

Teaching Mass 2023  
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Diocese of San Angelo

## BEFORE MASS:

Welcome to the Teaching Mass of the Diocese of San Angelo. This Mass is part of the Eucharistic Revival that we are promoting with Catholics throughout the United States, to help us better understand what happens in the Mass, so that all of us can participate more actively and more fruitfully.

I will be explaining a little bit at a time throughout this Mass. I invite you to open your mind and your heart to come to a deeper appreciation for the Mass, which is the greatest spiritual work of art.

Our postures and gestures in the Mass carry profound Christian spiritual meaning when we do them consciously with understanding and faith. They show outwardly what we believe inwardly.

When we immerse ourselves in the words and gestures of the liturgy, the signs and symbols help us collectively to open our hearts to God's grace.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a book that offers an official summary of Catholic teaching. It says that "a sacramental celebration is woven from signs and symbols. Their meaning is rooted in creation and in human culture. These signs and symbols have roots in the events of the Old Testament and in the person and work of Jesus Christ (CCC, 1145).

For example:

When we dip our fingers into the Holy Water, it is a reminder of our Christian Baptism and a sign of purification as we enter God's holy Church.

The flame on the candles reminds us that Jesus Christ is the light of the world. We want to let his light shine into our hearts, so we can reflect his light wherever we go.

Incense is a biblical symbol our prayer rising up to God:

- In Exodus chapter 30, God commands Moses and Aaron to burn incense as a holy act of worship.
- Psalm 141:2 says, “Let my prayer be like incense before you.”
- Revelation chapter 8 says, “From the angel’s hand the smoke of the incense went up before God, and with it the prayers of God’s people.”

The altar represents Jesus Christ, who is the cornerstone of our faith. An altar is a place where a holy sacrifice is offered. The reason we have an altar in our churches is so the Sacrifice of his Cross may be perpetuated there, and so we can gather around it, giving thanks to God, nourished from that altar by the Body and Blood of Christ. The priest kisses the altar at the beginning and the end of Mass because it is a sacred place.

The action of a procession has its roots in the Bible – just like when Joshua marched around the walls of Jericho, and the Israelites crossed the Red Sea. Its purpose is to remind us that we are all pilgrims, like the Israelites, walking together on a journey toward the promised land of Heaven.

When we are entering the church as one body of believers, and when the ministers go up in the Entrance Procession, we remember the words of Psalm 122, which says, “I rejoiced when I heard them say, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord.’”

And the place where we sit in the church makes a difference. If you want to get more out of the Mass, sit in a place that fosters your attentiveness and lessens your distractions.

We are the Body of Christ. As members of that body, all of us are called to immerse ourselves in the liturgy together, participating fully in the action.

This includes joining in the prayers, singing, listening attentively to the Scripture readings, offering yourself to God, and making the prayers of the priest your own as he offers those prayers up to God.

And in the singing, it’s not just the choir or the cantor that sings. We all do. Even if you think you have the voice of a frog, I encourage you to sing the best you can, because you are part of the congregation worshipping God. St. Augustine says that the person who sings, prays twice.

The people around you in Mass are your brothers and sisters in Christ. Have an attitude of solidarity and fraternity with them. You are not there just for yourself. We support one another by our presence in the Mass.

Jesus said, in Matthew 18:20, that where two or three are gathered in his name, he is there in the midst of us.

There are four ways that Jesus Christ is present in the Catholic Mass:

1. In the person of the priest, who does what Jesus did at the Last Supper,
2. In the readings from Scripture proclaimed at Mass,
3. In the community of the faithful people, because the members of the Church are the Body of Christ, and
4. Most of all, in the most intense mode of his presence, he is present substantially in the consecrated bread and wine that have become his Body and Blood.

Now let's talk a bit about the vestments:

As the deacon and I put on our vestments for this Mass, I will tell you about the meaning of each one.

The first and most basic vestment is the alb. It is a long white garment which flows from the shoulders to the ankles, with long sleeves. The word "alb" comes from the Latin word *albus*, which means "white." This vestment reminds us of our Baptism, when we were clothed in white to signify our freedom from sin, the purity of new life, and our inner Christian dignity.

