



## A Walk through the Mass

Over the course of this year, the Office for Worship Newsletter will focus on the various elements of the Eucharistic liturgy as a means of providing an opportunity for you to stop and reflect on why we do what we do at Mass. This month's newsletter picks up where we left off in October with a closer look at the eight essential parts of Liturgy of the Eucharist.

This newsletter is designed to be a resource for parish music ministers, liturgists, liturgy committees, as well as priests and deacons, and anyone who wants to know more about the Order of Mass and why we do what we do! Please feel free to reproduce and share these materials with your parish community; just be sure to cite the Office for Worship, Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

### LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST – Part Four

#### The Communion Rite

*From the Roman Missal:*

**131. Then the Priest, with hands joined, says quietly:**

**Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God,  
who, by the will of the Father  
and the work of the Holy Spirit,  
through your Death gave life to the world,  
free me by this, your most holy Body and Blood,  
from all my sins and from every evil;  
keep me always faithful to your commandments,  
and never let me be parted from you.**

**Or:**

**May the receiving of your Body and Blood,  
Lord Jesus Christ,  
not bring me to judgment and condemnation,  
but through your loving mercy  
be for me protection in mind and body  
and a healing remedy.**

## The Priest's Communion

Following the Lamb of God, the Priest prepares to receive Holy Communion by praying silently one of two prayers, both directed to Jesus Christ. These private prayers of the priest date back to the Middle Ages. The first prayer is from the 9<sup>th</sup> Century and asks Jesus to free the priest from his sins, keep him faithful, and never let him be parted from Christ. The second prayer particularly alludes to Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians where he warns the faithful not to receive unworthily (11:29).

For the priest, who presides over the celebration of the Mass, the prayers he prays aloud are expressed in the name of the Church and of the gathered assembly. Other times, –such as just before he receives Holy Communion, he prays silently in his own name, asking that he may exercise his ministry with greater care, attention, and devotion. As the Faithful participating in the Mass, we should also pray silently to prepare ourselves in a similar way for Communion.

132. The Priest genuflects, takes the host and, holding it slightly raised above the paten or above the chalice, while facing the people, says aloud:

**Behold the Lamb of God,  
behold him who takes away the sins of the world.  
Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.**

And together with the people he adds once:

**Lord, I am not worthy  
that you should enter under my roof,  
but only say the word  
and my soul shall be healed.**

133. The Priest, facing the altar, says quietly:

**May the Body of Christ  
keep me safe for eternal life.**

And he reverently consumes the Body of Christ.

Then he takes the chalice and says quietly:

**May the Blood of Christ  
keep me safe for eternal life.**

And he reverently consumes the Blood of Christ.

134. After this, he takes the paten or ciborium and approaches the communicants. The Priest raises a host slightly and shows it to each of the communicants, saying:

**The Body of Christ.**

The communicant replies:

Amen.

And receives Holy Communion.

If a Deacon also distributes Holy Communion, he does so in the same manner.

135. If any are present who are to receive Holy Communion under both kinds, the rite described in the proper place is to be followed.

136. While the Priest is receiving the Body of Christ, the Communion Chant begins.

### **“Behold the Lamb of God...” and “Lord, I am not worthy...”**

Following the priest’s silent prayer before receiving Communion, he genuflects for the third time during the Mass, picks up a host consecrated at the Mass (not a host from the tabernacle) and holds it up over the paten or over the chalice and prays “Behold the Lamb of God...” The option for holding the host over the chalice is relatively new in the celebration of the Mass. Prior to 2002, the priest held the host over the paten only, but the option to use the chalice at this point emphasizes our belief that Christ is truly present in both Eucharistic species – the bread *and* the wine.

In practice, some priests take the host they broke during the fraction, reassemble the parts of the broken host and hold it up as if nothing has happened to it. The priest has already broken the host in half and broken a particle to be placed in the chalice; yet some priests put the host back together again and conceal the missing part with their fingers. While this may look “neat” it actually reduces the significance of the breaking of the bread, the action of Christ which gave early Christians their name for the Eucharist (“the breaking of bread”). St. Paul provides us with appropriate catechesis on this moment: “The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:16b-17). The gathered assembly should be able to see the broken bread, for it is a visual sign of their participation in the body of Christ.

The words of the priest, “Behold the Lamb of God...” are a quote from John the Baptist as he acknowledged Jesus as the Lamb of God and proclaimed blessed by those who are called to his supper. It is now time for the people to express their unworthiness and pray for healing. The response of the people, “Lord, I am not worthy...” relies on the story of the healing of the centurion’s slave from Matthew 8:8 and Luke 7:6. In short, we are professing that we, who believe in Jesus, the Lamb of God, are unworthy of Jesus’ healing power; yet he gives himself anyway to those who have faith.

