

The Mass Part II: The Eucharistic Prayer

Everything leads up to this part of the Mass and flows from it. The Introductory Rites prepared us for the entire Mass including the celebration of the day as well as a summary of the readings and the focus of the Mass. The Liturgy of the Word prepared us for understanding the core focus of the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the act we are celebrating. This session covers the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Concluding Rites, the last two parts of the Mass.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Liturgy of the Eucharist encompasses the offertory, the Eucharistic Prayer, and the Communion Rite. Each of these parts flow from and explain the central reality we celebrate: the passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus manifest in the saving meal which is the Eucharist.

The Offertory

The Offertory follows from the Liturgy of the Word and the prayers of the faithful. In response to God's word, the people offer gifts to God both out of piety but also out of love and devotion. The first Christians would offer whatever they had including goats, sheep, oxen, grain, and money. The vast majority of our offerings in the modern era are money, since money represents all those things. You could make a claim that the offertory makes more sense at the end of Mass that having received Jesus into our bodies we would respond by giving. But that would miss another central reality: God has already given us everything we have. Thus in response to God's generosity we give now, together, as one, so that the gifts can be transformed during our celebration. As we give, God gives even more.

The main parts of the Offertory include the collection, the offertory procession, and the prayers over the offerings. Ministers gather the money from those gathered for that Mass reminding us that as the wheat and grapes are gathered to make bread and wine, so are our gifts gathered to become the sacred meal. The ministers then bring the monetary gifts as well as the bread and wine to the priest in the offertory procession. The Mass contains four processions: the entrance procession, the Gospel procession, the offertory procession, and the Eucharistic procession. Each of these events symbolize the entire people of God coming before God to offer gifts and to receive from God. Most processions contain only a few people, but some are rather extensive. The few ministers who are bringing the bread, wine, and money to the priest symbolize the entire people of God bringing their gift to the altar for consecration. The priest receives the gifts from the people, just like as in the Old Testament. The priest acts in the person of God who receives the gifts from the people on behalf of God. The gifts, now at the altar, are offered by the priest. During this time of collecting and bringing the gifts to the altar the people sing a hymn called the offertory hymn. This can be any hymn but is meant to symbolize our unity through the unity of our voices in song.

The prayers of offering: the priest has the option of praying these prayers in an audible voice or to himself. First the bread is offered through a prayer recognizing that the wheat came from the earth, gathered by people, made into bread, and will become our spiritual food. Then the priest places the bread on the altar. After the bread is offered, the priest pours the wine into the chalices and mixes a small amount of water with the wine. The original purpose of the water was to dilute

the wine since 1st century wine was rather strong and unpalatable. The symbolism of the water and wine become a symbol of the unity of the divinity and humanity of Jesus. Once the water and wine are mixed, the priest offers the wine in a formula similar to the bread: recognizing that the grapes come from the ground, we gather and make them into wine, and the wine will become our spiritual drink. Only bread and wine can be offered for a valid Mass. The bread must be only wheat and white flour and water. The wine must be only fermented grapes with a 12% alcohol content. The exclusive use of bread and wine represents that we are following Jesus' model who left this event as his memorial and we are not to change it. Jesus does the work, not humans. After the offering of the bread and wine, the priest has two prayers that are said only to himself and in a voice that only he can hear. These prayers are meant to help the priest to recognize the actions he is doing and to prepare. Then the priest washes his hands by the server running some water over his hands. This rite, called the "washing of hands," made more sense in the first millennium than now. Since the people brought animals and grain to be offered, the priest had to accept and deal with these gifts that are rather dirty. Thus it was necessary for him to wash his hands. Today the washing of hands is more symbolic of preparation for what is to come.

Prayer of Offering: the final part of the offertory is the prayers of offering. This prayer, like the Collect at the beginning of the Mass and the Prayer after communion that conclude the rite, is drawn from the celebration of the day and helps the people to understand what is about to happen.

The Eucharistic Prayer

No part of the Mass is more complicated and yet standardized than the Eucharistic Prayer. The priest can choose between 10 different Eucharistic Prayers to use on a given day.. Each of these prayers have specific rules governing their use. Eucharistic Prayer 1 is used primarily on more important days of the year. Eucharistic Prayer 2 is the simple one used on basic days and discouraged from use on Sundays. Eucharistic Prayer 3 has no restrictions. Eucharistic Prayer 4 can only be used on Sundays during Ordinary Time and on weekdays when no specific celebration is used. The two Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation can be used on Sundays of Lent and penitential days. The four Eucharistic Prayers for various needs are used on specific days when a social concern is emphasized. The Eucharistic prayers all have the same basic components: the preface, the introduction, the acclamation, the epiclesis, the oblation, the intercessions, and the institution or consecration, the anamnesis, and the doxology. Most of these parts of the Eucharistic Prayer are rather short, around a paragraph.

The preface: the preface includes two parts: the preface dialogue and the preface. The preface dialogue is an exchange between the people and the priest preparing everyone for the celebration of the Eucharist. This part is semi-variable. All of the major celebrations of the Church have their specific preface for that day. The season of the year have their own prefaces: 2 for Advent, 3 for Christmas, 1 for Epiphany, 4 for Lent, 5 for Easter, 8 for Ordinary Time, a bunch for different saints, and 8 for the dead. These prefaces match the celebration of the day and help to guide our attention to what we are celebrating.

