

A Walk Through the Mass

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Introduction:

When Jesus celebrated the first Mass on the evening of the Last Supper, he gathered with his apostles to participate together in the **Passover Feast**. At the Passover Meal, Jews remember the Passover events, when God saved them from the last plague of Egypt through the blood of a sacrificial lamb. The Mass is the **New Passover**, and Jesus is the new and ultimate Passover Sacrifice – the **Lamb of God**.

During the Last Supper, the first Mass with Jesus, the events of Calvary were **anticipated and made present** for the apostles, and Jesus used bread and wine as his Body and Blood poured out for the salvation of the whole world. Then he said, “Do this is remembrance of me.” Do what? Offer this sacrifice and make it present for Christians in every age and in every place. Jesus would work through them to offer this sacrifice until the end of time. The apostles were the first priests of the New Covenant, and the Church has been doing this ever since that day. The core structure of the Mass is the same as it was from the very beginning.

In the Year 145 A.D. Saint Justin was asked by the Roman Emperor to explain what the Christians meant by the word **Eucharist**. Here’s what he said:

“We call this food Eucharist. And no one is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true and who has been washed in the washing which is for the remission of sins and for regeneration, and is thereby living as Christ has enjoined.”

“For not as common bread or common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food

which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by him is both the flesh and blood for that incarnated Jesus. This we have learned from the apostles."

This one paragraph could sum up our Eucharistic Theology today. And the year was 145 A.D.!!! The Church has believed that the Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus from the very beginning - from the lips of the apostles themselves!

We can divide the Mass into five parts: the **Introductory Rite**, the **Liturgy of the Word**, the **Liturgy of the Eucharist**, the **Communion Rite** and the **Concluding Rite**.

The Mass begins with the **Opening Hymn** sung during the **Entrance Procession**, and the congregation stands as we join our voices together, because the most significant event this side of heaven is about to begin, and Jesus is ready to enter our lives in a special way. After all, Jesus is the true celebrant of the Mass working through the priest. The procession is lead with the cross - the sign of our salvation. Candles are included which represent the **Light of Christ**. The altar servers are first, followed by the lectors, the deacon and the priest.

The deacon will carry the **Book of Gospels** and place it on the Altar to signify the importance of the gospel as the Word of God. The deacon and the priest will reverence the altar together with a kiss, as a sign of reverence for the divine sacrifice which is about to take place here.

The Entrance Hymn and the Opening Procession begins....

Now we begin our liturgy, as we begin all things in the Catholic tradition by invoking the Blessed Trinity and remembering our baptism which was.....

Priest: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The Lord be with you....

After the celebrant greets the people, asking the Lord to be with them and they respond, we begin the **Penitential Rite**. We call to mind our sins and ask for forgiveness to prepare ourselves to participate worthily in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Either the **Confiteor** is said aloud or another form is used, in which three Christological Statements are declared followed by Kyrie Eleison - "Lord have mercy."

Priest: Brothers and sisters, let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare to ourselves to celebrate the Sacred Mysteries.

Deacon: You were sent to heal the contrite.....

Then the celebrant offers a **prayer for absolution**, asking for God's mercy.....

Priest: May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.

On Sundays and solemnities outside of Advent or Lent, the **Gloria** is sung. It's called the **great doxology**, because it's a prayer of pure praise. You might recognize the first line; it's taken from Luke's gospel. It's the doxology that the heavenly hosts sang at the birth of Jesus – "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to people of good will."

Gloria is sung.....

After singing the Gloria, the celebrant reads the opening prayer called the **Collect**. It *collects* the prayers of all the faithful gathered for Mass and sets the tone for the entire liturgy. The Collect is part of the "**Proper**" of

the Mass. It is a prayer that changes all the time in order to be “proper” for the particular day of the liturgical year.....

Priest: Let us pray.... *Pray the Collect....*

After this prayer, the congregation is seated for the first reading, and the **Liturgy of the Word** begins.

The first reading is normally taken from the **Old Testament**, though during the Easter Season it is taken from the **Acts of the Apostles**. On weekdays, except for solemnities, there are only two readings – the Old Testament reading and the **Gospel**, with a reading from one of the **Psalms** in-between them. On Sundays and solemnities, of course, there are three readings – one from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament **Epistles**, and the Gospel with a psalm in-between the first and second reading. The readings come from the lectionary and there is always a common theme....

