

# *Guidebook To The Catholic Mass*



*A Step-by-Step Explanation Compiled as an Aid to Appreciate  
and Understand the Mass of the Roman Catholic Church.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

*“What we do daily we do dully unless we do it devoutly”*

This quote which is taken from the wise words of a retreat director many years ago is a good starting point for our reflections. The purpose of this booklet is to give you an explanation of the Mass so that you can find it less “dull.” I promise you that as you read you will say to yourself many times “I didn’t know that,” and you will discover a new beauty and richness to the Mass that will help you to experience it more devoutly - and in the end more fruitfully. You may be very surprised to know what is really going on, and what it all means!

### **So does that mean that I will start to be excited by the Mass every time I go?**

Honestly, no. As with anything you can’t expect 100% solid enjoyment 100% of the time. But there are many things we do in life that sometimes fills us with great satisfaction, and other times we can’t get into it. You don’t spend time with someone you love because 100% of the time everything is 100% wonderful. You spend the time so that you can experience those times *when it is* 100% wonderful.

### **How will this booklet help to experience these times?**

By understanding what is going on at Mass, and realizing how you can most powerfully engage, you will increase the times of wonder and spiritual benefit. The more you know, the more that you can put yourself into the Mass, and *definitely* the more you will get out of it.

## WHAT IS THE MASS?

Before we go step by step through the Mass, it is important to discuss what the Mass is. It is *not just a ritual* we do as a community when we gather, it is *not just a way to express ourselves as Catholics* - it is these things, but it is so much more! When we gather for Mass we aren't just coming to be taught (although that's part of it), and we are not coming just to feel the unity of the community (although we should) - we are coming to engage in a sacred responsibility, a sacred function as a priestly people. We come to worship God who is deserving of all praise, and we come to personally encounter that God.

We encounter God in the person of the priest (in a way we will discuss later), in our fellow worshipers (*"Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst"* - Mt 18:20), in the Word of God when proclaimed (*"... and the Word was God"* - Jn 1:1), and most especially in the Eucharist we receive.

### *The Mass is a Meal*

In a very real way the Mass is a meal. We come to be fed from the table of the Word, and the table of the altar. During the **Liturgy of the Word** we listen to the words of scripture (and preaching on that scripture) to be fed and led to an encounter with God in that Word. During the **Liturgy of the Eucharist** we reenact the Last Supper in a special way. We are then able to share from the altar *the same meal* shared by the disciples when they ate with Jesus the night before He died.



### *The Mass is a Sacrifice*

The Mass is also a time where we experience the reality of Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross by which we have forgiveness for our sins, and are made able to share eternal life



in heaven (*"By His wounds, you are healed"* - Is 53:5). In the Mass (in a way that I hope will be explained later), we are able to participate in this one sacrifice, and by that participation are able to share in the fruits of that sacrifice. On the altar during the **Eucharistic Prayer**, Jesus, the lamb of God offers Himself as a sacrifice for us. Jesus the one high priest then offers this sacrifice to the Father on our behalf. We as a priestly people have a

part to play in this sacrifice. We are able to share in the sacrifice by what we offer, and then we are able to share both physically and spiritually in the benefits produced by that sacrifice (more on all this later).

### *The Mass Places Us At the Liturgy and Banquet of Heaven*

How can we participate in Christ's sacrifice and also share in the meal he provides? Because for God *all time is the same instant*. In the Mass we believe that we intersect with God's time and can be present at the sacrifice that occurs on cross at Calvary and is then ministered by Jesus, the one true priest in the Heavenly Liturgy.



We can also be present at the Last Supper and share that meal as well as the eternal wedding feast of the banquet in heaven.



These are admittedly difficult concepts to understand and believe. But as we will see later, *God is mysterious* and part of encountering Him is to *wrestle in faith* with these realities. As we go through the parts of the Mass there will be more explanation on how the Mass helps us connect with these mysterious realities.

### *Who is the Priest?*

*“Jesus, because he remains forever, has a priesthood that does not pass away ...Unlike other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifice day after day ... he did that once for all when he offered himself” - Heb 7:24-27 (abridged)*



Scripture teaches us that Jesus is the one high priest who offered one sacrifice for us. That sacrifice includes the last supper and the cross in our time, and is now forever taking place in the Heavenly Liturgy and Banquet in heaven.

In the Mass, we believe that Jesus acts through the man who is ordained a priest and that the sacrifice and meal we celebrate is taking place *because Jesus acts through the human priest*. Jesus is the one true priest, our ordained priests act “in the person of Christ.” We, as a priestly people, all have an important part to play in the sacrifice, as we shall see later.

