



Order of Mass - An Overview of Our Catholic Mass

Liturgy, or public worship, is at the very center of the redemptive work of Christ. Sacraments and liturgical rites are expressive events and not "things". The Eucharist, or Mass, the Church's highest form of prayer, is a gathering of the community, and our ceremonies/rituals set our Sunday gatherings apart from other kinds of assemblies.

Opening Rites

Everyone stands as our celebration begins by singing the entrance hymn as the presider (usually our Pastor) and other ministers (lectors, Altar Servers) process to the altar. The altar is a symbol of Christ which recalls that the common table is holy and sacred to the action of the assembly.

The Sign of the Cross and the Greeting--Together we make the sign of the Cross, which is one of the oldest gestures of our faith. It calls to mind our baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ.

The Penitential Rite--Recalling our faults and sins leads us to recall our common need for salvation and God's merciful compassion. The presider may employ several ways to help us pray for God's mercy. We conclude with the Kyrie , a triple invocation (**Lord Have Mercy, Christ Have Mercy, Lord Have Mercy**) which is one of the oldest known prayers of the Mass.

The Gloria--This joyful prayer - The Gloria - is really a song of praise, a "canticle". We sing it to praise God. However, during Advent and Lent, we do not sing the Gloria as we are awaiting the coming (and second coming) of Christ in Advent, and in Lent we prepare for his death and resurrection.

The Opening Prayer--The opening prayer concludes the introductory rites, and is also called the "Collect" prayer because it is the prayer of our being collected into gathering as a community.

Liturgy of the Word

We sit (posture of receptivity) to hear the reading of Scripture which has always been part of our Liturgy.

First three Scripture readings--we will hear one reading from our Hebrew story, a psalm, then a reading from our Christian story. We participate in the Responsorial Psalm by singing the response along with the Cantor.

The Gospel--Everyone stands (as a sign of reverence) as we sing a gospel acclamation and the presider (or deacon if one is present) prepares to proclaim the Gospel Reading. The Gospel is about the words and actions of Christ, and therefore very sacred. The presider greets us and we make a small sign of the Cross on the forehead, mouth and heart to express that our mind is open to the Word, we will speak it with the mouth, and hold it in the heart.

The Homily--is more than just a sermon or talk about how we are to live or what we are to

believe. It opens up the scriptures and helps us understand how Christ moves in our lives today. Everybody sits for the Homily.

The Nicene Creed--*we now stand* as we recite our Creed. It is a statement of our faith that unites us with the Church in the world.

The Prayer of the Faithful--We pray for the needs of the Church and as the Body of Christ--to be a body at peace: providing shelter for the homeless, healing for the sick and food for the hungry.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

The second major part of the Mass has four actions - taking, blessing, breaking the bread, and giving. These elements weave together in the symbolic actions and prayers of the Eucharist. The altar is prepared; the gifts are "set apart" and presented as a sign of our desire to incorporate ourselves in the sacrifice of Christ. We sit during the collection, and as the presider prepares the gifts.

Procession of Gifts--from earliest times, Christians brought wine and bread to be consumed at the Liturgy, and also money and other gifts for the poor. The gifts are things necessary for living. So our gifts of bread and wine represent the essence of who we are, people who give of themselves, and give themselves to God.

Preparation of the Gifts--Once the presider receives the gifts, he mixes a little water with the wine symbolizing the human and divine natures of Christ joined in the Mystery of the Incarnation--and of us receiving the divine-God becoming human. He then washes his hands as a symbol of his desire for internal purification.

Invitation to Prayer--We stand as the presider says the prayer over the gifts, asking for God's acceptance of our gifts, and expressing our desire to be united with these gifts of bread and wine, which will become Jesus.

Eucharistic Prayer--The Eucharistic Prayer is essentially a statement of praise and thanksgiving for God's works of salvation, making present both the body and blood of the Lord and his great redeeming actions in our lives. The presider prays to God on our behalf, but as a reminder that we are all offering this prayer, we will enter into a dialogue with the presider three times.

Preface--the presider greets us, and the prayer which follows, praises God the Father for His gifts of creation and redemption. We enter the prayer again with Isaiah's song of praise--the Holy, Holy, Holy.

Prayer of Institution--We kneel as the presider prays with prayers of praise. As a Jewish father would call on God's blessing, the presider will place his hands over the bread and wine to be blessed. He will say the words of consecration, which are taken from the accounts of the Last Supper in Sacred Scripture. The bread and wine are actually changed into Christ's Body and Blood.

Memorial Acclamation--The "Mystery of Faith", the Paschal Mystery, is the recognition of Christ's three-fold action of Death, Resurrection and Second Coming. We are invited to proclaim our belief.

The Great Amen--Our "GREAT AMEN" to this prayer acclaims our assent and our participation in the entire Eucharistic Prayer, which has made present Christ's actions, and is the center of our Catholic Faith. We remain kneeling until we have finished this Amen, and then we stand as one, unified, body.

Communion Rite

To prepare for the paschal meal, and to welcome the Lord, we pray for forgiveness and exchange a sign of peace. The practice of receiving both the Body and the Precious Blood, recalls the words of Jesus: **this is my body given up for you...this is my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant, shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven.**

The Lord's Prayer--This prayer is the prayer taught us by Jesus.

The Sign of Peace--In the sign of peace we shake our neighbor's hand and say **Peace be with you** as we remember the Risen Christ is the source of all peace. This gesture expresses faith that Christ is present in the Assembly because of reconciliation and wholeness.

The Lamb of God--The Lamb of God litany is sung during the rite of the breaking of the bread. This rite emphasizes how the Eucharist is a sharing event. Those who break bread are expected to offer their lives for others in the same way Jesus did throughout His life and especially in the passion.

Just before Communion is shared with the whole community the presider says: ***This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Happy are those who are called to His Supper.*** We acknowledge our need for God and our belief in God's love by responding: ***Lord, I am not worthy to receive You, but only say the word and I shall be healed.***

Receiving--*We stand during the Communion Procession as a sign of unity with the Body, and wait for the entire assembly to receive before kneeling or sitting.* The Minister of Communion says **THE BODY OF CHRIST** or **THE BLOOD OF CHRIST**, and we respond **AMEN** (We believe). St. Augustine wrote that we make a commitment to become what we receive.

Sacred Silence--After all have received Communion, we sit and observe a period of silence. We pray and thank God for transforming and renewing each of us as we presented ourselves to Him in the Eucharist.

Prayer after Communion--We stand for the prayer after Communion as we ask that the spiritual and healing effects of the Eucharist we have just shared, will be carried out in our everyday lives.

Concluding Rite

The Presider says again The Lord be with you. The ritual phrase now serves as a farewell, followed by a blessing.

Blessing--With the final blessing of the community by the celebrant, the Mass is ended.

Dismissal--We leave the Church with this mandate: Go in peace to Love and Serve the Lord. The dismissal reminds us that the only way to serve the Lord is in peace and love and our response is: Thanks be to God. The Presider will now reverence the altar once again. Just as we might hug our friends upon greeting them, and then again when saying farewell, the kiss of farewell at the end of the celebration mirrors the kiss whereby the altar is greeted at the beginning of Mass.

All those celebrating the Mass should remain until the ministers have reached the rear of the Church.