Along with the alb, the priest or deacon sometimes wears an amice, which is a rectangular piece of white linen that goes around the neck to conceal their normal daily clothes, and to protect the other vestments from getting dirty. Historically, it was derived from a cape that the priest wore over his head known as the "helmet of salvation," as found in Ephesians 6:17.

The cincture is a form of belt that secures the alb around the waist. It symbolizes the virtue of purity. It reminds us of the words of 1 Peter 1:13, "Gird up the loins of your mind, live soberly, and set your hopes completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

The stole is a long cloth, about four inches wide and of the same color of the chasuble, worn over the shoulders. It symbolizes the ministerial authority of

the ordained person. The stole of a priest hangs over the shoulders in front, and the stole of a deacon hangs on the right side.

Over the stole, the outer garment of a deacon is called a dalmatic. It has sleeves. The outer garment of a priest is called a chasuble. It doesn't have any sleeves. Both the dalmatic and the chasuble are the liturgical color of the season or of that particular celebration.

The word "chasuble" comes from the Latin word *casula*, which means "house." The chasuble symbolizes charity or love, reminding us of Colossians 3:14, which says, "Over all these things put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

There are some things that are particular to the vestments of a bishop. The first is the zucchetto, or skullcap, which has some similarity to the Jewish kippah. In that part of the Mass when we are in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, the bishop removes the zucchetto out of respect for Christ.

The bishop also wears a miter, which is a symbol of the authority of his office. The pointed shape of the miter reminds us of the tongues of fire which rested on the heads of the Apostles at Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, when they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

A bishop wears a pectoral cross over his chest, close to his heart, in order to treasure the memory of the Passion of Jesus Christ.

The staff that a bishop carries is called a crosier, and its shape is like the staff of a shepherd, symbolizing that the bishop is the shepherd of the flock of his diocese.

## PROCESSION WITH HYMN

### AFTER REACHING THE ALTAR:

Standing together for prayer is a sign of our respect for God as we direct our prayer to him.

When we make the Sign of the Cross, it is a synthesis of our Christian faith. It is an ancient Christian gesture that dates back at least to the second century. It is an expression of our belief in the Holy Trinity.

It reminds us that, by his holy Cross, Jesus Christ has redeemed the world. It invokes God's protection upon us. It's a mark of Christian discipleship, a declaration that we belong to Christ.

After the Sign of the Cross, there is a greeting to begin the Mass, reminding us that we are in the presence of God. God himself is calling us together. God is making himself present to us.

## DO SIGN OF THE CROSS AND GREETING

In the Penitential Act, we come before the Lord in humility to express our sorrow for sins. We examine our conscience. We ask for mercy three times, just as King David did after he admitted his guilt before the Lord. This opens our hearts to receive forgiveness.

We strike our breast at the "*mea culpa*" ("through my fault") in the *Confiteor* prayer. By this gesture, we ask God's forgiveness for our sins, asking him to cleanse our hearts before we listen to His Word and before we receive him in the Eucharist.

We acknowledge the fact that we, as individuals, are always in need of conversion, and that we, as a community, are always in need of reconciliation.

The Gloria is the hymn of the Mass. We sing it on Sundays and solemnities, but we won't be using it in today's Mass.

The Gloria recalls the song of the angels at the birth of Christ, in the Gospel of Luke. Originally, this prayer was a proclamation of praise that was sung at dawn on Easter Sunday.

The Opening Prayer or Collect is the last part of the Introductory Rites, just before we sit down for the readings.

The priest says, "Let us pray..."

At this point you ask yourself, "What do I need to pray for in this Mass? For whom am I offering my Mass today?"

There's a period of silence, then the prayer of the priest gathers those prayers up together and offers them to God. (That's why it's called the "collect" prayer.)

## DO PENITENTIAL ACT AND COLLECT

## BEFORE THE FIRST READING:

In the Liturgy of the Word, we are following the tradition of the Jews and the early Church.

When Jesus worshipped in the Jewish synagogue every week, the service included the proclamation of biblical passages from the Old Testament.