The Introduction: Following the preface, the Eucharistic Prayer contains a short, or sometimes longer, introduction to the next part of the prayer. Usually this prayer recognizes the goodness of

God, the things he has done, or calls to mind the God to whom we are praying. Eucharistic Prayer I is much longer and contains the saints and martyrs that led to the church we have today.

The Epiclesis: At this moment in the prayer, the Holy Spirit is called to come down upon the gifts of bread and wine and transform them into the Body and Blood of Christ. Some people think that the priest transforms the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, but that is not true. It is by the Holy Spirit that these things happen just like Jesus was conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit. In the Eastern Christian churches, this is the moment in which the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. The symbol for the Epiclesis is the priest placing his hands over the bread and wine.

The Consecration or Institution: In the Latin Rite churches, this is the moment in the Mass when the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. When the priest says the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, he is not symbolically reproducing what Jesus did; he is re-presenting this one moment of Jesus' life. Thus, Jesus' words have power. They do what they intend. Therefore in saying "this is my body," it becomes the Body of Christ because it was done at Jesus' command. This moment in the Mass is the most solemn and important. A priest cannot alter these words in any way. Changing or mispronouncing the words of Institution, invalidate the Mass. In other words, by saying something different or changing the words, the bread and wine will not become the Body and Blood of Christ because that is not what Jesus did.

The Acclamation or the Memorial Acclamation: in response to hearing the words of Institution and reliving these last moments of Jesus' life, the people acclaim their faith in what has just happened. The church gives three possible acclamations: "when we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim your death O Lord until you come again," "Save us savior of the world for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free," and "we proclaim your death O Lord and profess your Resurrection until you come again." All of the options have the same core idea: the bread and wine transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ is the central mystery that is taken by faith but teaches us about the Passion and death of Jesus. In the breaking of the bread we know the reality of Jesus.

The Anamnesis: Having acclaimed our belief in the God who suffered and rose from the dead who is now present in bodily form on the altar, we remember why we are here. The word "anamnesis" comes from the Greek word "to remember." Thus we recall what Jesus did for us. The final part of the anamnesis changes the tone of the prayer and bridges the prior sections to the next section. We remember those who we offer the Mass for: the people and needs of the world, those who have died, our pope and bishop, our fellow Christians.

The Oblation: Most of the Eucharistic Prayer until this point focused on acclaiming and understanding what we celebrated at this moment. Now the prayer shifts to focus on what we are going to do in response to our celebration, namely offer the world and the needs of the world. The Mass is not like a show, its more like a drama in which we are the actors and part of the event. We have a role and we have an active role in bringing salvation to the world throughout our offerings.

The Intercessions: Often we think of intercessions like prayers that we say for someone in need. These intercession focus on reminding ourselves that we pray with and in the Church. Our pope

is the vicar of the Church and our temporal leader and our bishop is our leader for our local church. Through them we have the sacraments and the leadership we need to persevere in faith. Then we remember the importance of praying for those who have died who are still present in the Mass as they prepare for Heaven.

The Doxology and Great Amen: the prayer ends with the recognition of through Jesus, with Jesus, and in Jesus we are able to do all this and offer any form of prayer or oblation. We recognize that everything we have done has been offered with, in and through Jesus to the Father. Then we all cry out our assent to everything that we celebrated with “Amen”: Let it be done.

The Communion Rite:

The Communion Rite follows after the Eucharistic Prayer and is designed to prepare the people to receive the Eucharist. Now that we have prayed together, listened to God’s word, offered our needs and the needs of the world to the Father, made Jesus present to us in the Eucharist, we are ready to consummate our faith or fulfill the intention of the Mass by eating the Body and Blood of Jesus. The Communion Rite begins with the priest inviting the people to join him in praying our one prayer as Christians: “The Our Father.” This one prayer is our prayer, our prayer as a community of believers, the one prayer that Jesus gave us. So we pray it together. Then the priest adds a tag on the end of it completing the petitions of the prayer and we respond. Then the priest prepares us for communion by helping us to recognize our sins and offer forgiveness to one another in the sign of peace.

After all this is done, all those who have been initiated and ready for communion come forward and receive the Body and Blood of Jesus. This moment is the final procession of the Mass. The people come forward in one line representing that we are one body who are approaching the Lord. The priest gives out communion as the representative of Jesus showing that we receive from the Lord not from our own doing. The Communion Rite ends with the purifying of the vessels, the chalices and patens used for the consecration, and then the Prayer After Communion. Like the Collect and the Prayer over the Offerings, this prayer reflects the character of the day and the event we have just celebrated.

The Dismissal

The final part of the Mass is extremely short. The two parts are the final blessing and the final sending. After the Communion Rite has ended, the priest invokes the people and the Lord with the phrase “the Lord be with you” representing that God will show himself to the people. The priest can then bless the people in two different ways. The simple blessing is “May almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” Or the Solemn way with three petitions on behalf of the people and then the blessing. After blessing the people, the priest dismisses the people. The dismissal has four different forms: “Go in Peace,” “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord,” “Go forth the Mass is ended,” “Go in peace glorifying the Lord by your life.” Each of these phrases state the purpose of sending: to go and announce what we have celebrated and believe to the world.