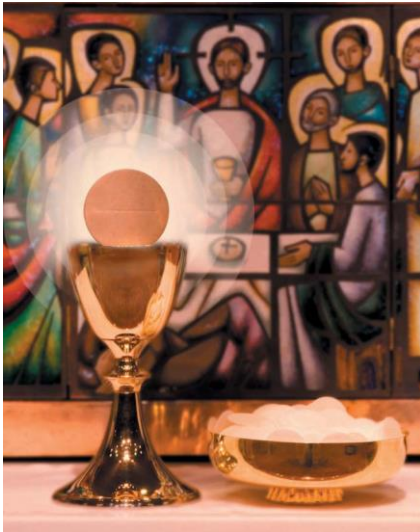


A Simple Explanation of the Mass



Introductory Rite

The priest begins by kissing the altar as soon as he approaches it. This is because it is a symbol of Jesus and the Eucharistic Sacrifice will be offered on it. Each altar also contains relics of the martyrs who gave their lives for Christ.

Because we belong to God we begin every Mass by signing ourselves with the cross in the name of the Trinity.

Because none of us is yet fully Christ, none of us is yet fully converted, and each of us is in need of further conversion, we ask for mercy for our sins and transgressions before we

listen to the Word of God in the readings.

Having been forgiven by God it is natural to give thanks. We want to thank God for his love for us and we do so using the Gloria which is a hymn as old as the fourth century. It begins with the words of the angels to the shepherds on the first Christmas night.

The opening prayer is called the Collect. It begins with the priest saying, "Let us pray..." followed by a pause for the people's silent prayer. All of these silent prayers of the people are then 'collected' (hence the name Collect) and offered to God in the prayer offered by the priest. The priest offers this prayer with outstretched arms symbolizing being freed by Jesus dying on the cross and rising for us. The people answer "Amen" to this opening prayer. "Amen" means "so be it" or "Let it be." It is the people's acknowledgement and acceptance as their own the prayer which the priest has offered to God.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

The part of the Mass that concluded with the Collect was called the Introductory Rite. Now we begin the first major section of our Mass, the Liturgy of the Word. The Liturgy of the Word takes place at the Lectern. There are two major sections in the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Because God speaks to us in his Word in the Bible we listen to these readings with great attention and it would be better to have prepared at home to understand them better. Vatican II told us that when the Scriptures are proclaimed in Church Christ himself is speaking to us ([Sacrosanctum Concilium](#) 7). Vatican II also says the presence of Jesus in the Scriptures is to be venerated ([Dei Verbum](#) 21). The First Reading is always from the Old Testament except during Easter when it is from the New Testament.

God has spoken to us in the First Reading and we respond using the words of a Psalm. There is a link between the First Reading and the Psalm; the Psalm is our prayerful response to what we heard in the First Reading. God spoke to us in the First Reading and we speak to God in the Psalm. Jesus used the Psalms for prayer every day and would have known most of them by heart, which is an added reason for paying attention to the Psalm.

The Second Reading is not linked with the First Reading or Psalm. It is an excerpt from a New Testament letter by Paul or another writer to give encouragement to an individual or a church. When we begin reading one of these letters we read an excerpt every Sunday until we finish and then we start another letter.

As a sign of reverence for the Gospel Acclamation we all stand. The Gospel Acclamation consists of one verse taken from the Gospel to follow that sums it up or that could be said to reflect on it. It is preceded and followed by "Alleluia" which means "Praise God." The Alleluia shows us that this is a joyful part of the Mass. It is joyful because the time for the Gospel has arrived. To make sure that we catch the main point of the Gospel we are told beforehand in the Gospel Acclamation what to look out for.

The Gospel is the highpoint of the Liturgy of the Word, the first part of the Mass. It is linked with the First Reading and Psalm so hopefully you can find a link each Sunday between the First Reading, Psalm and Gospel. The readings follow three-year cycle so it will be three years before you hear these readings proclaimed in Church again. Before proclaiming the Gospel the priest or deacon bows towards the Book of the Gospels and prays silently, "Almighty God, cleanse my heart and my lips that I may worthily proclaim your holy Gospel." The priest and people sign themselves on the forehead, lips and chest before the Gospel is proclaimed as a sign that we belong to Jesus in thought, word and deed. Since the Book of the Gospels is a symbol of Jesus the priest or deacon concludes by kissing the book.

The Homily given by the priest is the breaking of the word reflecting the breaking of the bread in the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The Creed summarizes our faith. Up to now the Liturgy of the Word has deepened our faith. The Creed is our opportunity to respond in faith to God's Word to us. God has communicated with us and now we communicate with God.

The Liturgy of the Word concludes with the Prayer of the Faithful or General Intercessions. In these simple prayers we pray to God for all our needs. We call them the Prayer of the Faithful because all our prayers are united and offered to the Father as one prayer.

