

Understanding the Parts of the Mass



EXPLAINING EACH PART OF THE MASS
BY
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*I know you'll learn something new about the Mass
and I hope that it helps to deepen your faith.
Please feel free to share these lessons with your
friends and family, and Be assured of my prayers.*

HOLY WATER

As you enter the Church, look for the Holy Water font near the entrance. It is a pious custom to dip your right hand in the font and bless yourself with the Holy Water as you quietly say, "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." This little ritual reminds us of our baptism – that's why the font is near the door of the Church, because we 'entered the Church through baptism.' At the same time, this gesture is also a sacramental and can absolve us of our venial sins. It helps remind us that we have just entered into a sacred place for a sacred time.

GENUFLECTION

"At the name of Jesus, every knee must bow." That's what St. Paul wrote years ago. And so, as the priest and ministers approach the altar they make a genuflection to honor the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist in the tabernacle. If the tabernacle is not in the center of the sanctuary, then the priest bows to the altar and the crucifix as a sign of reverence. When the faithful enter the Church, and before they enter their pew, it is praiseworthy for them to make a genuflection to the tabernacle. The tabernacle containing the Most Blessed Sacrament should be clearly visible. Look for the little vigil light burning next to it.

THE TABERNACLE

Benedict XVI wrote: “The Holy Eucharist is the center of absolutely everything.” The most important item in a Catholic Church is the tabernacle – the noble, beautiful, and secure safe that contains the Holy Eucharist, which is the very Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is really, truly, and substantially present under the appearances of bread and wine. It is truly the “Holy of Holies.” That’s why, in most Churches, the tabernacle is placed in the center of the sanctuary or on the back altar, or at least in a place which is clearly visible and marked by a vigil light. Pope

THE ALTAR

While the tabernacle is the most important item in a church, the altar is no less important during Mass. Because upon the altar the Perfect Sacrifice is renewed and Jesus Christ is made present and offered to the Father for His Glory and for the expiation of our sins. For that reason, when the priest enters and leaves the Mass, he bows profoundly and kisses the altar, which is a sign and instrument of our salvation.

The altar in a Catholic Church is a direct descendant of the Altar of Sacrifice of Abraham on Mount Moriah, and the other altars of sacrifice of the Old Testament. It is typically made of stone, immovable and truly

noble in appearance. The altar is adorned with an altar cloth of linen, for Jesus was wrapped in linen after He died; it is also adorned with a crucifix and up to six candles for feast days, or even seven candles when the bishop is present. The candles remind us that Christ is the Light of the World, and the crucifix reminds us that Jesus so loved us that He died for us on the cross to redeem us from our sins. In solemn liturgies, the altar may be incensed and decorated with flowers, which can be truly abundant and spectacular in the churches found in the Philippines, Mexico, Spain and Latin America.

THE CRUCIFIX

Every Catholic Church has a tabernacle, an altar, and a crucifix – which is a cross with the figure of Christ crucified. The crucifix is in the sanctuary near the altar and should be clearly visible. It reminds us how much Jesus loved us and is an invitation to love Jesus in return. Our religion is about a person – Jesus Christ – who is true God and true Man. Jesus loves us and invites us to love Him in return, and that love is expressed in prayer and worship, and at the same time through service to our neighbor. The first commandment is to love God above all things, and the second is like it: to love your neighbor as yourself. That’s where the cross of Christ comes in.

Someone once told St. Teresa of Calcutta: “I would not touch a leper for a million dollars!”

To which Mother Teresa replied: “And I would not touch a leper for TWO million dollars! But I will touch a leper for the love of Christ.” By gazing upon the crucifix, our love for Christ goes deeper.

THE SACRISTY

The sacristy is a special room in the church, usually next to or behind the sanctuary, which many of the faithful never see. The sacristy is where the priest vests for Mass, and in the sacristy there are closets for vestments, shelves for storing the various liturgical ornaments used in the Mass (candles, thurible, cruets, bells, bread, wine, etc.) and a safe for the sacred vessels (chalice, ciborium, and monstrance). Often in the sacristy there will be a special sink for cleansing and polishing the sacred vessels, as well as a sacrarium. A sacrarium is a sink that drains directly into the ground and is only used for washing sacred vessels and the sacred linens.

