

“DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME”

A Class on the Mass

Part 5A Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the Presentation of the Gifts sometimes referred to as the Offertory. In the GIRM we read:

At the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist the gifts, which will become Christ’s Body and Blood, are brought to the altar.

First, the altar, the Lord’s table, which is the center of the whole Liturgy of the Eucharist, is prepared by placing on it the corporal, purificator, Missal, and chalice (unless the chalice is prepared at the credence table).

The offerings are then brought forward. It is praiseworthy for the bread and wine to be presented by the faithful. They are then accepted at an appropriate place by the priest or the deacon and carried to the altar. Even though the faithful no longer bring from their possessions the bread and wine intended for the liturgy as in the past, nevertheless the rite of carrying up the offerings still retains its force and its spiritual significance.

It is well also for the money or other gifts for the poor of the Church, brought by the faithful or collected in the church, should be received. These are to be put in a suitable place but away from the Eucharistic table.(73)

The procession bringing the gifts is accompanied by the Offertory chant which continues at least until the gifts have been placed on the altar. (74)

The bread and wine are placed on the altar by the priest to the accompaniment of the prescribed formulas. The priest may incense the gifts placed upon the altar and then incenses the cross and the altar itself, so as to signify the Church’s offering and prayer rising like incense in the sight of God. (75)

The above instruction tells us that as the collection(s) is being taken up by the ushers, we are singing a song which continues as the procession takes place to bring the gifts to the altar. We may be asked by the ushers to bring the gifts forward. This is a great honor and we should willingly accept as we represent the entire community bringing the gifts for the sacrificial meal. The money is brought forth **first** in the procession by one of the ushers. This is our monetary offering to God which will be used to cover operating expenses and to carry out the various ministries of the parish. Our generosity and sacrifice is greatly appreciated and expresses our self-giving to the Lord. The bread and wine, which will become the Body and Blood of Christ comes next carried by two members of the congregation. The priest accepts the money and then the bread and wine at the front of the sanctuary and carries the gifts to the altar.

The bread is placed on the altar by the priest as he holds the paten holding the bread slightly raised above the altar and prays silently, or if there is no singing, at that time aloud a very old Sabbath prayer: “Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.” We respond with our “Blessed be God forever,” which is our way of saying to God that he be praised and thanked for this bread.

When preparing the chalice we notice that the priest fills the chalice(s) with wine then pours a few drops of water into the wine. When he pours the water he says silently: “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.” This practice developed from the custom in the early church of diluting the wine which was very strong. It now takes on a spiritual meaning reflecting the wonderful mystery of the Incarnation. The priest holds the chalice slightly raised above the altar

and says: “Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine, and work of human hands. It will become for us our spiritual drink.” We again respond: “Blessed be God forever.”

The priest then bows and says silently: “Lord we ask you to receive us and be pleased with the sacrifice we offer you with humble and contrite hearts.” He then washes his hands. Originally this had a practical function. In the early church before the use of currency the people did not give money for the collection but food and goods from their trades. The priest’s hands would have been soiled from handling all these material gifts and he needed to wash his hands before he continued with the Mass. Today this washing has taken on a spiritual meaning as the priest recognizes his own sinfulness and as he washes his hands he says silently: “ Lord wash away my iniquity; cleanse me from my sins.”

The priest, facing the people, extends and then joins his hands saying: “Pray, brethren (brothers and sisters) that our sacrifice may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.” We respond: 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 the Church. “ The priest then prays the Prayer over the Gifts. We have just experienced the transition from the Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The Eucharistic Prayer itself begins with a **Preface** which begins with a dialogue between the Priest and the people. The dialogue sets the tone for the Eucharistic Prayer. Once again the priest wishes that the Lord be with us and we respond: “And also with you.” (Next Advent this will become: “And with your spirit.”) The priest asks us to lift up our hearts, the symbolic center of our love, to which we respond that we lift them up to the Lord, and finally the priest instructs us to give thanks to the Lord to which we respond: “It is right to give him thanks and praise.” which will change to “It is right and just,” in the new translation. There are many options from which Preface the priest can choose based on the liturgical season, the feast, and the celebration. There are special Prefaces for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Marriage, Funerals, etc. We conclude the Preface with the **Holy, Holy, Holy** which we say or sing. In this response, which comes from the Prophecy of Isaiah and the Book of Revelation, we recognize the holiness and presence of God.

In the next lesson we will examine the remainder of the Eucharistic Prayer.

Reflection Questions:

1. What is our understanding of the collection? Does it truly express our generosity to God for all he has blessed us with?
2. Are we willing to bring up the gifts if we are approached by an usher?
3. During the dialogue between us and the priest before the Preface do we strive to feel the Lord’s presence, truly lift up our hearts to him and want to give him thanks?