

A Walk Through the Mass

(An Intergenerational, Interactive Way to Understand)

INTRODUCTION

Many people have asked for a tool that will help the faithful understand what it is that we do, and why we do it, when we gather for the celebration of the Mass. Those parishes that have planned and facilitated gatherings in which the Mass is actually gone through and its various parts are broken open for those who are gathered, have reported it very beneficial for the participants.

This ***Walk Through the Mass*** has been developed with that request in mind. It was designed to be “user-friendly”.

It is offered to parishes as a way to help provide a formative / reflective / interactive opportunity for Catholics to come to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Sunday Mass.

THE MASS

By Todd Williamson and Nancy Polacek

Today we will walk through most of the actions and gestures of the Mass and together we will explore the meaning and origins of the Sacrament that is central to who we are as Catholics.

INTRODUCTORY RITES

This first part of the Mass is meant to gather all the individual people in the church into the Body of Christ. The rite takes each of us out of our individual thoughts and gathers us all into the prayer of the Church. This is a transition that gets us ready for the awesome mystery of the Eucharist where we can meet God and God can meet us.

As we sing the Opening Song, which helps to unify us as one voice, think about the prayer that you bring to church tonight; a prayer for yourself and a prayer for this faith community.

(Stand for Opening Song...)

Veneration of the Altar

As the priest approaches the Altar he bends forward in reverence and kisses it. This ritual goes back to the earliest followers of Jesus who were persecuted, even killed because their faith was contrary to that of the Romans. The early Christians would gather in hidden places to pray and share their Eucharistic meal, often in the underground catacombs, and the "table" they used was the coffin of one who was martyred. The gesture of kissing the burial site was one of reverence for those who gave their life for the faith. Many of our altars today contain relics of a saint, maintaining that tradition.

Another reason that the priest reverences the Altar with a kiss is because, for us, the Altar – a table of sacrifice – is an image of Christ, who made the ultimate sacrifice, offering his very self to the Father.

Greeting and Sign of the Cross

When each one of us was baptized, we were signed with the cross of Jesus Christ. In that moment, the Church claimed us for Christ – we belong to him. As we are gathered for Mass, the very first thing we do is, once again, mark ourselves with the sign of Christ's cross, reminding us of whose we are and to whom we belong. This also reminds us that the Mass, though it has many parts, is one great prayer! All the different pieces help to form this one most perfect prayer that we, as Catholics, have.

(All make the Sign of the Cross)

Penitential Act

We have transitioned from everyday life to the Sacred Liturgy through procession and song, a kiss and the Sign of the Cross. As we begin, we recognize our sinfulness and our need for and our dependence on, the mercy and forgiveness of God. Together we pray...

Gloria

After we have remembered God's mercy and forgiveness given to us in Christ, the only appropriate response is to praise God. We do that in the Gloria which follows. This ancient hymn comes from the song of the angels at the birth of Jesus.

(Together the participants sing the version of the Gloria that is most familiar to your parish)

The Introductory Rite concludes with the Opening Prayer, or the Collect. Here the priest gathers all our prayers...notice the hands and how they hold and lift up the prayers of the whole Church. What prayer did you bring with you tonight? Your prayer, all our prayers are gathered together and joined with the prayer of the Church around the world. Every nation and in every language the same words are said.

The Introductory Rite gives us the time and preparation so that we have the right stance for participating in the Eucharist.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Once we have been gathered as the Body of Christ, remembered our need for God's love and mercy, and given praise to God, we enter into the Word of God. Once again the Mass of today reaches back to the earliest Christians. Our Liturgy of the Word follows the pattern of a Jewish Synagogue Service with its procession of the Torah to a place of honor so it can be read and God's word proclaimed.

Our posture changes in response to the readings, though we remain active listeners because in the Liturgy of the Word we enter into an actual dialogue – a conversation – with God.

First Reading

In this reading, usually taken from the Old Testament, we are reminded of all the things that God has done throughout history to save us. As we remember His greatness it gives us hope. In this reading you get a "sneak preview" of the Gospel because the reading was chosen to match the "theme" of the Gospel.

Psalm

We respond to all that God has done for us, using words from the Old Testament as we sing the Responsorial Psalm. The Psalms have been called the "Church's first prayerbook." These are words that Jesus himself used in prayer. As we sing the psalm, we are responding to God's greatness using the very Word of God.

(Choose a Psalm that is familiar to the parish and appropriate to the season.)

Second Reading

This reading comes from the New Testament; most often one of the epistles. These are instructional letters written by the Apostles to the earliest Christian communities,

offering spiritual advice on how to live as a disciple. In these letters are advice and counsel that help us, too, live out our faith.

In response to this second reading and in preparation for the Gospel, we stand and sing Allelulia, which is a Hebrew word, meaning "Praise God." Just as in the Introductory Rite there was a procession that helped us transition from the outside world to Mass, now there is a procession so that we might prepare our hearts and minds to hear from Jesus himself. We stand out of respect, prepared to hear the very words and life of Jesus.

Reading of the Gospel

(All stand for the procession and reading of the Gospel)

Presider: The Lord be with you.

All: And with your spirit.

Presider: A reading from the holy Gospel according to ____ All: Glory to you, O Lord.

With these words we sign ourselves with the sign of Christ – the cross. Tracing the cross on our foreheads, lips and heart, so that these words of Christ fill my mind, be on my tongue and in my heart. (Proclaim a Gospel passage that fits the theme: John 6- Bread of Life, Emmaus story, Last supper, etc.)