First reading, Psalm, second reading...

If the deacon reads the Gospel, he asks the celebrant for his blessing before he goes to the **ambo**.....

Deacon: Father, may I have your blessing....

Gospel Acclamation is sung....

We stand for the **Gospel** and it is read only by the priest or deacon. This is because it has pride-of-place among the readings, since it contains the very words of Jesus. The Gospel is followed by the **homily**, which is meant to help the congregation understand the readings and offer an insight into how they can be applied to our lives today. This is different from a sermon, which can be on any topic that the preacher chooses.

Deacon: The Lord be with you....

After the homily and a few moments of silent reflection, we stand and profess our faith by reciting aloud either the **Nicene Creed** or the **Apostles Creed**. These express the core tenants of our faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as well as what we believe about the church. Then we join together and pray for the needs of the Church, the world, people in need, our own faith community, and those who have died.....

Nicene Creed..... Prayers of the Faithful....

This concludes the Liturgy of the Word, and the congregation is seated as the altar is prepared for the **Liturgy of the Eucharist** which begins with the **Offertory Procession**. We will not have an Offertory Hymn today, as we normally do, so that we can explain what's going on.

Members of the congregation bring the gifts of bread, wine and water forward to the celebrant in the Offertory Procession, as a sign of our participating in the **Sacrifice of the Mass**. We bring the offerings that we just made during to collection as well as our very lives to the altar to be joined to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ and be transformed through this sacred liturgy.

The deacon will prepare the chalice for the celebrant – pouring the wine and adding a few drops of water. This signifies the blood and water that flowed from Jesus' side as he hung upon the cross, and it represents his true nature – fully divine yet fully human. As he adds the water to the chalice he says....

Deacon: By the mystery of this water and wine, my we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.

The priest takes the ciborium full of hosts and then the chalice, lifts them up and thanks God for his providence - for providing these signs of his self-giving love which will become for us the **Bread of Life** and our **Spiritual Drink**....

Priest: Blessed are you, God of all creation....

The priest then washes his hands, repents of his sins and prays that he will be worthy to stand at the foot of the cross on Calvary, which will be made present for us in a few moments.....

Priest: Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

Now the priest faces the congregation and makes the **Invitation**.....

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

We fully participate in the Mass when we offer our own sacrifice joined now to the ultimate and efficacious sacrifice of Christ. Our sacrifice is what we have done, and will do, to serve others, and how we are giving of ourselves to those in need.

The **Prayer Over the Offerings** is next. It is a part of the **Proper** of the Mass, because it changes for each week of the year and for solemnities.....

Priest: *Pray the Prayer Over the Gifts...*

The **Eucharistic Prayer** is preceded by the **Preface** which also changes for the different liturgical seasons, significant Feast Days and other occasions. This is a prayer of thanksgiving that praises God for all of his works throughout salvation history, and is consistent with the theme of the

lectionary. The priest begins the Preface by again asking the Lord to be with the people and inviting the congregation to put their heart and soul into the Holy Sacrifice, which is about to take place.....

Priest: Pray Preface IV for Sundays in Ordinary Time The Lord be with you.... Lift up your hearts..... End with: "He has unlocked the gates of heaven."

The Preface concludes with the **Holy, Holy, Holy** – another doxology, another prayer of pure praise – and, as the Apostle John described in the Book of Revelation, the angels and saints join us as we sing.....

Priest: And so, with the company of Angels and Saints we sing the hymn of your praise, as without end we acclaim.

The *Holy, Holy, Holy* is sung....

Now the celebrant has a choice of **Eucharistic Prayers**. The one you hear most often is **Eucharistic Prayer Number II**, which is the shortest. It goes quickly into the **epiclesis** where the priest raises his hands over the gifts and calls down the Holy Spirit, so that they may become the Body and Blood of Christ. The altar server rings the bells once to signify that the **Consecration** is about to take place.....

Priest: You are indeed holy, O Lord, the fount of all holiness. Make holy these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The **Consecration** is the most solemn part of the Mass. This is where the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ and are offered to the God the Father. It is now that the **Sacrifice of Calvary** is made present for us – made present for us so that we can enter into it and offer

our sacrifices joined with his, so that they will become effective for our salvation and the salvation of others.