### *The Mass Makes Divine Realities Present*

The Mass acts like a “porthole” or a “bridge” to divine realities. In the Mass we encounter God in His Word and in the Sacrifice of the altar. We stretch ourselves to approach God in love and faith, and God becomes truly present through Jesus Christ in word and body. We have the opportunity to join ourselves to the Sacrifice of the Cross, and are invited to share in the banquet of God which flows from that Sacrifice. As we continue to explore the Mass, please realize that this common looking event is much more than it appears.





## WHY GO TO MASS?

### *Growth in Faith*

The mass is *much more than it appears*, and there are very good reasons why God has chosen to veil the sacred realities we have been discussing in this event that can become mundane, repetitive, or even boring. God wants us to approach Him in faith. If God used really amazing special effects at Mass to convey what is really going on, we would not have to grow in true faith. It is not the actions we do that justify us, but our faith. If we saw the heavens open during Mass we would not believe by faith, but by evidence. God knows that it by straining to have faith in the veiled realities we will grow in faith in Him and in the words He speaks.



### *Purposes of the Mass*

*"Remember to keep holy the sabbath day"* - Ex 20:8



There are four purposes of the mass that we ought to keep in mind. The four purposes of the Mass reflect Jesus' action and what His sacrifice was all about. Our worship of God in the Mass should contain these.

**ADORATION:** God is our creator and we depend on Him for everything. The infinite, eternal, and all-powerful God is owed adoration and praise. We sometimes forget that this is one of our duties. The more we grow in love of God, and the more we are conscious of God's greatness and goodness, the more we will want to offer our sacrifice of praise.

**THANKSGIVING:** All good things we have come from God. The more we are aware of the great benefits that we receive in the Eucharist, and in God's other daily helps, the more this spirit of thanksgiving will bring us closer to God. If we don't feel the need to thank, we are not seeing all the benefits we continue to receive from God - and that is not living in reality.

**ATONEMENT:** Jesus is perfect God and perfect man. Scripture tells us that He took our sins upon Himself and made up for them. As we grow closer to God we will increasingly feel the sorrow of offending the God who loves us so completely. In the mass we not only gain forgiveness of minor sins (mortal sins require the sacrament of Penance to reconcile), but we are strengthened to fight temptation and weakness. We restore the damage our sins have done to our relationship with God by joining ourselves to the sacrifice of Jesus that took away those sins once and for all.

**PETITION:** God is generous and longs to give. Ultimately God wants to give us the great gift of eternal life in heaven. *"The Father knows what you need before you ask him"* (Mt 6:8), Yet God wants us to ask for what we need. *"Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be open to you"* (Mt 7:7). Our activity of asking for what we and others truly need opens us to the mind of God and prompts God to respond by answering our prayers.



### *A WALKING TOUR OF THE MASS*

In this section we will walk through the mass and try to add some explanation to what is happening. Following this tour during a mass or two should enhance your experience of the mass. Eventually you should be able to grow in faith and more fully engage in the four purposes of mass while participating in the Sacrifice and meal of the Mass.

#### *INTRODUCTORY RITES:*

This portion of the Mass begins our worship. The rites have a two-fold purpose: (1) To establish a communion among those present and to God who is there with us, and (2) to dispose those present to listen to the Word of God and to celebrate worthily the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

**Entrance Procession:** Serves the practical purpose of getting the ministers from the sacristy (the place where the ministers vest and get ready) to the sanctuary and the altar of sacrifice. We generally sing a chant or hymn during this time to unite us in song,



to lift our minds to God, and to help us to begin to ponder the mysteries of that God. Singing, paying attention to the words of the chant or song, and actively working to recognize God's presence are good ways to allow this time to be effective.

**Reverence to the Altar:** The ministers reverence the altar with a bow as they approach the sanctuary. Deacons, priests, and



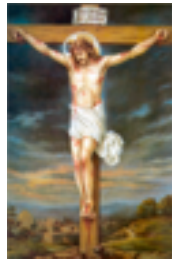
bishops will then reverence the altar with a kiss. The altar symbolizes the presence of Christ in our midst. It is a meeting place between heaven and earth, it is not just a table.

Sometimes the altar will be incensed as a sign of reverence for the place and what is to take place there.