PRAYERS BEFORE MASS

You have heard the conventional wisdom, “You get out of it, what you put into it”, and that surely applies to the Mass. Worship resources, including the free Relevant Radio® App, will help you get more out of the Mass by offering you any number of traditional prayers to pray in the moments before Mass. Try to call to mind the intentions you will pray for at Mass, especially the spiritual and material needs of loved ones, and read and

reflect on a time-tested prayer before Mass.
This is one of my favorites:

A Prayer Before Mass (by St. Thomas Aquinas)

Almighty and everlasting God, behold I come to the Sacrament of Thine only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: I come as one infirm to the physician of life, as one unclean to the fountain of mercy, as one blind to the light of everlasting brightness, as one poor and needy to the Lord of heaven and earth. Therefore, I implore the abundance of Thy measureless bounty that Thou wouldst vouchsafe to heal my infirmity, wash my uncleanness, enlighten my blindness, enrich my poverty and clothe my nakedness, that I may receive the Bread of Angels, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, with such reverence and humility, with such sorrow and devotion, with such purity and faith, with such purpose and intention as may be profitable to my soul's salvation.

Grant unto me, I pray, the grace of receiving not only the Sacrament of our Lord's Body and Blood, but also the grace and power of the Sacrament. O most gracious God, grant me so to receive the Body of Thine only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, which He took from the Virgin Mary, as to merit to be incorporated into His mystical Body, and to be numbered amongst His members. O most loving Father, give me grace to behold

forever Thy Beloved Son with His face at last unveiled, whom I now purpose to receive under the sacramental veil here below. Amen.

SIGN OF THE CROSS AND GREETING

We begin the Mass - as we begin almost every prayer and sacrament - by making the Sign of the Cross, using the exact words that Jesus taught us (Mt. 28:19) just before He ascended into heaven. By signing ourselves with the cross as we say "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen," we call to mind two central truths of our Faith: that God is a trinity of persons, and that our savior Jesus Christ died for us on the cross. No other gesture so clearly marks a person as a Roman Catholic than the Sign of the Cross.

Next, the celebrant greets the faithful with the words, "The Lord be with you," to which they respond, "And with your spirit." What a wonderful greeting, what a wonderful wish! What could possibly be better than having the Lord with us? And what could possibly be better than the Lord being with your spirit in the state of grace?

Have you noticed that the more enthusiastic and robust the response by the congregation ("And with your spirit!!!"), the better the homily will be minutes later?

THE CONFITEOR

Of all the magnificent prayers at Mass, the Confiteor is one of my favorites, and it comes at just the right moment: the beginning of Mass. It is deeply powerful, sincere, searching, and human. "I confess to Almighty God," screams, "I am NOTHING! Help me God! And everyone else help me too!" We exclaim it at the beginning of Mass to prepare ourselves for what is about to take place, much like a humble and respectful guest removes his dirty shoes when he enters someone's beautiful home.

Here is the Confiteor:

*I confess to Almighty God
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done and in what I have failed to
do,
through my fault, through my fault,
through my most grievous fault;
therefore I ask Blessed Mary ever-Virgin,
all the Angels and Saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.*

MEA CULPA

Why do we repeat "mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa" (through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault)? We say that three times because important truths need to be repeated, or we just don't get it. Much like a mother who

shouts, “don’t touch it!!” three times as her little two-year-old boy runs to touch the whistling tea pot.

KYRIE

The opening scene of the black and white film, *Lord of the Flies* (1963), shows British schoolboys marching in formation on the beach of an island in the South Pacific as they cheerfully sing their upbeat version of “*Kyrie, Kyrie, Kyrie eleison.*” They are seemingly oblivious to the meaning of the words, “Lord have mercy”, and unaware that the island where their plane just crashed may look like paradise, but in fact is paradise lost because they have been deprived of adult leadership, authority, and the calm and prudent use of reason. Soon these marooned boys will become slaves of their passions; no more marching in formation, no more cheerful singing, no more working together for a common goal. In short order many of them begin to behave like savages. The movie is a metaphor on the effects of original sin. When we honestly come to grips with the reality of our situation – fallen human nature as a result of original sin – how can we fail to cry out, “*Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison*”, (Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy)?

GLORIA

On Sundays and feast days, but not on Sundays during Lent or Advent, the Gloria is sung or recited by the faithful. It is a song of joy and praise to God and expresses the most fundamental sentiments of the creature to his Creator: thanksgiving, praise, worship, and adoration.

First sung by the angels the night our Savior was born, the Gloria has inspired composers the world over and down through the centuries to create stunningly beautiful musical scores for choir and orchestra. Some of the greatest – in my humble opinion – are by Handel and Mozart. But the finest, most sublime setting for the Gloria – again in my humble opinion – is the Gloria from the Mass, “Cum Jubilo,” a classic Gregorian chant. But we do not know who composed it. It is reported that Mozart once said he would gladly let someone else take credit for all of his musical compositions if he could only claim credit for composing the Gloria of the “Missa Cum Jubilo.”

On very special occasions, the bells are rung during the Gloria: Midnight Mass on Christmas, the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, and Easter Vigil.