We proclaim the Scriptures in Mass because God is literally speaking to us. We should listen attentively, with an open mind and an open heart, to what God wants to communicate to us.

Our posture of sitting is a posture of peaceful rest together in the presence of God as we receive God's word in scripture and listen to the preaching by the priest or deacon. This posture fosters our thoughtful reflection on God's message to us.

Sitting and listening is like the disciple Mary of Bethany, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. Jesus said, "Mary has chosen the better part."

After the Old Testament passage, we sing a responsorial antiphon taken from the Book of Psalms. Jesus himself prayed with the Psalms throughout his life.

In the second reading, from the New Testament, we encounter the early Church living its Christian faith. We are members of the same Body, and we face struggles similar to those of the early Christian communities.

We stand and sing before the Gospel to give praise to God.

The word "Alleluia" in Hebrew means "praise the Lord." It is a song of rejoicing in preparation to hear the words of Christ spoken to us directly.

The GOSPEL is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word.

We listen to the words and actions of Christ, which have the power to change us. For us, this is a moment of profound encounter with the Lord, second only to the Eucharist.

We give some special signs of respect for the proclamation of the Gospel:

- We stand, as a sign of respect and alertness to hear the Words of the Risen Lord.
- We sometimes use incense and processional candles.
- The Gospel is proclaimed by a special minister – a deacon or a priest.
- We all make a small sign of the Cross on the forehead, mouth and heart. As we make that gesture, we can pray in silence, "May the words of the Holy Gospel remain always on my mind, on my lips, and in my heart."
- More importantly, we are acknowledging that the Risen Christ is present and speaking to us:  
The priest says, "A reading from the Holy Gospel acc. to Matthew"  
You say, "Glory to you, O Lord."  
At the end of the passage you say, "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ."

Christ, who is living and present among us, continues to speak to his people now.

## DO THE READINGS

HOMILY (briefly on today's readings):

The homily seeks to connect the Scripture passages we just proclaimed with our life in the world.

For example, in this Mass, the First Reading speaks of the "Bread from Heaven." To the Israelites in their Exodus through the desert, the Lord God physically fed them to sustain them on their way to the Promised Land of Israel.

And in the Mass, the Lord God feeds us spiritually to sustain us on our way to the Promised Land of Heaven.

The Second Reading comes from the First Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians. This letter was written about 23 years after the Death of Christ, and the Early Church already had the regular practice of celebrating the Eucharist. This shows that the Catholic Mass has been a constant practice since the earliest years of the Christian faith.

And in the Gospel of Saint John, Jesus himself says, "The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." We believe that.

Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper, which was a Jewish Passover seder meal that he celebrated with his Apostles. He took some of the traditional elements of the seder (bread and wine), and he assigned them a new meaning. He took the bread and said, "This is my body which will be given for you." He took the chalice of wine and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you."

The Eucharist is a Dynamic Interchange:

Going from life to liturgy and from liturgy to life.

Each one informs the other. Each one feeds into the other.

This is how the Eucharist is called the source and summit of the entire Christian life.

Our daily activity leads up to the Eucharist and then flows from it.

Jesus Christ is present in the Sacrifice of the Mass in a more powerful way than in anything else we do. We come to the liturgy to receive his presence, and then we carry his presence with us.

After the homily, we profess the Creed, which is an ancient summary of Christian beliefs. It's a response to the readings and the homily.

The Creed is an expression of our love to God.

The Nicene Creed was formulated by the bishops of the Church, in union with the Pope, in an ecumenical council in the fourth century.

The structure of the Creed is trinitarian: Father, Son, Spirit

There are two different types of bows in the Catholic liturgy, a bow at the waist (profound bow) and a head bow. A bow of the head is made when the three Divine Persons are named together, and at the names of Jesus, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the saint in whose honor the Mass is being celebrated. This is a basic gesture of respect for the persons being named.

A profound bow at the waist is an expression of profound reverence. We make a profound bow, toward the altar, during the *Incarnatus* when we are reciting the Creed ("and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man"). This posture expresses our shared acknowledgement



of the central Christian belief in the Incarnation – the fact that God loved his people so much that he became a human being and dwelt among us.