**Sign of the Cross:** We begin the Mass as we begin all prayer, by making the sign of the cross. This not only introduces us to the reality of the sacrifice of the cross that we



will celebrate, but also introduces us again to the mysterious reality of our God who is *one God* yet is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The sign of the cross is also a reminder of our baptism, when (in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)

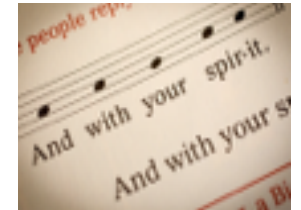


we became a part of the Body of Christ and a Child of God. Any of these things is appropriate to reflect upon as you make the sign of the cross.

**The Greeting:** Then the celebrant greets the people present. There are a few different greetings he may use, but the

response is always the same: “And with your spirit.” This is no ordinary greeting and it is meant to be our affirmation of an important truth. The greetings from the celebrant have roots in the scriptures and recall occasions where humans or angels greeted a person in the name of the Lord. Our response is not at all the same as “The Lord be with you too,” It has a very different meaning.

**... And with your spirit ...** This response (which occurs 5 times in the average Sunday Mass) dates back to the early days of the Church. It is a statement of faith in the power of the sacrament of holy Orders, and recognition that the celebrant has been anointed by the Spirit of God to act in the person of Christ. It is also a reminder that the man standing there does nothing, but rather, it is God who acts through him. We are actually not addressing the priest, but the Spirit of God that was given to him at ordination and through which the one High Priest, Jesus, will act during the Mass.



**Penitential Rite:** *“Turn to God that your sins may be wiped away”* (Acts 3:19). We have recognized that we are in the presence of



God and have spoken the mystery of the trinity. We have recalled our status as adopted children of that God and we have acknowledged that Christ Himself will act powerfully in this Mass through the priest. Now we recognize that we have all sinned and fallen short of what the Lord has asked of us. As an assembly that has come here to worship that God,

we ask to be cleansed so that we may approach him in purity of heart. We also ask his mercy to forgive us so that He may wipe away the barriers to encountering Him that are caused by sin. This also helps us enter more deeply into the mystery of the sacrifice of the cross by which we are set free from sin.

**... Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy ...** This ancient plea for mercy is always part of the Penitential Rite regardless which form is selected.



**... "May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life" ...** The Rite always concludes with this absolution prayer. We recognize that we have been forgiven of our venial sins through turning to God for Mercy (Mortal Sins require the Sacrament of Penance). We also recall the greatest effect of God's mercy and forgiveness was won for us by the sacrifice of Jesus, attaining everlasting life.

**Glory to God!:** At some masses we now give praise to God by joining our voices to the heavenly choirs in the hymn of the angles referred to in Luke 2:14. We should allow ourselves to enter more deeply into the reality of God during this prayer. The words speak again of the Trinity. We sing of the Glory of God the Father. We ask Jesus the Lamb of God to have mercy on us and take away the sins of the world (which he will do later in the Mass). Finally we recall that the Father, Jesus (the Son), and the Holy Spirit all share in the same glory as the one God. This prayer looks back to what has just happened and point to what is ahead.



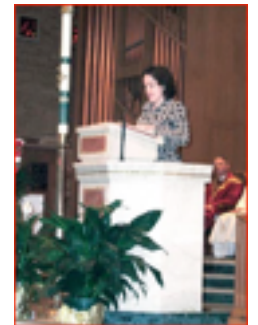
**The Collect:** Having been led to prayer by all that has occurred, the celebrant says “Let us pray ...”. There is a brief period of silence where we, the children of God, who have just been cleansed of sin approach our loving Father. We each offer the intentions that we would like to pray for in this Mass. The prayer called the Collect “collects” all of our prayers. The priest turns to the Father standing in the place of the Son and offers them by the Holy Spirit.



### ***THE LITURGY OF THE WORD***

Having been drawn away from the distractions of daily life, and drawn into the mystery of God Himself, we are now disposed to hear the Word of God. The Church feeds us from the table of God’s Word. This nourishment helps us to be able to approach the table of the Eucharist from which we receive the living God who feeds us in body and soul.

**Old Testament Reading:** To continue to bring us into contact with God, we hear a reading from the Old Testament. The Old Testament proclaims through its words who God is, it contains the prophecies that will be fulfilled in Jesus, and it sets out the stories and themes that the New Testament writers and Jesus Himself will use to deepen our understanding of the reality of God. We end the reading with a recognition that what we have just heard is the Word of God, and we give thanks.



**Responsorial Psalm:** This intentional pause for reflection helps us to enter into a spirit of meditation to better receive what we just heard and what we will now hear.

**New Testament Reading:** On Sundays there is a second reading from the New Testament. In this reading we hear the interpretations and expansions of the Old Testament realities, the teaching of the Apostles to the early church community, and the earliest statements of the faith that we hold as Christians. As with the first reading, we end with recognition that these are not just any words - they are the Word of God (inspired by the Holy Spirit), and we give thanks.