THE COLLECT

“When this hymn is concluded (the Gloria), the Priest, with hands joined says: ‘Let us pray.’ And all pray in silence with the Priest

for a while.” So state the ‘rubrics’ in the Roman Missal.

The Collect is also called the ‘Opening Prayer’ and it is the moment for all the faithful gathered at Mass to collect their thoughts and intentions for the Mass that has just begun. Accordingly, we pray in silence. That is the moment to silently tell God in our heart what we are praying for at Mass: family, friends, relatives, a child who is seriously ill, a new job, for vocations, the Pope, and upcoming elections ... whatever. Since there is an infinite amount of grace available at each Mass, we can pray for as many persons or intentions that we wish.

“Then the Priest, with hands extended, says the Collect prayer, at the end of which the people acclaim Amen.”

Pay attention to the Collect prayer – it is usually centered on the theme of the Mass, whether it be a saint or a season or a solemnity of the Lord.

LITURGY OF THE WORD - 1ST READING

After the Greeting, Penitential Rite and Gloria are completed, the faithful may be seated and are invited to listen attentively to the Word of God.

As a teacher, I have found the most effective way to communicate a message is with audio and visual aids. For that reason, the faithful are encouraged to read the readings for

themselves even before Mass. You can find the daily readings on the Relevant Radio® App, or many other places. You may also find it helpful to follow the readings in your missalette as the reader is proclaiming the Word of God.

On weekdays, we have three readings: the first, the Responsorial Psalm, and the Gospel. On Sundays and Holy Days we have four readings: typically one from the Old Testament, the Responsorial Psalm, one from the New Testament, and then the Gospel.

When we read the Sacred Scriptures we should ask the Holy Spirit for help to understand the meaning as it applies to us today, here, and now.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

With the reform of the Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council, the Psalms now have a more prominent place in the cycle of readings.

Every day, we have a psalm during the readings at Mass. Because the congregation participates in the singing or chanting of the Psalm by repeating a selected phrase, we call this a 'response' - hence, the 'Responsorial Psalm'.

The Psalms can be recited or sung; they can be sung in plainchant or with musical instrument accompaniment.

King David composed many of the Psalms, and there are 150 in all. They express various

themes, emotions, and needs of the human creature with respect to his Creator and fellow human beings.

It is remarkable that even though these Psalms were composed thousands of years ago, we see that human nature has not changed during the course of time. The creature hungers for his Creator, repents of his sins, longs for protection and the goodness of the Lord.

ALLELUIA

Following the Responsorial Psalm or the Second Reading, as the case may be, the people stand and sing “the Alleluia or another chant laid down by the rubrics, as the liturgical time requires.”

I’ll never forget when a thousand voices and musicians sang Handel’s Hallelujah Chorus at the Canonization of St. Josemaria in 2002. Talk about magnificent and inspiring praise!

Simply put, we are to sing the Alleluia before the Gospel except in Lent, when another acclamation is used. On weekdays, if not sung, the Alleluia may be omitted.

I find it fascinating that Jesus would have sung the Alleluia (it’s a Hebrew word, after all) in the Synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath when he was a youngster. It literally means “Praise Yahweh”.

GOSPEL

Did you ever wonder what the deacon asks the priest before he proclaims the Gospel? He says: "Your blessing, Father." And then the priest says, in a barely audible voice: "May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips, that you may proclaim the Gospel worthily and well; In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

If no deacon is present, the priest bows to the altar and quietly says: "Cleanse my heart and lips Almighty God, that I may worthily proclaim your Holy Gospel."

The deacon or priest proclaims the Gospel loudly and clearly and in such a manner that the faithful can understand it. All stand for the Gospel as a sign of respect.

The Gospel readings for weekdays follow a two year cycle, and for Sundays follow a three year cycle. The Gospels are according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The four Gospels we use today are the same used by the early Christians. In fact, the New Testament as we know it, 27 books in all, has been the same since at least 170 AD.

HOMILY

"Speak concisely. Say much in few words."

Read what Pope Francis wrote about the homily in *The Joy of the Gospel*:

158. Paul VI said that “the faithful... expect much from preaching, and will greatly benefit from it, provided that it is simple, clear, direct, well-adapted” .[125] Simplicity has to do with the language we use. It must be one that people understand, lest we risk speaking to a void. Preachers often use words learned during their studies and in specialized settings which are not part of the ordinary language of their hearers. These are words that are suitable in theology or catechesis, but whose meaning is incomprehensible to the majority of Christians. The greatest risk for a preacher is that he becomes so accustomed to his own language that he thinks that everyone else naturally understands and uses it. If we wish to adapt to people’s language and to reach them with God’s word, we need to share in their lives and pay loving attention to them. Simplicity and clarity are two different things. Our language may be simple but our preaching not very clear. It can end up being incomprehensible because it is disorganized, lacks logical progression or tries to deal with too many things at one time. We need to ensure, then, that the homily has thematic unity, clear order and correlation between sentences, so that people can follow the preacher easily and grasp his line of argument.