In the Liturgy of the Word God spoke to us in the readings and we spoke to God in the Psalm and Creed.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Preparation of the Gifts

We begin the second main part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Eucharist with the preparation of the gifts of bread and wine. The Liturgy of the Eucharist takes place at the altar. We call it the altar because a sacrifice will take place here, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross will be made present to us here. Bread and wine will be offered to God. Both the bread and wine are the "work of human hands" so in presenting the bread and wine to God we are presenting something of ourselves. As the priest presents the bread and wine to God let each member of the congregation offer themselves to God and surrender themselves to God. While the gifts are being prepared the collection is taken up. What people give is expressive of themselves and is used for the upkeep for the parish.

When the priest mingles the water and wine in the chalice he prays, "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." Christ became human, one of us, and we ask him to help us become more like him, more Christ-like. The mingling of the water and wine symbolizes the mingling of Jesus and the Church, that Jesus and the Church are one.

The priest washes his hands as an expression of his desire for inward purification. When washing his hands the priest prays, "Lord wash away my iniquity and cleanse me from my sins."

The prayer over the gifts of bread and wine concludes the introduction the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Eucharistic Prayer

The Eucharistic Prayer follows with its variable preface. The Preface begins with "The Lord be with you" and concludes with the Holy, Holy...

The Eucharistic Prayer is a great prayer of thanksgiving. Each Eucharistic Prayer contains the following elements.

1. The priest prays with both hands stretched over the gifts. At this time he prays that the Holy Spirit may come upon the gifts and make them holy. The bread and wine now begins changing into the Body and Blood of Jesus, and not only at the consecration.
2. The priest raises the consecrated host and chalice of wine to the people so that they can adore Jesus truly present in the bread and wine. I invite you to look and Jesus and adore him as he is elevated in the bread and chalice.
3. After the Institution Narrative (consecration) the prayer remembers the actions of Jesus to save us.
4. The priest offers Jesus, the victim, to the Father.
5. There is a prayer once more to the Holy Spirit, this time to come down on the people and unite them.
6. This is followed by many petitions.
7. At the end of the Eucharistic Prayer the priest raises up the bread and wine as a reminder that it is through Christ, with him and in him that everything is made holy.

Communion Rite

After the Eucharistic Prayer we begin our preparation for Holy Communion. The Communion Rite begins with the Lord's Prayer, the "Our Father." The "Our Father" is followed by a prayer to protect us from evil. This is in turn followed by a prayer for peace. During the Eucharistic Prayer we asked the Holy Spirit to come upon us to make us one. As a sign of that oneness and to prepare for receiving Jesus in Holy Communion we offer each other a sign of peace.

Since none of us is worthy to receive Jesus in Holy Communion once again we ask Jesus for his mercy by praying the prayer commencing "Lamb of God." The priest mingles the bread and wine in the chalice to show that the body and blood of Jesus are One. The people prepare for Holy Communion by praying "Lamb of God." The priest says a private prayer to prepare himself for Holy Communion. While the people pray the "Lamb of God" the priest breaks the bread. The ideal would be to have a one large piece of bread and break it into sufficient pieces for everyone to show that we are all united in the Eucharist. When regular hosts are used, which are broken in half, the symbolism is as follows:

1. the breaking of the bread is the death of Jesus,
2. the mingling of the host in the chalice symbolizes Jesus descending to the dead to free souls (Apostles' Creed and originally in Eph 4:9, see also 1 Peter 3:19; 4:6.)
3. the joining of the host again symbolizes the resurrection.

Then the priest shows the host to the people and invites them to humbly confess their unworthiness, "This is the Lamb of God..." Their response is "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof but only say the word and my soul shall be healed." This is based on the reply of the centurion to Jesus in Matt 8:8. We come in procession to the sanctuary to receive Holy Communion which reminds us that we are on a pilgrimage in this life, a journey from birth to death, a pilgrimage to our Father in heaven.

In the prayer after Holy Communion the priest asks God that the mystery celebrated may have an effect on our lives. Thus ends the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

In the Liturgy of the Word God spoke to us in the readings and we spoke to God in the Psalm and Creed. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist we offered bread and wine to the Father and in return we received Jesus in the form of bread and wine. Jesus was offered to us in the form of bread and wine and during the Eucharistic Prayer we offered Jesus as victim to the Father. In both the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist there is a two-way communication between God and us.

Concluding Rite

The final part of the Mass is the Concluding Rite. Now the priest blesses the people and sends them from the church to love and serve the Lord, to do good works, to live the faith celebrated during the Mass. The communion celebrated in the mass does not end with the final blessing – But we go to carry on the mission of Christ in our ordinary, day to day lives and in our community.