**Gospel Acclamation:** As we approach the high point of the Liturgy of the Word we prepare to hear the words of Jesus Himself. Since we recognize that Jesus is present when his words are proclaimed, we prepare for His arrival.



**Gospel:** This high point of the Liturgy of the Word is often accompanied by processions, special gestures, and sometimes incense. To indicate the presence and direct activity of Jesus in the proclamation of the Gospel we stand (as you would if any other important person entered the room). Also, only an



ordained minister (Deacon, Priest, Bishop) proclaims the Gospel. We affirm our recognition of the presence of Christ in the minister by addressing the spirit of God that he received at ordination.



that have just been read are explained and applied to our lives. Giving of the Homily is reserved to Bishops, Priests, and Deacons - not just because of their theological training, but because we believe that as ordained ministers they have the capacity to allow the spirit of God (received at ordination) to speak through them to us.



**Silence:** It is appropriate to sit in a few moments of silence to soak in the realities that have just been proclaimed, and to consider how Jesus may be speaking to us. We should always listen attentively during the readings and homily and then in our hearts afterwards to see what the Lord wishes *to say to us personally* that day.

I BELIEVE...

God in the readings and the homily (in order to bring us to a deeper understanding of those mysteries). We now renew our baptismal dignity, and profess our faith in the mysteries of God that we as a Church believe. We then get ready *to enter into* the most sublime mystery - the Most Holy Eucharist.

**Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful):** Having professed our faith in the greatness, goodness, and power of God - we ask Him to bend low and hear our prayers. The community gathered today expresses the needs *of that community and of the Universal Church*. We pray for the Church, civic leaders, world

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**Homily:** The Homily is a crucial element of the exploration of God's Word. Through the Homily the words of the scriptures

conditions, specific needs of the local community, and for the dead - who are in need of our prayers and the effectiveness of

the Eucharistic Sacrifice to assist them in moving from



purgatory to heaven. In contrast to the intentions we make personally in the mass before the Collect, these prayers come from the whole community and are placed before God by the whole community in exercise of their priestly function.

### ***THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST***

All that has come before has prepared us and turned our attention to the most sacred part of what we are doing in Mass: The Liturgy of the Eucharist. The action of the mass now moves to the Altar of Sacrifice. We move to the altar bringing the faith we have just professed and the needs we have expressed. We, as a priestly people, come to the sacrifice with *our offering* and *priestly functions* to be preformed as we gather with Jesus the High Priest who acts through the person of our human priest.

#### **Preparation, Thanksgiving, Communion.**

These three parts of the Liturgy of the Eucharist take place in relation to the altar, which is a meeting place between heaven and earth. It is here at the altar that Jesus the High Priest makes intercession on our behalf and becomes available to us - *we meet Him here*. First we prepare the altar and the gifts, then we participate in the great prayer of thanksgiving (the Eucharistic Prayer) where Jesus becomes physically present and offers Himself to the Father on our behalf. Finally, we encounter our Lord personally in Communion.



witness the Sacrifice on that altar, and we are preparing a worthy place for the physical presence of our Lord and God.



All vessels needed are put in place, and a special cloth called a “corporal” is laid on the area where the sacrifice will take place. At the same time a collection is taken up at most masses. The early

Christians used to offer the bread and wine for the sacrifice, food and other goods for the poor, and the work of their labors. In our day we offer money (from which the bread and wine is purchased, the poor are helped, and the practical needs of the parish and larger Church are taken care of). This monetary offering is also a sign of us returning to God the good gifts he provides us, and it is symbolic of the spiritual sacrifice that we offer at the mass (more on this spiritual offering later).



**Presentation and Acceptance of Gifts:** The Priest or Deacon receives the gifts of bread and wine and other offerings from



the people. This is an important time for all the people present to exercise the priestly function of placing their own *spiritual sacrifice* on the altar. During this time, and during the preparation prayers that follow, is an often neglected opportunity to join the sacrifices of your life to the one great sacrifice of Christ.

**Preparation of the Gifts:** The gifts are formally placed upon the altar and with special prayers they are dedicated be transformed into Christ’s Body and Blood for the sacrifice. During this time *we place our spiritual sacrifices* onto the

**Preparation of the Altar and Collection:** The Deacon, Acolyte and other ministers prepare the altar. We are getting ready to

gifts. *"You too are living stones, built as an edifice of spirit, into a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"* (1 Pt 2:5). The most important way that we can give meaning to the events of our week is to offer them as a spiritual sacrifice to God. As a priestly people we are able to place the struggles, work, pain, sorrows, achievements, and in fact our *very selves* with the hosts, and to spiritually mix our sacrifice into the wine as the priest or deacon adds a bit of water to the chalice. We may complete the prayers the priest has used to offer the gifts with: "Blessed be God Forever."