159. Another feature of a good homily is that it is positive. It is not so much

concerned with pointing out what shouldn't be done, but with suggesting what we can do better. In any case, if it does draw attention to something negative, it will also attempt to point to a positive and attractive value, lest it remain mired in complaints, laments, criticisms and reproaches. Positive preaching always offers hope, points to the future, does not leave us trapped in negativity. How good it is when priests, deacons and the laity gather periodically to discover resources which can make preaching more attractive! On Sundays, holy days of obligation, and solemnities, the people stand after the homily and make the Profession of Faith. This is also known as the Creed because the first word is Credo, which means "I believe" in Latin.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

Typically we recite the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which capsulizes the dogmatic formulations of the Council of Nicea (325 AD) and those of Constantinople (381). It is simply called the Nicene Creed. When confirmation students are present at Mass, the people can recite the shorter and more ancient creed known as the Apostles' Creed. The Apostles' Creed has 12 articles of faith.

We stand for the Creed to show respect and attention for what we believe and also to honor all martyrs who died for these beliefs.

If you are ever confused about what you believe as a Catholic, or if anyone ever asks you what you believe, you can simply recite the Nicene Creed for them:

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the
Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius
Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver
of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,

who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic
Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of
sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

There are four 'ends' of the Mass, just as there are four 'ends' of prayer: Petition, Adoration, Reparation, and Thanksgiving. Pope Benedict XVI observed that we are "at our most attentive in prayer of petition and prayer of thanksgiving." When I read that observation, I thought about my own experience in prayer, and realized that it's true.

The Prayers of the Faithful follow the homily, and while they are not mandatory at every Mass, I don't know why you would omit them since we have such a wonderful opportunity to win God's mercy by asking for His help.

The priest introduces and closes the Prayers of the Faithful, while the reader announces the various intentions and invites the congregation to pray by saying, "We pray to the Lord", and the people respond, "Lord, hear our prayer." There is an order to the

petitions, starting with universal needs of the Church and moving down to local needs, often mentioning by name the sick and recently deceased in the parish.

I always make a point of praying for the Holy Father and the Bishops, as well as for peace in the world and the special protection of Christians persecuted around the world. I also remember to pray for mothers and the safety of unborn children and an increase in vocations ... and the list could go on and on because there is an infinite amount of grace available at each Mass, so 'why leave money sitting on the table?'

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST (OFFERTORY)

After the Prayers of the Faithful (Universal Prayer), the Mass enters into a new and profound phase: the ritual of offering and sacrifice. Pay attention, because a lot is going on.

"The ministers place the corporal, the purificator, the chalice, the pall, and the Missal on the altar." If this were a meal, the table is now set. But this is not a meal; it is a sacrifice, and the sacrifice is ready to begin.

Members of the faithful can offer their sacrifice. Typically on Sundays, a collection is taken up. That monetary sacrifice is real, but also symbolic of what we hope is a deeper

reality: the readiness to sacrifice (*sacrum facere* – literally, ‘to set aside’) our hearts, minds, souls and bodies for the love of God.

Frequently members of the faithful come forward bringing gifts of wine, water, and unleavened bread, which will be consecrated for the Eucharist. In some countries, such as the highlands of Mexico where I ministered for fifteen summers, the faithful also bring gifts for the celebrant for his own use: milk, cheese, eggs, etc. It is all very moving.

The priest offers the bread and the wine to God, so that it might be sanctified, and the people respond, “Blessed be God forever.”

And what can we who are poor offer to God? All the work that we will do that day. And that offering allows us to put our heart into our work, especially the ordinary housework that makes life pleasant for those we live with. Offering our daily work allows us to extend the Mass through the day. In this way we discover that nothing is trivial, nothing is wasted: all can be offered and connected to God who awaits us in the hum-drum activities of daily life.

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THE 'SECRET' PRAYERS (OFFERTORY)

If you watch very closely, you'll notice that the priest is moving his lips and praying some prayers very, very quietly during the preparation of the Gifts. The rubrics indicate that the priest should pray them 'sub secreto', which is translated as 'inaudibly' or 'secret.'

But there's really no secret, because the prayers are printed in the Roman Missal or other worship resources for the whole world to see. And even though the rubrics indicate that the priest is to pray these prayers, there is absolutely no reason why you can't do that too!

As the priest pours wine and a little water into the chalice, he prays quietly: "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."