This is the overarching theme of the Communion Rite. From the moment we rise to our feet to pray the Lord’s Prayer until this moment, we have been praying for healing – healing with our neighbor and healing for our souls. Now we arrive at the moment, just before reception of Holy Communion, aware of our sinfulness, conscious of our unworthiness; yet confident in faith that Jesus gives of himself despite that!

**“May the Body/Blood of Christ keep me safe for eternal life.”**

At this point in the Mass, the priest says another private prayer to prepare himself to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. These are additional examples of the silent, private prayers of the priest that help him exercise his ministry with greater devotion. He then receives the Body and Blood of the Lord.

### **Communion Song**

At this point, the Communion Song begins as the people stand and make their way to the minister distributing Holy Communion. Many people believe this is a time to pray fervently and silently until and after they receive Holy Communion. However, that time of prayer comes during the quiet time after we have received and the Communion Song has concluded. The Church teaches us that the purpose of the Communion Song is to “express the spiritual union of the communicants by means of the unity of their voices, to show gladness of heart, and to bring out more clearly the communitarian character of the procession to receive the Eucharist” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 86). Therefore, it is at this point in the Mass when we should sing as we join our minds, our hearts, and our voices in union with one another, as we express our gratitude for the great gift of the Eucharist.

137. When the distribution of Communion is over, the Priest or a Deacon or an acolyte purifies the paten over the chalice and also the chalice itself.

While he carries out the purification, the Priest says quietly:

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.

138. Then the Priest may return to the chair. If appropriate, a sacred silence may be observed for a while, or a psalm or other canticle of praise or a hymn may be sung.

139. Then, standing at the altar or at the chair and facing the people, with hands joined, the Priest says:

**Let us pray.**

All pray in silence with the Priest for a while, unless silence has just been observed. Then the Priest, with hands extended, says, the Prayer after Communion, at the end of which the people acclaim:

**Amen.**

## **Consuming the Remains, Reposition of the Blessed Sacrament & Use of the Tabernacle**

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states that when Communion is over, the priest and deacon may consume what remains of Communion at the altar. The instruction is specific in saying that the consecrated wine must be consumed and the option given for the consecrated hosts as well; however, it is customary in most parishes that if consecrated hosts remain, they be placed in the tabernacle.

At this point, it is important to discuss that the purpose of the tabernacle is to be used as a place of reservation to store consecrated hosts that will be taken to those who are sick or homebound throughout the week. The tabernacle is also a place for private adoration of the faithful. While the contents of the tabernacle contain consecrated hosts, those hosts should not be used for distribution of Communion at Mass, except in extraordinary circumstances, like the late arrival of unexpected numbers. Everyone should receive Communion from the bread and wine brought to the altar at the Mass they attend.

This is important because the gifts of bread and wine that are brought to the altar at each Mass are symbols of the people gathered, and the bread and wine become the memorial sacrifice of Christ's Body and Blood offered to the Father. The priest calls upon the Holy Spirit to sanctify these gifts and transform them for those who partake of them. When Catholics receive from the tabernacle, they are still receiving Communion but they are not receiving from the sacrifice in which they have just offered themselves alongside the bread and wine.

## **Purifying the Vessels Used for Distribution of Holy Communion**

After distribution of Holy Communion, the particles and droplets of the consecrated bread and wine, which remain in the chalice and ciborium, are collected and consumed by a priest, deacon, or instituted acolyte. Traditionally the fragments of the bread are wiped from the paten or ciborium into the chalice. Water is then added, and the contents are consumed by the minister. The vessel is then wiped dry with a purificator. It is not intended to be done with any ceremony and can take place either at the altar or at the credence table, though the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* seems to prefer the credence table. If it is done at the altar, it should be done to the side so as not to equate the action with the consecration itself.

In the United States, lay people who serve as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion once had permission from the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments to assist in the purification of vessels, as long as the diocesan bishop agreed; however, this was only intended to be for "grave" need and not merely for convenience sake. When the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* was revised in 2002, the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments did not extend this permission to the laity. To date, only ordained ministers and instituted acolytes are permitted to carry out this task. An instituted acolyte is someone preparing for Holy Orders.