#### **Ceremonial Incense and Washing:**

After the prayers have been offered over the gifts, the priest washes his hands. Sometimes, before this, the priest will incense the gifts as a sign that they are being purified to be offered to God. The incense is a



reminder that our prayers and sacrifices rise up to God like incense. The priest and people may also be incensed in virtue of the sacrifice that they are offering. The priest washes his hands as he prays for interior purification. The hands that hold Jesus need to be pure as well as the heart that will lift up the prayers.

**... My sacrifice and yours ...** The priest invites the people to pray for the acceptability of the bread and wine that he will offer, and for the sacrifices that the people have mingled with those gifts, which will also be a part of what is offered.



**... May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands ...** The people respond, exercising their priestly function while the

priest is silent. We pray that the Lord will accept the gifts of bread and wine (which contain our sacrifices) that are now entrusted to the hands of the priest. We pray that when these gifts become transformed into Jesus and offered to the Father it will be *"for our good and the good of all His Holy Church."* In this we anticipate the real effects of this sacrifice that will be achieved as a result (more on this later).



**A Final Offering Prayer:** The priest prays one final prayer over these gifts that have been brought, prepared, and accepted for sacrifice. We now move to the central part of the Mass.

**The Eucharistic Prayer:** There are several choices for the Eucharistic Prayer that the priest may select. Although they differ to some degree, they all have the following basic parts - see if you can notice when each occurs:

**PREFACE:** The Eucharistic Prayer always starts with the Preface. The Preface begins with a dialogue between the people and the priest. We affirm the spirit that will allow Jesus to offer the sacrifice through the priest ("And with your Spirit"). We lift up our hearts to the Lord. Pay attention to the words of the Preface (which is not the same at every mass), there is a treasure of spiritual realities that are expressed. As we raise our hearts and remain standing the priest prays (or sings) this prayer that glorifies God the Father and gives Him thanks for the work of salvation accomplished through His Son. Picture that as the priest voices the reality of God's Glory, and speaks of the mysteries that we are entering into, a doorway to God's eternal time is opening for us.



**HOLY, HOLY, HOLY:** As we begin to contact the eternal time of God we are able to be present at the Eternal Liturgy in Heaven where Jesus as High Priest offers His Sacrifice on the cross to the Father. We are truly entering the presence of the angels in Heaven, and we join them in their hymn of praise to God. We also sing Hosanna in anticipation of the arrival of Jesus who comes in the name of the Lord.



If we look around, things don't look like they have changed much. We are called to believe in faith that we are entering a supernatural time, even though our senses do not show it to us. In recognition that we have entered into the Liturgy recalled in Revelation 4:1-11, we fall to our knees before the majesty of the unseen God.

**CALLING DOWN THE HOLY SPIRIT:** Before the transformation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus, the priest calls down the Holy Spirit to make the gifts Holy. You will notice that he extends hands over the gifts as he calls down the Spirit, and then blesses them with the sign of the cross.



**WORDS OF INSTITUTION (CONSECRATION):** Our contact with eternal time allows us to enter into the reality of the Last Supper. Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last supper and commanded us to repeat this event as the way to join ourselves to his sacrifice on the cross, and to share the fruits of that sacrifice in our own time.





This is the most solemn part of the Mass. You will notice that as we begin to remember the last supper the priest will switch from speaking to the Father narrating the event to the voice of Jesus in the first person and then back again:

*“Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my body which will be given up for you”*

and

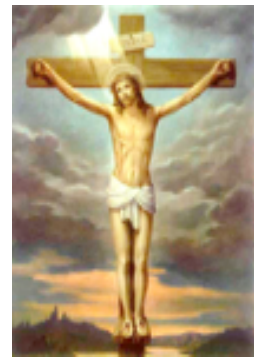
*“Take this, all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my blood ...”*

then finally

*“Do this in memory of me.”*

When the priest speaks the words of Jesus it is really Jesus speaking these words through the priest. They are meant for us as much as for the disciples at the Last Supper. In addition, they have the same effect they did at the Last Supper - the transformation (transubstantiation) of the bread and wine into Jesus' Body and Blood.