Then the priest bows profoundly and says quietly: "With humble spirit and contrite heart may we be accepted by you, O Lord, and may our sacrifice in your sight this day be pleasing to you, Lord God."

Finally, as he washes his hands he prays,
“Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity, and
cleans me from my sin.”

THE ‘ORATE FRATRES’

The gifts having been prepared, the priest invites everyone to pray: “Pray brethren (brothers and sisters), that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.”

Standing, the people reply: “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.”

‘My sacrifice and yours.’ Just what does THAT mean? Many things, but especially that the Mass is a sacrifice, not just a meal, and it is the representation of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, but in an unbloody manner. Everyone who participates in the Mass is asked to make a sacrifice, because making a sacrifice is a proof of love. And our religion demands that we love God.

Sometimes the sacrifice we make is simply the time and effort that we have made to get to Mass. For some folks in the world, that’s easy because the local Church is just next-door. For others, it is very difficult because it is far away. And for others, going to Mass might even be dangerous, especially in areas

of the world where Christians are persecuted and martyred for their faith.

PRAYERS OVER THE GIFTS

There are three prayers that are unique for each daily Mass: the Opening Prayer, the Prayer Over the Gifts, and the Prayer After Communion. If the Mass is in honor of the Blessed Mother, those three prayers will be related to her. If the Mass is in honor of a martyr, the three prayers will be related to that martyr.

When the priest prays the Opening Prayer and the Prayer After Communion, he invites everyone present to pray by saying, "Let us pray." But he does not make this invitation for the Prayer Over the Gifts, because the people just stood to pray the "Orate Fratres" and they are already in a disposition of prayer.

The rubrics state: "With hands extended, the priest sings or prays the prayers over the gifts, at the end of which the people respond 'Amen.'"

Why does the priest extend his hands? Once again it is 'body language' that shows that he and the entire congregation are 'open' to the gifts that God wants to give them.

PREFACE

Now the great event of the Mass is about to take place: the miracle of the transubstantiation. As the Eucharistic Prayer begins, everyone is standing. The priest invites the people to pray with him and a dialog takes place between the priest and the people.

“The Lord be with you.” R./ “And with your spirit.”

“Lift up your hearts.” R./ “We have lifted them up to the Lord.”

“Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” R./ “It is right and just.”

If the people respond with energy and enthusiasm, it is a clear signal that they have faith and that they want to be there.

And now begins the Preface to the Eucharistic prayer; it is prayed by the priest alone. It is the second longest prayer in the Mass after the Eucharistic Prayer and changes daily and by the season depending on the theme of the Mass. For instance, there are several different prefaces for the Advent season, Christmas season, Lenten season, Easter season, saints, martyrs, virgins, pastors, etc.

To follow the prayer more closely and derive greater benefit from the prayer, you can

follow the prayer in your printed worship resource.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER (1)

I will spend the next seven lessons on the Eucharistic Prayer, and it would really help if you had a copy of the Eucharistic Prayers from your missalette, Daily Roman Missal, Magnificat, or mobile App so you can follow along.

At this point of the Mass, everyone is invited to kneel. Well, at least in the United States. (In other countries – Spain, Italy, France, Mexico – the faithful stand until the consecration.)

We kneel because something holy and miraculous is about to happen: the bread and wine will be changed into the Body and Blood of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

There are four standard Eucharistic Prayers for daily Mass, plus several others for Masses of Reconciliation and in some countries, Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with children. For these lessons, I will focus on Eucharistic Prayer I, also known as the ‘Roman Canon.’ The word “canon” in the liturgy means that the prayer is “fixed,” and is the same day in and day out with limited exceptions for Christmas and Easter time.

The first Eucharistic Prayer – the Roman Canon – is the prayer that your parents, grandparents, and great-great-

grandparents all the way back to 1570, would have followed in Latin at Mass. It was the same from the Council of Trent until the reform of the Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council.

The Roman Canon is still basically the same except we now pray it in the vernacular (English) and we've added the name of St. Joseph to the Saints we commemorate at Mass.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER (2)

MEMENTO

After directing our prayers of offering to God the Father through Jesus Christ, the priest prays for the Church, the Pope, the local bishop and all "who holding to the truth, hand on the catholic and apostolic faith." And then the priest says the "Memento" which is Latin for "Remember."

"Remember, Lord, your servants, N. and N."

At this point the priest and all the people pause to pray in silence for a few moments. What do they pray for? Actually, the question is "who" do they pray for? They pray for "N. and N.", with the "N" signifying the first letter of the latin word "nomen" which means "name." The moment has arrived to pray for people and for their needs, because the Mass is first of all an opportunity for prayer of petition.

