

## **The Meaning of the Mass Part 6 -- The Communion Rites (after the Lord's Prayer)**

After the Lord's Prayer, which is the first action in our Communion Rite, we then proceed into what is known as the Rite of Peace and the Reception of the Eucharist. It's important to know that all of these actions and prayers are part of our Communion rites and so all of them are telling us something about how we express communion, how we foster communion, and how we enter into communion.

The first action after the Lord's Prayer is the Rite of Peace. As the priest prays for the gift of peace, he now addresses Jesus present in the Eucharist – the peace we are praying for is a gift of Jesus Christ himself and springs from the communion of Life and Love Jesus enjoys with the Father and the Holy Spirit. ***This is the FIRST TIME in the liturgy that the priest addresses Jesus directly present in our midst in the Eucharist rather than the Father in Heaven.*** Peace in the Old Testament, was a consequence, an effect, of right relationship. We can think of “peace” then, in terms of communion without division – through Jesus, who is in communion without division with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus said at the Last Supper “Peace I leave you, my peace I give you” (John 14:27). Peace, then, is part of the meaning of our Lord's Death - in his Body and Blood he is giving us the gift of peace itself. Saint Paul speaks of this peace in his letter to the Ephesians, 2:14-16 “For he is our peace ... that he might create in himself one new person in place of two, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross....” and to the Colossians, 1:20 “...through him to reconcile all things in himself, making peace by the blood of the cross.” Peace is brought to the world through the cross of Calvary and we now receive the grace of Calvary through the Eucharist. It is at this moment in the Mass that we exchange the Sign of Peace, which begins with the fourth time the priest says to the people, “The Peace of the Lord be with you” and they respond “and with your spirit”. The mystery of Christ's peace which he accomplished on Calvary is now being passed by the priest, acting in the person of Jesus, to His body the Church. The response “And with your spirit” acknowledges that the Peace we are about to exchange is not a merely human wish for well being; rather, it is a peace that only comes from Christ through the ministry of the priest and is now shared with the people so they can become ministers of Our Lord's peace to one another. As the invitation to “exchange a sign of peace” is given by the priest or deacon, we offer to one another the same greeting of the Risen Lord from John 20:21 when our Lord said to the apostles “Peace be with you” in the upper room. We have just said “Our Father” and now we can say “Brother” or “Sister;” we just prayed to forgive, now we can offer a sign of reconciliation. Our lives have been united in the one sacrifice of Jesus and offered to the Father –we are individually in communion with Jesus and also in communion with all others who have offered their lives on the altar and who have been incorporated into the one sacrifice of Christ with us. ***The sign of peace is an expression of this deep unity as The Lord actively unites the assembly in himself as one body.*** This is a sacred ritual moment – not a chat session or a time to greet our friends – when we heal any divisions or wounds in the body of Christ so that our communion with God and one another can be more perfectly realized. It's Christ's peace, not ours –and we must be aware of the respect and reverence due such a grace gained by such a price.

The priest then breaks the bread – a symbol of our Lord's body being broken on Calvary. As he does so, the Assembly addresses Jesus present in the Eucharist by the title “Lamb of God....” – we are appealing for the mercy and peace Jesus brings as the Lamb of God who is offered in Sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. As Revelations 5:11-12 and 19:7,9 tell us about the “Lamb of God” being surrounded by singing throngs, we are now joining with those singing throngs as heaven and earth are united around the one presence of God. Next is the Reception of the Eucharist, which begins with the Proclamation: “Behold the Lamb of God....” These are the Words of John the Baptist from John 1:29. This, again, is a mystery. What appears as broken bread is nothing less than Christ himself who comes as our food in the sacrifice that

takes away our sins. Then with a verse from the book of Revelation 19:9, the priest says “blessed are those who are called to the supper of the Lamb.” ***The eternal heavenly wedding banquet has now begun, and we are invited to it as the Church who is the Bride of Christ.*** We are here to seal our covenant relationship with the Lord by consummating the communion already established in the sacrifice of the Eucharistic Prayer. Again the people address Christ directly in the Eucharist when they speak with the words of the Roman centurion from Matthew 8:8, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof...”. Our participation in the Wedding Banquet of the Lamb is further symbolized by the 7 candle stands in our Sanctuary. In Revelations 1:12, the Apostle John tells us that when he is given a glimpse into the throne of the God in the heavenly Jerusalem that there were seven lampstands surrounding the Throne of the Lamb, He says, <sup>12</sup>*Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands,* <sup>13</sup>*and among the lampstands was One like the Son of Man, dressed in a long robe, with a golden sash around His chest.* These 7 candle stands in our sanctuary on either side of the Tabernacle and the mosaic of Christ remind us that we are now standing with John around the very throne of God as the Lamb once slain who lives forever now offers himself to us as food and drink in the Bread and wine of the Eucharist. And so we approach the heavenly throne of God on this Altar to consummate the covenant relationship offered to us in the Blood of the Lamb.

The community then forms a procession and sings with one voice as the Body of Christ. The Eucharistic hymn acclaims the mystery of Christ in the Eucharist that lays before them. This action of receiving physically the Body and Blood of Jesus confirms everything that has been said in the Eucharistic Prayer; this is the transformed lives of the people symbolized by the bread and wine offered up. Our gift, received by the priest (as Christ himself) and transformed to become the Body and Blood of Jesus is now handed back to us - our lives are being handed back to us but only after they have been transformed in sacrifice! That is the importance of the proclamation “The Body of Christ / The Blood of Christ”. ***Our Amen ratifies the exchange that has taken place and our willingness to be changed into the Body of Christ.*** St. Augustine said: “If then, you are the Body of Christ, your own mystery lies in the Eucharist. You must receive that which you are and become that which you receive”. Receiving Communion is a huge commitment; not just a gift, but an agreement to live out that gift as one Church, one body of Christ throughout the world, by entering into a covenant that affects every part of our lives and obligates us to be an active member of the Catholic Church. This is why we caution those who are not aware of or prepared to make that commitment to **refrain from** the Eucharist, so they do not unknowingly incur an obligation they are not prepared to meet. As Saint Paul says in his first letter to the Corinthians 11:27, “Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Each one must examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.”

Finally, we offer the Prayer after Communion - the diversity of many becoming one body is gathered into one heart and one voice as we pray for the enduring effect of this peace, this communion, this grace to continue its transforming power in our lives and our world. It is a prayer that the sacrament we have received will bear fruit in us and that we remain faithful to our new identity as living tabernacles who carry Jesus Christ to others. When we say Amen to this, we are saying Amen to all that has happened in the Communion rites – to living our lives united in the one sacrifice of Jesus and to being ministers of Christ’s peace won for us on Calvary to every wounded human heart and every distressed situation we encounter, and to living free from sin and the alienating influence of evil. Amen.