**“THE MYSTERY OF FAITH”:** In the presence of the “mystery of faith” now present on the altar, we acclaim the reality of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross which won salvation for us and his Resurrection and Ascension. These realities become present, and we can benefit from them.



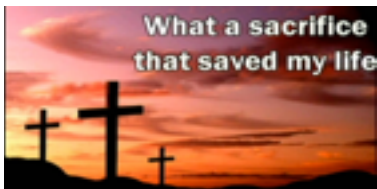
**OFFERING OF THE SACRIFICE:** In our Mass we witness, in the person of our priest, Jesus offering sacrifice.

*"We have such a high priest, who has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in heaven, minister of the sanctuary and of that true tabernacle set up not by man, but by the Lord." (Heb 8:1-2)*



*He entered, not with the blood of goats and bulls, but with his own blood and achieved eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12)*

**Such a Sacrifice:** Jesus the high priest ministering at the Heavenly Liturgy is able to take *His offering of His body and blood from His sacrifice on the cross, and our spiritual offerings of ourselves and our daily sacrifices, and offer them to the Father.* Since Jesus' one sacrifice occurs in eternal time, it is not just the offerings of the people present at *this mass* that are offered along with Jesus' sacrifice of Himself. Jesus takes and combines His sacrifice with all the sacrifices offered by His people at *every Mass* that has ever been celebrated, and every one that will ever be celebrated until the end of time.



*"We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all ... by one offering he has forever perfected those who are being sanctified" (Heb 10:10,14)*

Through a series of prayers we participate in the sacrifice of Christ. You will hear the words ... **we celebrate the memorial** ... and ... **we offer you** ... in the prayers. This is not ordinary "celebrating"! We "remember" *in such a way* that

the sacrifice of Jesus, *and the powerful effects that flow from it*, are made present to us in a mysterious manner. In the prayers of the Eucharistic Prayer we invoke the saints, pray for the living and deceased, and ask that a share of the graces made available through the sacrifice are distributed to those for whom we pray ... and to us too.

**DOXOLOGY:** At the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer the priest chants **...Through Him, with Him, in Him ...** as he elevates the Body and Blood of Christ. He gives praise to the one God in three persons who has given Himself for sacrifice, received that sacrifice on our behalf, and now dispenses his mercy and graces to us. We respond with a resounding AMEN! to all that has happened in this great Eucharistic Prayer. The mysterious porthole to the Heavenly Liturgy closes and we stand and enter the “Communion Rite.”



**The Our Father:** Jesus has just been in encounter with the Father. He has made sacrifice and received benefits from that sacrifice to be shared with us. Recalling our status as adopted children of God, and now using the words that Jesus gave us to address the Father - we ask to be given that DAILY BREAD.



**The Sign of Peace:** Remembering the greeting that Jesus gave the Apostles when he appeared to them after His resurrection: “Peace be with you” (John 20:21) we now receive that same

greeting from Jesus through the person of the priest



(responding back to the “spirit” of Jesus in the priest). God is now going to give us our Daily Bread in the form of the Eucharistic bread which has been transformed into the Body of Jesus. We are made aware of the presence of the Risen Jesus in our midst, as when he appeared to the Apostles. We share that peace received from Jesus with others.

**The Lamb of God:** After a lamb had been sacrificed on the altar in the Old Testament sacrifices, the priests and those who offered the lamb for sacrifice would share in eating the flesh that was not consumed in the fire. The sacrifice has happened, yet remaining on the altar *in front of us* is the body of the lamb that was sacrificed. We pray to Jesus, the Lamb of God who has taken away the sins of the world and now is laid out upon the altar. We ask for mercy and peace as we prepare to receive our portion of the sacrifice. The priest breaks the host and divides the Body and Blood on the altar preparing it to be consumed by all the people.



**... Behold the Lamb of God ...** As the priest hold up the flesh of the Lamb he calls for us to look at it. The priest reminds us that this is *He who takes away the sins of the world* (by offering Himself in sacrifice). The priest then states how happy we are to be called to *the supper of the Lamb*. This is a reference to the marriage banquet of heaven (Rev 19:6-9). God has joined



to us in a *spousal union* through the Sacrifice of Christ in the Heavenly Liturgy. He then celebrates with a *banquet in which he shares His very self with us*. He is more than the dead flesh of the lamb of a sacrifice - because of His resurrection He is now living. As we receive this flesh of Jesus the Lamb of God, and give ourselves to Him in a union of faith, we become bit-by-bit transformed into what we receive (the Living God).