Who do you pray for? The priest is obligated on Sundays to pray for his parishioners, but for most priests – as times goes on – their list grows more and more. One of my favorite authors, a priest himself, Fr. Leo Trese offered this reflection on the Memento in his book “Vessels of Clay”:

“I just can’t bring forward enough intentions ... for the time is so short. ... All I can say is ‘For all the intentions, Lord, which I mentioned to You in my morning prayers.’ It is a long list, whose established pattern undergoes daily additions and modifications.”

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER (3) THE CONSECRATION

At the Last Supper, Jesus said, “Do this in memory of me.” And that’s exactly what we do at Mass each day. The priest takes unleavened wheat bread and grape wine – just as Jesus did – and says the words that Jesus said, “This is my body. This is my blood,” and the great miracle of the transubstantiation takes place.

The ‘substance’ of the bread and the ‘substance’ of the wine is changed into the ‘substance’ of the Body and Blood of Christ. So the Church teaches that in the Eucharist, Jesus is really, truly, and substantially present, with His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.

After pronouncing those words, the priest shows the Eucharist to the people. In some countries the faithful keep absolute reverential silence at this sacred moment; in other countries the faithful quietly proclaim the words of St. Thomas the Apostle, "My Lord and my God!"

The server rings the bells and everyone knows that a great miracle has just taken place.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER (4) BELLS

I love bells, don't you? Bells are permitted at Mass, but not mandatory. Still, I think they add something beautiful to the experience.

When I was chaplain at Northridge Prep school for boys, the 6th and 7th graders always wanted to serve and always wanted something active to do, like ringing the bells. If it were up to them, they'd ring the bells all Mass long. But no, only three times: once at the 'epiclesis' when the priest puts his hands over the gifts and invokes the blessing of the Holy Spirit, again for the second time when the priest elevates and shows the host to the people, and third time is when the priest elevates the chalice and shows the Blood of Christ to the people.

So what's up with the bells? We ring bells to get people's attention and let them know something important is going on and something has changed; school bells tell us

something has changed, for instance that period 3 is now over and now we begin period 4. Fire bells in the village alert everyone to take action and come and help. And bells at Mass tell us that a miracle has just happened: the transubstantiation.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER (5) MEMENTO OF THE DEAD

At every Mass, the Church prays for the living and the dead. Just because a person has died does not mean he is no longer part of the Church. And the Church always remembers the souls of the faithful departed. The body dies, but the soul lives forever. At the end of the world, the souls will be reunited with their bodies.

So why do we pray for the ‘faithful departed’? Because if they are still in purgatory, they need our prayers. They can not pray for themselves, but we can pray for them and we can apply the grace and fruits of the Mass to their souls for their purification.

It is very helpful to pray for the dead by name. For that reason, the rubrics state: “For N. and N.” Who should we pray for? Family and friends who have died, and then especially for all those who have died anywhere or at anytime who have no one to pray for them.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER (6) EUCHARISTIC DOXOLOGY

No matter which Eucharistic Prayer we use, (1,2,3,4 or the various EPs for Reconciliation or for Masses for Children) they all end the same with the “Eucharistic Doxology.” A “doxology” is the English translation of a Greek word which means a short hymn of praise to God.

The priest proclaims: “Through Him, with Him, in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours almighty Father, forever and ever,” as he raises the Eucharistic Lord in the consecrated host and in the Precious Blood in the sacred chalice for the entire congregation to see and ponder.

Who is the “Him” in this hymn of praise? Jesus Christ, of course. So, this short prayer is a Trinitarian formula of praise to God the Father through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ, in union with the Holy Spirit.

The Mass is clearly a prayer of praise to the Father, by the Son, through the Holy Spirit.

There’s a lot going on at each Mass, isn’t there?

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THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER (7) AMEN

It is such a simple word: Amen. And it seems to be exactly the same in English, German, French, Spanish, Latin, Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew. That’s because it came from the Hebrew language and followed the path of Christian Evangelization throughout the world.

So what does it mean? It means that we give assent to what has just been said and we claim that it is true.

Amen = I believe it. So be it. It is true.

Can I get an “Amen” for that?

At really special Masses, such as the canonization of a saint in St. Peter’s Square, the choir and the people sing the super-duper “triple Amen” in four part harmony accompanied with brass, tympani, strings, and voices. It is truly magnificent and glorious and a fitting way to conclude the Eucharistic Prayer in which the extraordinary miracle of the Transubstantiation just took place.

THE LORD’S PRAYER

The pace is picking up as we conclude the Eucharistic Prayer with the Great Amen. We are all focused at this point on the Holy Eucharist and we begin our final preparations for receiving the Lord in Holy Communion. What better way to prepare than to pray in unison with “the words Our Savior taught us”?