The Consecration is in the form of a **narrative** taken from the Gospel accounts of what Jesus said and did at the **Last Supper**, where he instituted the **Sacrament of the Eucharist**.....

Priest: At the Time he was betrayed and entered into his passion....

The altar server rings the bells three times during the elevation of each of the **Eucharistic Elements** to signify this most sacred moment.

The priest then calls for the **Memorial Acclamation**, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist continues with **prayers of petition** for those present, the Church, the Pope, the Bishop and the clergy, for the Mass intention, and for those who have died.....

Priest: The mystery of faith....

Therefore, as we celebrate the memorial of his Death and Resurrection..... End with: *"We may merit to be coheirs to eternal life, and my praise and glorify you through your Son, Jesus Christ."*

As the **Blessed Sacrament** is elevated, the Eucharistic Prayer concludes with another great doxology followed by the **Great Amen**.....

Priest: Through him, with him, and in him....

The **Communion Rite** begins as the celebrant invites the congregation to stand and join with him in praying aloud the **Lord's Prayer**, calling God Our Father in the mist of the Church.....

Priest: At the Savior's command and informed by divine teaching, we dare to say: Our Father....

Before we say the doxology together, the priest prays another prayer of petition asking God for deliverance and peace in our days, as together we continue to be faithful and await the Second Coming of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.....

Priest: Deliver us, Lord, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days....

The Celebrant then offers a brief prayer for peace and unity before the deacon invites everyone to offer the **Sign of Peace** to their neighbors.....

Priest: Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your apostles: Peace I leave you, my peace I gave you....

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

Deacon: Let us offer each other the sign of peace.

Then, in what is called the **Fractioning Rite**, the priest takes the large host, breaks it, and places a small piece in the chalice. This signifies how the body of Christ was **broken** for us as well as the **mingling** of his precious Body and Blood. With this movement, the Eucharistic Elements are joined in such a way that we can receive the whole of Christ – his Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity - by consuming either his Body or his Blood.

The priest continues by saying softly....

Priest: May this mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.

At this point, the congregation sings the Agnus Dei, the **Lamb of God**. Jesus is the Lamb of God that has been sacrificed for the salvation of the whole world.....

Lamb of God is sung....

Then, with hands folded, the priest says quietly.....

Priest: May the receiving of your Body and Blood, Lord Jesus Christ, not bring judgment and condemnation, but through your loving mercy be for me protection in mind and body and a healing remedy.

As a final preparation to receive the Body and Blood of Our Lord, the priest genuflects, takes the host, holds it slightly above the chalice, while facing the people and says.....

Priest: Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world....

Our response is an **Act of Faith**, and comes directly from the 8th chapter of Matthew's Gospel. It's the centurion's response to Jesus after he offered to come to his home and cure his servant.

Before the priest consumes the Body of Christ, he says quietly.....

Priest: May the Body of Christ keep me safe for eternal life.

He then takes the chalice and says quietly.....

Priest: May the Blood of Christ keep me safe for eternal life.

The priest then serves Communion to the deacon and the **Communion Procession** begins. This is **covenant-union**. This is, for us, the most intimate union that we can have with Jesus and one another this side of heaven....

Distribute Communion....

After Communion, the altar is cleared, the remaining Blessed Sacrament is reposed in the tabernacle, and there is a time for silent thanksgiving and reflection.

Then Communion is distributed to the **Extra-Ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick** and any announcements are made....

Deacon: Give the Blessed Sacrament to the EMs and do the announcements.

The **Concluding Rite** begins as everyone stands for the **Prayer After Communion** in which the priest asks God to help us become what we have just received. Then the priest asks the Lord to be with the people, and their response is followed by the **Final Blessing**. The Mass ends, as it began, with the Sign of the Cross.....

Priest: Let us pray.... *Prayer after Communion*

The English word *Mass* is taken from the Latin word *missa*, which means *being sent*. The deacon has the last word, as he **commissions** the people to go and become what they are called to be, by living the sacramental life. We are now *sent* out to be a visible sign of God's invisible grace to the whole world. If we have offered our sacrifice and received the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ with the **Proper Disposition**, we will walk out the doors of the church with a New Life. We will have become a New Creation.

Deacon: The Mass is ended, let us go forth and love and serve the Lord by loving and serving one another.

Thanks be to God!