**... Lord, I am not worthy ...** This is all very weighty stuff! The mysteries of God that began to express in the Introductory Rites, that were expended during the Liturgy of the Word, and came to a climax during the Eucharistic prayer, now come home to us personally. The God who came to earth and took flesh so that He could sacrifice that body for us comes to us physically. The God who acted as High Priest of His own sacrifice on our behalf, and then accepted that sacrifice, now wants to share with us the graces and benefits that flow from the sacrifice. Wow! What else could we do but look up to him on our knees and repeat the words of the centurion from scripture: *"Lord, I am not worthy for you to enter under my roof"* (Mt 8:8).



**Communion:** If we are properly disposed (see "Guidelines for the Reception of Communion" below), we may now come forward to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. If we are unable to receive Jesus in the Eucharist we can make a "Spiritual Communion" what was defined by St. Thomas Aquinas as: "an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the Holy Sacrament and a loving embrace as though we had already received Him."





The Eucharist is the “Source and Summit” of our lives as Christians; there is no substitute for the actual reception of the Eucharist. There are great benefits to regular reception of the Eucharist (see “Why must we go to Mass every Sunday” below).

**The time after Communion:** You have just returned to your seat after approaching the minister of communion (by the way you receive Body and Blood whether you receive the Host, the Cup, or both - God is equally present - can't break God into pieces). The time after we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus is a privileged time. We are in a personal contact with Jesus, and have just received a portion from the table of the Heavenly Banquet just as the disciples received a portion at the Last Supper (the first Mass). That portion is not only the physical body of the Lamb (Jesus), but also a portion of the graces that flow from the great sacrifice of Jesus. There are several important things that we ought to do with this time.

(1) Offer **Thanksgiving** to God for the great gift He has given us in His sacrifice. We can also thank Him for letting us participate by joining our offering to that sacrifice, and can gratefully accept the graces He will give us that flow from the sacrifice. (2) We can take time in **Adoration** of our great God and reflect on the mysteries of God that we heard in the scriptures and in the prayers of the Liturgy. Such



reflection can give us new insights. (3) Such insights can lead us to **Atonement** through a recognition of where we have fallen short in our relationship with God. This can lead us to



accept God's healing graces present in the Sacrament of the Eucharist to transform us into that which we have received.

(4) We can focus again on the intentions we offered at the start of Mass. Now that the graces of the Sacrifice are flowing to us, we can **Petition** through our priestly function that God's graces be applied to these intentions (or others that come to mind at that time). What a privilege this time is!

**Prayer after Communion:** After we have received communion and had some time for reflection, prayer, and meditation, the priest stands and prays the Prayer after Communion after the invitation "Let us pray ..." This final prayer reflects on the great gifts we have just received and prays for their effectiveness in our lives and in the lives of others.

### ***THE CONCLUDING RITES***

Mass moves quickly to an end in the Concluding Rites. There may be some announcements, or the community may be briefly addressed about some other issue related to that specific community or the Church at large. We then prepare to depart.

**Blessing:** After the people affirm the Spirit of Jesus in the priest, he imparts a blessing to the people in the name of the three persons of the Triune God.

**Dismissal:** The deacon or priest dismisses the people sending them forth to be the presence of Christ in the world.

**Procession:** The clergy again reverence the altar with a kiss as a sign of respect for the presence of Jesus and the great sacrifice that has been celebrated there. After this all the ministers process out of the Church followed by the people.



## THERE IS A LITTLE "THOMAS" IN ALL OF US



*Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." ... Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."*

*Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe."*

*Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." (Jn 20:19-29)*

**... Unless I see ...** All that we have explored about the Mass can be difficult for all of us to believe at times. Like Thomas, we all have a difficult time believing things that we can't see.

**... do not be unbelieving, but believe ...** Our Lord calls us to have *faith* in His words. It is by faith that we can truly stretch ourselves to approach the great mystery of a God who is present yet invisible. Our God can't be seen with our human eyes, and the full reality of God is something that we can only approach, yet not fully hold, with our limited abilities. We can't wait for proof that can't be given, Jesus calls us to just *have faith and believe*. The Mass helps us grow in faith.

**... Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed ...**

If you have difficulty in believing, if some Masses you just can't "get into it" and struggle to have faith ... join the club! Many great saints had struggles in faith. The more we work to grow in faith, and ask God for the gift of faith, the more we open to God, and the closer we approach, by faith, the union with Jesus' death and resurrection that brings salvation. One way to help stay focused during the elevations of the Host and Chalice after consecration is to look at Jesus now present and say with Thomas "My Lord, and my God!"

### **BEFORE AND AFTER MASS**

To most fruitfully attend Mass, it has been the tradition of Catholics to make preparation before Mass and thanks after.