Next, in the prayer of the faithful, we as a community pray to God on behalf of the world. We lift up the world to be transformed by his love. This is our response to the love that God has poured upon us. Each one of us should express our particular prayer intentions in our own heart.

## DO THE PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

### AFTER THE PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL:

In the Offertory, we as a community present our offerings to God – the gifts of bread, wine, and our contributions to support the church.

#### Collection:

We make a sacrificial gift from our own personal resources.

From what God has given to us, we give back the first fruits to God.

We are helping the mission of the Church and serving the needs of the poor.

This helps us to let go of our greed and selfishness, and express solidarity for the good of others.

We offer ourselves to God, along with the bread and wine as they are placed on the altar. We offer our joys, our pain, and our sufferings, so that we, too, may be sanctified and transformed to reflect Christ more clearly.

Making offerings to the Lord opens us to receiving from the Lord.

This is where you choose to place your heart on the altar, so that when the priest lifts his hands, your response will be true that you have lifted your heart up to the Lord.

The priest prays over the gifts of bread and wine, asking the Lord to bless the offerings which we have brought to the altar – our spiritual sacrifices along with the bread and wine.

#### Mixing of Water and Wine:

- Where did this come from? At the time of Christ, the wine was so strong and heavy, they cut it with water to drink it.
- Symbolic meaning for us: The wine represents Christ; the water represents us.

- It symbolizes the joining of humanity and divinity. Christ becomes one with us. His sacrifice becomes ours.
- We recall that blood and water flowed from the side of Christ as he hung upon the Cross.
- The priest says in silence, "By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity."

The priest bows profoundly, asking the Lord to accept us and our sacrifice. He then washes his hands, asking the Lord to forgive any sins he may have committed, using words from Psalm 51. He says, "Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."

This action should be a reminder to the people, that we must all purify our hearts before we come forward to receive Communion.

The priest invites the people as members of the common priesthood to pray that this sacrifice may be acceptable to the Lord. The altar contains the sacrifice of the priest, the sacrifices of the people, and the sacrifice of Christ himself – all to be offered to the Father.

## DO THE ACTIONS OF OFFERTORY, RECEIVING GIFTS, INCENSE, PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

### BEFORE THE PREFACE:

The word "Eucharist" comes from a Greek word which means "thanksgiving." In the Eucharist, we are giving thanks to God the Father for his saving action through Jesus Christ.

After the Preface is a prayer that is usually sung, called the "Holy, Holy, Holy," or the *Sanctus*. When the priest introduces the *Sanctus*, notice that he mentions the angels in Heaven.

At this point in the Mass, we acknowledge that, in the Eucharist, we are one with God and with our fellow members of the Mystical Body of Christ:

- Those on earth
- Those in purgatory
- The angels and saints in heaven

The *Sanctus* is found twice in the Bible, in Isaiah chapter 6, and in Revelation chapter 4. In both places it is a prayer of the angels in Heaven worshipping before God's throne.

So, when we pray or sing it, this prayer shows the union of Heaven and earth that takes place in every Mass.

The posture of kneeling is an outward sign of an inner attitude of humility, supplication, and gratitude to God. Kneeling on both knees is an expression of reverence for Jesus Christ who is truly present in the Eucharistic species.

St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow "(Phil 2:10).

#### *Epiclesis:*

Toward the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest prays a prayer called the *Epiclesis*. In this moment the priest extends his hands over the gifts and asks God the Father to send his Holy Spirit on the bread and wine, to sanctify them so that by his power they may become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, and so that those who take part in the Eucharist may become one body and one spirit.

The priest does this only one time in the Mass – with both hands outstretched over the elements.

It shows our belief in the active role of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist.

Then, the central part of the Eucharistic Prayer is the consecration:

The bread and wine are actually transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ.

The Mass is more than just a memorial of a past event of the Last Supper. It's more than just a community meal of fellowship.

It's also a participation in the sacrificial Death and the Resurrection of Christ. In the Eucharist, we participate in and apply the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to our needs today.

The Great Amen at the conclusion of the Eucharistic prayer is the moment when we, as a community, offer our assent to the prayer and action that have just taken place.