And so, standing, we all pray the “Lord’s Prayer”, also known as the Our Father. There are seven petitions in the Our Father, as the Catechism states:

“2803 After we have placed ourselves in the presence of God our Father to adore and to love and to bless him, the Spirit of adoption stirs up in our hearts seven petitions, seven blessings. The first three, more theological, draw us toward the glory of the Father; the

last four, as ways toward him, commend our wretchedness to his grace.”

I could list the seven petitions, but that would be too easy. Can you figure out what they are? If you cannot, go find your copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and read paragraphs 2803-2854.

I will leave you with one last consideration about the Lord’s Prayer during the Mass. Pope Benedict XVI points out in his commentary on the Lord’s Prayer that “we are at our most attentive in prayer when it is prayer of thanksgiving or prayer of petition.”

Ask God for good things, because God is our good Father.

THE SIGN OF PEACE

There is a lot going on during the “Communion Rite” at this point in the Mass, but since there are only “40 Lessons on the Mass in Lent” I am unable to comment on all of them. I invite you to get a copy of the Daily Roman Missal or any other worship resource that has the prayers, the secret prayers, and the rubrics for your study. You will learn a lot and your hunger for the Eucharist will grow.

So let me comment on the “Sign of Peace”, which the reform of the Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council recovered and inserted into this part of the Mass. Some think we should

have the “sign of peace” at the beginning of the Mass so we can be more focused at this point on receiving Holy Communion.

As it turns out, the ‘rubrics’ state that the priest says “The peace of the Lord be with you always” and the people respond, “And with your spirit.” But then the rubrics point out: “Then, if appropriate, the Deacon or the Priest, adds: ‘Let us offer each other a sign of peace.’”

So, it is not mandatory to have the sign of peace, and sometimes it is omitted at weekday Masses. For funerals and weddings and other very special occasions it is not uncommon that the exchange of a sign of peace takes longer and is more involved as the circumstances warrant. The sign of peace that we exchange should be in keeping “with local custom ... to express peace, communion, and charity.” Here in the USA the custom is a handshake. In other countries it is a smile, and in still other countries a hug.

But the ‘sign of peace’ remains only a sign if there is not a deeper commitment to charity, love, and forgiveness of our neighbor.

THE AGNUS DEI

Next follows the ‘Agnus Dei’ (Lamb of God) calling to mind that electric moment when John the Baptist pointed to Jesus at the Jordan and told the Apostles John (brother of James)

and Andrew (brother of Peter) “Behold the Lamb of God!” (John 1:37). Immediately, John and Andrew began to follow Jesus who, turning around, surprised them by asking, “What is it you seek?”

(That is a deep, deep question that Jesus asks each of us. But more on that later...)

“Lamb of God” may sound a bit strange to us in contemporary English, but back then – to that audience and in that language – it had a profound meaning and triggered a reflection on Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac and God’s promise to save His people.

When Isaac asked his father, “Where is the sacrificial animal,” Abraham replied, “God himself will provide the sacrifice.” And so he did, thousands of years later in the person of Jesus.

Jesus is the “sacrificial lamb” who takes away the sins of the world, fulfilling the prophetic meaning of the sacrifice of Abraham and the Passover event which set the Israelites free from bondage in Egypt.

We say, “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us ... have mercy on us ... grant us peace” because that is what the heart and soul seek: peace and repose from all worry, anxiety, and remorse for our own sinfulness.

It is a beautiful way for us to prepare for the moment of Holy Communion.

THE BEST 'SECRET' PRAYER

After the faithful sing or recite the "Lamb of God, Grant us Peace", pay close attention to what the priest celebrant is doing. He bows his head, folds his hands, and prays what I consider the most magnificent of the 'secret' prayers, in order to prepare himself to receive Holy Communion worthily and fruitfully. Here it is:

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.
"And never let ME be parted from YOU."
That just about sums it up, doesn't it? There's
nothing more important than being united to
Jesus Christ.

Now we are ready for Holy Communion. The rubrics state: "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 the Lamb of God, Behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those who are 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.”

LORD, I AM NOT WORTHY. These are some of the most famous words ever spoken and they are repeated daily by tens of millions of Catholics at Mass right before Holy Communion.

And the person who first spoke them? He was a Roman Centurion whose servant was deathly ill. Jesus told him he would come for a visit, but the Roman soldier — an honest and humble man — shook his head and said, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed.”

Jesus was so moved by this man’s humility, that he worked the miraculous cure immediately and on the spot and marveled at this man’s faith and humility.

Humility is an elusive, but necessary virtue. Saint Josemaria once wrote: “You are not

humble when you humble yourself, but when others humble you and you accept it for Christ.”

