvation: the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ.

**Prayer for unity and intercessions.** The grateful memory of God’s salvation leads us to make a bold petition, our main petition at every Eucharist: we pray for unity. “Humbly we pray / that, partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, / we may be gathered into one by the Holy Spirit” (Eucharistic Prayer II). To this petition we add prayers for the bishop of Rome and for the bishop of the local Church; we pray for the living and the dead as well as ourselves that through the intercession of the saints we may one day arrive at the table in heaven.

We look forward to that glorious day and raise our voices with those of all the saints who have gone before us as the priest raises the consecrated bread and wine and offers a doxology, a prayer of glory to God in the name of Christ: “Through Him, and with Him, and in Him, / O God, almighty Father, / in the unity of the Holy Spirit, / all glory and honor is yours, / for ever and ever.” Our “Amen” to this prayer acclaims our assent and participation in the entire Eucharistic Prayer.

### **The Communion Rite**

**Our Father and Sign of Peace.** We prepare to eat and drink at the Lord’s Table with those words taught us by Jesus: “Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Keenly aware that Communion (the word means “union with”) is the sign and source of our reconciliation and union with God and with one another; we make a gesture of union and forgiveness with those around us and offer them the Sign of Peace.

**Invitation to Communion.** The priest then shows us the Body of Christ and invites us to come to the table echoing the words of John the Baptist “Behold the Lamb of God....” We respond, “Lord, I am not worthy...”, as the Centurion did when he asked Jesus to cure his servant (Matthew 8:8). None of us, on our own, are worthy to embrace the fullness of Christ. It is only through the love and mercy of God bestowed upon us that we become worthy to receive. The members of the assembly now approach the altar in procession.

**Communion.** As God fed our ancestors in the desert on their pilgrimage, so God gives us food for our journey. We approach the minister who gives us Eucharist with the words “The Body of Christ,” and we respond, “Amen.” During this procession we usually sing a hymn that unites our voices, minds and thoughts, even as the Body and Blood of Christ unites us into one body. Then we pray silently in our hearts, thanking and praising God and asking for all that this sacrament promises. The priest then unites our prayers into the Prayer After Communion, to which we respond, “Amen.”