When you say "Amen," you are making the entire prayer your own. You are affirming, completing, and signifying your consent to the entire prayer. "Amen," a Hebrew word, means "truly", "certainly." It's your faith statement.

## DO THE PREFACE AND EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

### AFTER THE GREAT AMEN:

When people asked Jesus how to pray, he taught them the Our Father. The Lord's Prayer is the beginning of what we call the Communion Rite. Because this prayer has a line which says, "Give us this day our daily bread," it has a spiritual connection to the Eucharist.

In most of the Mass, our prayers are addressed to God the Father. However, after the Our Father, and until the time we receive Communion, our prayers in the Mass are directed specifically to Jesus, rather than to God the Father.

Before the distribution of Holy Communion, we make a gesture of communion with one another in the Sign of Peace. This action expresses the fact that we pray for peace in one another, and we find peace in one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

It recalls the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Mt 5:23-24).

After the Sign of Peace comes the Fraction Rite, when the priest breaks the bread, which reminds us of what Jesus did in the Passover ritual at the Last Supper. (He took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples.)

The priest breaks off a small piece of the host and drops it into the chalice of the Blood of Christ.

You might not always notice this action, but it has a fascinating historical background. In the Early Church, when the bishop would celebrate the Mass in the main city, and the priests would celebrate Masses in the

surrounding towns and villages, they had a beautiful practice. They would break off a little bit of the Eucharist from the bishop's Mass, and bring it to the Masses in the surrounding towns, and drop it into the chalice there. It was an expression of unity of faith among those Catholics, their pastors, and their local bishop.

Next, we all sing or pray together the Lamb of God. Jesus is the Lamb of God, and we ask him to have mercy on us.

Then the priest raises the Body and Blood of Christ and proclaims the words of John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God."

We all respond with words that are similar to those of the Roman centurion in Matthew 8:8, when he tells Jesus, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof, but only say the word and my servant will be healed."

Here we are opening ourselves up to the great healing power of Christ in the Eucharist.

In the Communion Procession, when we walk up together toward the altar, it reminds us that we are all pilgrims, like the ancient people of Israel, on a journey together toward the promised land of Heaven. As we walk together, we should be lovingly conscious of our brothers and sisters in Christ who accompany us on this shared pilgrimage to God. We belong to the same Body of Christ, and we are committed to each other.

When we receive the Eucharist, it is an expression of our communion with God and our communion with one another.

When the minister holds up the Eucharist and says, "The Body of Christ," what does your response of "Amen" mean?  
You are saying, "truly, yes, I believe that this I am receiving is the real presence of the Body and Blood of Christ."

After Holy Communion is distributed, the priest or deacon purifies the Communion vessels. This is not a simple action of washing the dishes. The chalices and ciboriums must be treated with reverence and care, because Christ is fully present in every drop and crumb.

PRAY THE OUR FATHER

## BEFORE THE DISMISSAL:

After receiving Holy Communion, give thanks to God in your heart, for having received this great gift, and for anything else in your life you are grateful for.

You might ask yourself, "How can I make my life better reflect the presence of Christ that I have just received?"

There's a challenge involved in receiving the Eucharist. We receive the presence of Christ. Then it is up to us to bring his presence to the world, to our neighbors, and to our society.

Our faith allows us to see Jesus in the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist.

In the same way, our faith challenges us to see Jesus in the faces of the people we meet every day.

St. John Chrysostom said, "If you cannot find Christ in the beggar at the church door, you will not find Him in the chalice."

The priest offers the final blessing over the people, then comes the dismissal of the congregation. In the words of the dismissal, we are all commissioned to bring Christ's presence with us as we go out from the church.

As we go out the door of the church, we make the Sign of the Cross with holy water, as a reminder of our baptismal vocation to carry Christ's Gospel into the world. We go forth as a community renewed in Christ, ready to put our faith into action by the way we live and work.

If you would like to get a copy of these notes, you can find them on the website of our diocese, which is [sanangelodiocese.org](http://sanangelodiocese.org).

There you can look under Eucharistic Revival, and this resource will be there.

Thank you very much for participating.