HOW TO RECEIVE HOLY COMMUNION

When the Blessed Mother appeared to Adele Brise at Champion, Wisconsin on October 8, 1859, her message was simple, clear, and direct.

“Teach the children what they need to know for their salvation. . . Teach them their catechism, how to sign themselves with the Sign of the Cross, and how to approach the sacraments; that is what I wish you to do. Go and fear nothing. I will help you.”

And just how are we to approach the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist at Mass? The Church instructs us that we need to be in a state of grace to receive Holy Communion, that is we should not be conscious of any unconfessed mortal sin at the time of Holy Communion. Moreover, we should keep to the one hour fast from food and beverage before Communion. For the rest, in the USA, the faithful are free to receive Holy Communion standing or kneeling, on the tongue or in the hand.

But we should try to receive Our Lord with piety, devotion, hunger, and desire.

You get out of it, what you put into it.

THANKSGIVING AFTER COMMUNION

Have you noticed? Pope Francis often sits in the back of the Church after morning Mass to make his time of thanksgiving, some ten minutes or so. This is an ancient and venerable custom based on the fact that the sacramental reality of the Eucharistic presence of Jesus Christ remains in us for ten to fifteen minutes after we receive Him. In effect we are like living Tabernacles for that time period.

There are many beautiful prayers of thanksgiving for after Communion, some composed by saints like Thomas Aquinas or Bonaventure. What follows is the Universal Prayer attributed to Pope Clement XI. This just about sums it up:

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.
I trust in you: strengthen my trust.
I love you: let me love you more and more.
I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.
I worship you as my first beginning,
I long for you as my last end,
I praise you as my constant helper,
And call on you as my loving protector.
Guide me by your wisdom,
Correct me with your justice,
Comfort me with your mercy,
Protect me with your power.
I offer you, Lord, my thoughts: to be fixed on
you;
My words: to have you for their theme;

My actions: to reflect my love for you;
My sufferings: to be endured for your greater
glory.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask,
For as long as you ask,
Because you ask it.

Lord, enlighten my understanding,
Strengthen my will,
Purify my heart,
and make me holy.

Help me to repent of my past sins
And to resist temptation in the future.

Help me to rise above my human weaknesses
And to grow stronger as a Christian.

Let me love you, my Lord and my God,
And see myself as I really am:

A pilgrim in this world,
A Christian called to respect and love
All whose lives I touch,
Those under my authority,
My friends and my enemies.

Help me to conquer anger with gentleness,
Greed by generosity,
Apathy by fervor.

Help me to forget myself
And reach out toward others.

Make me prudent in planning,
Courageous in taking risks.

Make me patient in suffering, unassuming in
prosperity.

Keep me, Lord, attentive at prayer,
Temperate in food and drink,
Diligent in my work,
Firm in my good intentions.

Let my conscience be clear,
My conduct without fault,
My speech blameless,
My life well-ordered.
Put me on guard against my human
weaknesses.
Let me cherish your love for me,
Keep your law,
And come at last to your salvation.
Teach me to realize that this world is passing,
That my true future is the happiness of
heaven,
That life on earth is short,
And the life to come eternal.
Help me to prepare for death
With a proper fear of judgment,
But a greater trust in your goodness.
Lead me safely through death
To the endless joy of heaven.
Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE MASS IS ENDED

And now what do we do? Having received
Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist,
we go out into the world to bring Christ to all
we meet, through our words and deeds.

At the end of World War II, the Catholic
faithful in a small town in Germany set to
work to rebuild their parish Church, which
had been demolished in the war. Little by
little, brick by brick, with great love and faith,
they rebuilt their beloved Church. But when
it came to restoring the marble statue of the
Sacred Heart of Jesus, the hands of the Lord

on the statue of Jesus never looked quite right. So the restoration committee decided to leave the statue without hands, but placed a bronze plaque next to it stating: "Jesus has no hands, except our hands."

Go in peace.

The Mass is clearly a prayer of praise to the Father, by the Son, through the Holy Spirit.

There's a lot going on at each Mass, isn't there?



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(also known as Fr. Rocky)*

What is Holy Mass?

It is our way of showing Jesus that we love Him. God, through the Church He founded on St Peter, asks us to obey the 3rd Commandment by attending Mass. Heb 10:25 says: 'Don't neglect to meet together, as has become the habit of some.' The basic format of the Mass has not altered since the beginning of the Church's 2,000 year-old history (CCC 1345). Mass is a **SACRIFICE**, a **SACRAMENT** and a **COMMUNION** where Jesus, our Lord, is present in His Word, in His priest, in the gathering of His people, and most especially in the Eucharistic species.