When the Word of Christ has been proclaimed, the priest/deacon shows reverence with a kiss. The priest/deacon shows reverence to symbols of Christ: book of Gospels, the Altar. We show reverence through our posture: standing for the Gospel.

Homily

The Liturgy of the Word continues with the homily where the priest/deacon helps us make connections between the scripture readings and how we live out a life of faith. The homily helps us understand the scriptures and leads us to Eucharist.

Creed

After the readings and the homily, we respond to the Lord, who has spoken through the Readings: we proclaim "I believe!!" This is the Creed.

(People stand and recite the Creed together)

Universal Prayer / Intercessions

From there we actually ask God for more of his divine presence and action, which we have just heard proclaimed in the readings. And so we stand and present before him our needs and the needs of the Church, usually following a similar pattern: prayers for the Church, those in authority, for the sick and the poor, finally for those in our community.

(Use this time to pray a few petitions together that will be meaningful to the participants)

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

The Liturgy of the Eucharist follows another Jewish tradition, the Passover Meal. In the Passover Meal prayers are said to remind the people of God's love and mercy, and where food is blessed and shared.

Presentation of the Gifts

People from the community bring forth the bread and wine to be shared with everyone. However, the bread and the wine aren't the only things we offer God in the Presentation of the Gifts. We also offer ourselves. Each time we go to Mass, we are called to offer to God all that we are! We offer ourselves as "gift" to God. Even though you are not walking forward, you can still "carry" a gift, given to you by God that you bring to this Mass to be blessed, broken and shared with others. What gifts do you have that you will share this week?

(The presentation procession may be demonstrated with children or a family)

Washing Hands

In ancient times when the gifts were brought forth from the community, those could have included live animals. The washing ritual was a practical step before consecrating the bread and wine to be shared. The ritual remains in our Mass of today as a symbolic washing with a prayer that the priest says for interior purification, "Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." It is a prayer that we can pray with him in our hearts to help prepare to receive the Bread of Life, and the Cup of Salvation.

Presider: Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.

All: 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.

Everything we experience at Mass can be summed up in this invitation to prayer that the people say.

Eucharistic Prayer

(Choose an appropriate Preface – i.e., one of the Prefaces for Sunday, or a seasonal one - and Invite the people to stand. Pray through the whole of it, from the Dialogue ending with singing the Sanctus)

This is a great prayer of praise and thanks. While the words are different in the 13 different Eucharistic Prayers, the underlying structure is the same. Each Eucharistic prayer acknowledges our need to give thanks to God, offers the bread and wine, asks God to send the Holy Spirit to transform the bread and the wine into the very presence of Christ, and intercedes on behalf of the church, the world, the poor, and those who have gone before us. The Eucharistic Prayers are based on prayers that we have had in our tradition since the earliest years of the Church, as well as more recent prayers. In a very real way, everything that we have done at Mass before this point, has prepared us to enter into this great prayer.

The Lord's Prayer

This is the prayer that unites ALL Christians, the prayer that Christ gave us. Before we share in the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation, we recognize that our daily bread comes from God.

(Stand together and recite the Lord's Prayer)

Sign of Peace

In this ritual sharing of Christ's peace we use the first words of Jesus after the resurrection: "Peace be with you." Once we have received Christ's peace (not just a kind greeting) then we are prepared to receive the fullness of Christ in the Eucharist.

Presider:

All:

Presider:

(The participants share the sign of Christ's Peace)

The peace of the Lord be with you always. And with your spirit.

Let us offer each other the sign of peace.

Communion Rite

Once more, we enter into a procession. All processions are outward, physical symbols of inward and spiritual realities. Each one of us, in our own faith lives, is on a procession. Our whole life is one great procession – one great journey - to Heaven and to the Father. So now, as we move forward to receive Holy Communion, we are more than simply "in line." We are in another procession which is a symbol of our pilgrimage to the Heavenly Banquet!

As we reach the priest or the extraordinary minister, we are presented with the Eucharist in the very simplest of words: "The Body of Christ." This most awesome mystery, the very presence of Christ Jesus, given for our lives, and for the life of the world, demands a response from each one of us. And so we respond, "Amen," another Hebrew word which means, "Yes," or "So be it."

Similarly, we are presented with the chalice with the words, "The Blood of Christ," and again we respond with a strong "Amen!"

The Eucharist is the spiritual and sacramental nourishment for our life journey! As the Lord fed his chosen people with manna from heaven, so too does he feed us with this Bread from Heaven. As the two disciples at Emmaus recognized the presence of the Lord in the breaking of the bread, so too do we recognize the presence of Christ in our midst, feeding us with his very Body and Blood.

When all have received Holy Communion, the Priest prays a prayer of thanks, which brings the Liturgy of the Eucharist to a close.

CONCLUDING RITES

Blessing and Sending

Once we have received Holy Communion, there is very little for us to do before we are sent out to take the Eucharist – in so many different ways – out into the world.

Remember, the Mass is one great Prayer. Just as we began it by marking ourselves with the cross of Christ, so now, at the conclusion of the Mass, we do the same. This time, we mark ourselves as we receive the final blessing.

(All make the Sign of the Cross)

The final part of the Mass, the Concluding Rite, is actually the shortest part! It consists of a blessing and a dismissal – a sending out. We have what we need: The Eucharist. Now we are charged to be Eucharist in every other part of our lives – in our family life, in our work life, in our neighborhood life. We are sent to be the Body of Christ in the Word.

“Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.” “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.” You can’t miss the mission that we are given!

All: Thanks be to God.

(End with a closing song of joy as people are dismissed)

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