

Four-Minute Reflections on the Mass

Reflection 8: The Liturgy of the Eucharist, Part II

At the close of the previous talk, we spoke briefly about the presentation of the bread and wine and our monetary gifts for the poor and the Church. The priest has received them, and as the bread and wine are arranged on the altar, we can mentally place ourselves there as well, as an expression of our willingness to give ourselves to God.

The rich symbolism of the Mass continues. The prayers are beautiful and the realities they convey, the Sacred Mysteries, are profound. As part of our full, active participation in the Mass, we continue to pay close attention to the prayers and actions unfolding, and we respond wholeheartedly, entering into the sacred dialog and action.

The gifts are now on the altar. At his option, the priest may incense the gifts, the cross and then the altar itself. When this occurs, the deacon or another minister would, in turn incense the priest, any concelebrating clergy, and the congregation. The incensing signifies the prayerful raising up of our offering of the gifts, our prayers, and ourselves to God.

Just before the prayer over the gifts begins, we may notice that the priest or deacon pours a small amount of water into the wine, saying inaudibly *“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 mixing of water and wine is an ancient liturgical practice. It can represent the mingling of the divine and human natures in Christ. It can also represent the union of Christ with the faithful.

The Prayer over the Gifts begins. Notice the use of the personal pronoun we, which signifies the gifts represent all of us. The priest raises the Host and says: *“Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you; fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life.”* Then, as the priest raises the chalice, the prayer is repeated for the wine which will *“become our spiritual drink.”*

This part of the prayer over the gifts affirms our dependence on God. We offer back to God some of what he has given us and give praise to God for all His gifts. The priest then says, *“Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the Almighty Father.”* We then respond, *“May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands, for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.”*

We continue actively in the sacred dialog as the Mass continues to unfold. When the Prayer over the Gifts has been completed, the priest washes his hands in further preparation, saying, inaudibly *“Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me of my sin.”* The washing of the priest’s hands is a symbolic action expressing the celebrant’s need for inward purification. Then, the Mass moves to the richness of the Eucharistic Prayer.

When we pay attention to the flow and progression of the Mass, listen to, participate in, and respond to the Mass prayers, the beauty and power of the liturgy becomes increasingly clear. We are not disconnected spectators on the sidelines. Rather, we are each an important, integral part of the proceedings.