

The Structure of the Mass
Part TWO—The Liturgy of the Eucharist, and Dismissal

Preparation of the Gifts

As the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins we are seated and we perform the ritual of “preparing the gifts.” Bread and wine are brought forward to the altar, and prayers are prayed over these gifts in preparation for the calling forth of the Holy Spirit to transform them. As part of the preparation a small drop of water is placed into the wine. The water diffuses completely into the wine and cannot be separated back out, even after the wine is consecrated into the Precious Blood of Christ. This drop of water symbolizes us—we are united to the Precious Blood of Christ and cannot be separated from Him by any outward force. Romans 8 reminds us, “What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?” Once united to the saving love of Christ through His precious blood we are united to Him forever.

The Anaphora—the Eucharistic Prayer—a Prayer of Grateful Thanks

Once the gifts are prepared we are invited to stand and enter as a community into the Eucharistic Prayer. In imitation of the Jewish Passover, we begin this prayer by calling to mind how God has been present in our human history and experience. This prayer continues through the “Sanctus” or “Holy Holy” which is a biblical-based prayer coming directly from two parts of Scripture:

- The song of praise of the angels, as recorded in Isaiah 6:3—One cried out to the other: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts! All the earth is filled with his glory!”
- The greeting of Jesus during his triumphant entry into Jerusalem: Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9)

The Anaphora—the Eucharistic Prayer— A Prayer of Epiclesis and Consecration

Following the Sanctus we kneel out of respect for the Words of Consecration when the bread and wine will be transformed into the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ. This prayer of Consecration begins with what we call the EPICLESIS—a greet word which means calling forth or “invoking” the Holy Spirit. It is accomplished with a swooping gesture of the priest’s hands, calling down the Spirit upon the bread and wine. The process of transformation begins.

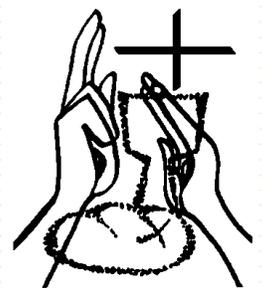
The priest then takes the bread into His hands and says the words of Consecration: “Take this, all of you, and eat it, for this is my body, which will be given up for you.” The process of transformation is complete and the bread is now the Body of our Lord. The same is done with the chalice filled with wine. The priest takes it into his hands and says, “Take this, all of you and drink from it, for this is my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many.” We are then reminded that Jesus wants us to do this often (at least once a week), when the priest pronounces the words of Jesus, “Do this in memory of me.”

The priest then leads us in a series of petitions for which we are offering the Mass:

- We ask God to bless the pope, our local bishop and the whole Church.
- We ask God to remember those who have died and to bring them into his presence. Finally,
- We pray for ourselves.
- We pray that we may one day join Mary and all the saints at the heavenly banquet table. And there, we will give glory and praise to God through Jesus Christ.

The Eucharistic Prayer comes to its conclusion with a “doxology” and the great AMEN.

- Through Him, with Him, and in Him, O God almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, forever and ever.
- Our AMEN is the high point of the celebration as we indicate with a strong, vibrant AMEN that we believe that all that has just happened is true. Christ is truly present on our altar, and ready to give Himself to us in Communion.



Following the GREAT AMEN we stand and prepare to receive our Lord in Holy Communion.

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Preparation for Communion

We begin our preparation for Communion by standing and joining together in the prayer which Jesus gave us—the Our Father. At the conclusion of the Our Father we pray for peace and then exchange a sign of peace, with a handshake or a hug. The sign of peace is a gesture of our desire for reconciliation and peace in our lives. In Scripture Matthew reminds us of these words of Jesus: "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be

reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering." (Matt 5:23-24) Some seem to think that the Sign of Peace is a sign of hospitality and therefore a time to greet others. But it is a sign of reconciliation—a sign of our willingness to be vulnerable and to take the first step in reconciling with someone we have hurt or someone who has hurt us. It is a gesture that is full of the great challenge of being a follower of Christ—of being a reconciler. Then the priest takes the consecrated Body of Christ and breaks it—a reminder that on the Cross Jesus' Body was broken and His blood poured out for us. We acknowledge Him to be the "Lamb of God" who takes away the sins of the world and who "grants us peace."



Communion

The community is invited forward to receive Our Lord in Holy Communion. We are invited to receive the Body of Christ and then to receive the Blood of Christ. Communion under both species (Body and Blood) is the earliest form of Communion in the Church and is what is recommended today. Some pastors, however, offer only one species (usually the Body of Christ) to their assemblies. We cannot "divide" Christ—He is present in His entirety, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, in both the species of the Body and the species of the Precious Blood. If ever a community were to run out of one species or the other during the celebration of the Communion rite, one still receives Communion validly with only the Precious Blood or the Consecrated Body. We recommend that wherever possible and whenever possible that Communion be received under the greater sign of both species.

Prayer After Communion

Once having received Communion the Lord invites us into intimate prayer with Him. We should return to where we have been sitting, kneel, and spend time in prayer with Jesus. In this way we enter into Communion with our God and with the community with which we are worshipping. Remain kneeling and in prayer.

Dismissal

There may be announcements to bring to the attention of the community, and then we are invited to end our prayer with the Sign of the Cross (just as we began it) and to sing together (unless there is no music at the Mass) a Concluding hymn as the priest and other ministers depart. The dismissal tells us that the Mass is over and we are to GO and LIVE what we have celebrated. (*Some people choose to leave before the dismissal—is it because they do not want to be sent forth and dismissed to do God's work?*)

Issues We Face Today

- A casual attitude towards the Mass that says being on time or staying to the end are not important. Sauntering slowly across the courtyard from the parking lot to the Church knowing that Mass has begun, for example.
- A further casual attitude that says it is OK to dress "down" for Jesus rather than to dress "up" for Him.
- A sense that we can take Jesus "for granted" and not do our "best" for Him.

If everyone were to make an effort to do our "best" for Jesus, such incidences of casual attitude might begin to decline and reverence for the Lord and authentic thanksgiving for His blessings might increase.

Fr. John