#### **PREPARATION**

To begin with, our reception of communion is dependent on us not being conscious of grave sin (willful sins against the 10 commandments and other sins of "grave matter" determined by the Church). It is beneficial to check ourselves for such sins and to seek out sacramental Confession prior to reception of the Eucharist. To receive Communion in such a state of sin is actually to commit another sin: "*So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.*" (1 Cor 11:27)

Some people will look ahead to the readings to begin to reflect on them and maximize the level that the Word “penetrates”



during Mass. It is also beneficial to arrive a bit before Mass to: (1) Review our week and consider what we will be offering, (2) Pray for clarity regarding what petitions

we will be making, (3) Relax and “center” ourselves so that we can encounter God with less distraction in the Mass, and (4) Become aware of the presence of God around us. Although we are required to fast for one hour before mass, we may decide to fast longer as a preparation for Communion.

### **THANKSGIVING**

The time after communion is a privileged time, as was said above. Extending the time of prayer after Communion by spending a few minutes in the church before departing, or by spending some time shortly after Mass to thank God for the great gift He has given us in the Eucharist, is a good practice. St. John Chrysostom



once said that *“when a person has eaten some delicious food at a banquet, he is careful not to take anything bitter in his mouth immediately after, lest he should lose the sweet flavor of [that food]. In like manner, when we have received the precious Body of Jesus Christ, we should take care not to lose its heavenly flavor by turning too soon to the cares and business of the world.”* There are also a number of prayers that have been composed over the years to assist one in making thanksgiving after Mass. These may be found in many prayer books, and online.

## **WHY MUST WE GO TO MASS EVERY SUNDAY?**

### ***THE SABBATH DAY***

In the Third Commandment, God tells us to “*Remember to keep holy the sabbath day*” (Ex 20:8). The Church tells us that we have an obligation to fulfill the Third Commandment by refraining from unnecessary work on Sunday and by participating in the Mass, our chief form of worship as Christians. From the earliest days of the Church, Christians have understood that being a Christian isn’t a private matter. We are called to be Christians together; while we can and should engage in the private worship of God throughout the week, our primary form of worship is public and communal, which is why Sunday Mass is so important. God is due His day.

### ***PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL BENEFIT***

Jesus tells us: “*I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, and I in him will bear much fruit. ... Anyone who does not remain in me [will] wither. ... If you remain in me ... ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you*” (Jn 15:5-7).

Reception of the Eucharist is a genuine way that we can remain in Jesus and He in us. He also tells us “*I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you*” (Jn 6:53). In the Mass we are able to offer ourselves and the struggles and joys of life to God, and then to receive the “daily bread” that will be our strength through the coming week. This should be a strong incentive to attend Mass as often as possible, at least on the Sabbath.

### ***IT TAKES TIME TO GET TO KNOW GOD***

The scripture readings selected for the various Masses through the three year cycle of readings give us a contact with the Word of God that is unparalleled. Not only are there carefully selected readings that complement one another, there are various prayers of the Mass that change through the year (and

from Sunday to Sunday), these and the readings combine to present to us the mysteries of God and of the faith. To begin to grasp the person and mind of God takes years of regularly reflecting on the readings in the context of the prayers, hundreds of homilies offering interpretation, and the enlightenment that can come from the graces of the Sacrament of the Eucharist. There is no substitute for this combination.

### **GUIDELINES FOR THE RECEPTION OF COMMUNION**

*1996, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops*

#### **FOR CATHOLICS**

As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. We are encouraged to receive Communion devoutly and frequently. In order to be properly disposed to receive Communion, participants should not be conscious of grave sin and normally should have fasted for one hour. A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord without prior sacramental confession except for a grave reason where there is no opportunity for confession. In this case, the person is to be mindful of the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, including the intention of confessing as soon as possible (canon 916). A frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance is encouraged for all.

#### **FOR OUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS**

We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this Eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions which separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21).

Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life, and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion. Eucharistic sharing in exceptional circumstances by other Christians requires permission according to the directives of the diocesan bishop and the provisions of canon law (canon 844 §4). Members of the Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the



discipline, the Code of Canon Law does not object to the reception of Communion by Christians of these Churches (canon 844 §3).

***FOR NON-CHRISTIANS***

We also welcome to this celebration those who do not share our faith in Jesus Christ. While we cannot admit them to Holy Communion, we ask them to offer their prayers for the peace and the unity of the human family.

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East, and the Polish National Catholic Church are urged to respect the discipline of their own Churches. According to Roman Catholic