## **Silent Prayer or Song of Praise**

Once the vessels are purified, the priest may go to his chair for a period of silent prayer. Alternatively, a Song of Praise may be sung at this time. The purpose of the song is to focus the assembly on the mystery of the Holy Communion in which it participates, and should never draw

undue attention to the choir, cantor or other soloist. Additionally, the most proper posture for the people is to stand for this song.

Sometimes parishes use this time to make announcements, take up a second collection, or conduct some type of devotion, like praying a decade of the rosary. None of these actions are appropriate at this time. It is a time of silence or a time of praise.

### **Prayer after Communion**

The Prayer after Communion officially concludes the Communion Rite. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states that it brings “to completion the prayer of the people of God” (GIRM, 89). It is not a “closing prayer,” as the custom has become in many parishes today. Rather, it is a prayer asking that those who have partaken of the sacrifice receive the fruits of the Eucharist.

### **THE CONCLUDING RITE**

140. If they are necessary, any brief announcements to the people follow here.

141. Then the dismissal takes place. The Priest, facing the people and extending his hands, says:

**The Lord be with you.**

The people reply:

And with your spirit.

The Priest blesses the people, saying:

**May almighty God bless you,  
the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit.**

The people reply:

Amen.

142. On certain days or occasions, this formula of blessing is preceded, in accordance with the rubrics, by another more solemn formula of blessing or by a prayer over the people.

144. Then the Deacon, or the Priest himself, with hands joined and facing the people, says:

**Go forth, the Mass is ended.**

Or:

**Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.**

Or:

**Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.**

Or:

**Go in peace.**

The people reply:

Thanks be to God.

145. Then the Priest venerates the altar as usual with a kiss, as at the beginning. After making a profound bow with the ministers, he withdraws.

146. If any liturgical action follows immediately, the rites of dismissal are omitted.

## **Announcements**

Those in liturgical ministry sometimes joke that it wouldn't be Mass if there weren't announcements. While there is humor to that, announcements are important to the life of the community. In the earliest manuscripts used for Mass, at a time when Christianity was practiced only under a veil of secrecy, a minister would announce the day for the next gathering, the name of the church, and whether it was inside or outside the walls of Rome. Today, the announcements are meant to highlight upcoming events of interest in the coming week, like an upcoming blood drive, a parish dinner, or a fundraiser for a youth mission trip. While the announcements are taking place, this is the most appropriate time for a second collection.

## **Blessing**

We are now ready to be sent forth to live as witnesses to the Gospel in the week ahead, but before we leave, the priest offers us his blessing. The blessing started out as a devotional practice when the Bishop blessed individuals after the service. Eventually that blessing was moved before the dismissal.

Sometimes a Prayer over the People or a solemn blessing may replace the simple blessing. If this is the case, the priest extends his hands over the people while he prays. A solemn blessing usually occurs at Masses celebrating more solemn, or festive, occasions, such as Christmas, Easter, Holy Days of Obligation, or even the celebration of sacraments, like Baptism, Confirmation, or even Matrimony.

## **Dismissal**

If a deacon is present at Mass, he dismisses the assembly. In his absence, the priest does it. The dismissal is given so that all who gather at Mass may now return to the world doing good works, praising and blessing God. The people respond, "Thanks be to God" and these are the last spoken words of the Mass. The whole concluding rite is very brief. After all that we have done in the Mass, our job is now to go forth from this Mass and live as members of the Body of Christ. It is an immediate command to go out, which explains the brevity of this part of the Mass.

It is important to note that no recessional hymn is noted in the Order of Mass, though in almost every parish, a recessional hymn is commonplace. Most people feel like the Mass should end as it began – with everyone singing; however, the omission of a recessional hymn lends more to the weight of the dismissal of the people. The assembly has just been sent forth to do

good works, and nothing should delay them, not even a rousing song. If there is a recessional hymn, however, it is courteous for the priest and deacon to remain at their places until the song is nearly over.

Now it is time for the priest and deacon to leave. As at the beginning of Mass, they go to the altar and venerate it with a kiss, and then a recession forms. If servers or acolytes processed in, carrying cross and candles, they will also carry them out; however, the Book of the Gospels, which was carried in procession, is never carried out. This is because the Word of God contained therein now lives within us and it is our responsibility to carry that Word to the people we encounter. All the ministers make a profound bow to the altar, or a genuflection to the tabernacle if it is in the sanctuary, and walk out in the order in which they entered.

Following the recession of the ministers, the assembly leaves. There is no reference to the assembly's departure in any of the liturgical books, nor is there reference to the gestures of the assembly. It is most appropriate for the people to make a profound bow to the altar, or a genuflection to the tabernacle, just as the ministers did.