

## **Four-Minute Reflections on the Mass**

### **Reflection 1: Introduction**

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Have you ever wondered why we celebrate Mass the way we do? Why do we have a procession at the start of Mass? Why do we make the sign of the cross? Why do we sometimes kneel, while at other times we stand? Why are we encouraged to join in the singing? Questions such as these are often on the minds of every Catholic who comes to Mass. We look for answers to questions such as these to help us not only to become better-informed Catholics but, more importantly, to help us enter more fully into our Eucharistic celebration. As the Second Vatican Council emphasized, “Full, conscious, active participation by all the people” is the “aim to be considered before all else.”

At the request of Bishop Wester each parish in the diocese has been asked to present a series of short talks on the structure of the Mass. These Four-Minute Reflections, following the Prayer after Communion, will hopefully help us, as the assembly, come to a better understanding of the Mass, and enable us to participate more fully, consciously and actively. They will not be sermons, but carefully prepared talks that over time will cover the key aspects of the Mass. Imagine a “class about the Mass” without ever leaving the comfort of your pew!

The purpose of these reflections will not be to overwhelm us with a lot of detail, but rather to increase our awareness of how various parts of the Mass work together to heighten a sense of unity as we are drawn into the sacred mystery and then sent forth to carry on Christ’s mission in the world. We will see how the introductory rites - the procession, the singing and prayers - prepare us to listen attentively to the word of God so that we may enter more joyfully and gratefully into the Liturgy of the Eucharist

and Communion. Then, renewed by word and sacrament, we will better appreciate the significance of the prayers, blessings and dismissal that come at the conclusion of Mass.

You can do a lot of things in four minutes: drive four miles, write an email, heat up your dinner, or listen to a song. We believe that these Four-Minute Reflections will provide a better understanding of the symbols, gestures, and rites that are sometimes not understood or taken for granted at Mass thus enabling us to share more deeply in the mystery of this great sacrament. Over the course of the liturgical year, we will strive to shed some light on practices that are ever ancient and yet, ever new. We invite you to listen attentively to what is being presented. And remember: each reflection will only take four minutes.

## Four-Minute Reflections on the Mass

### Reflection 2: Preparation for Mass

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There is an old saying that goes: “We receive what we give.” To receive something good, we have to give, whether it is acquiring an education, doing well in a job, or even learning to play golf.

This applies with equal force when it comes to the Mass - we receive what we give. Sometimes we may hear people complain, “I don’t get anything out of Mass.” Such a statement begs the question: “How much did you give?” And I don’t mean the collection plate. Rather: how much did you give in preparing for Mass? Did we hurry in at the last minute, just as the processional was starting, with our hearts and minds still caught up in the worries and concerns we woke up with? Or did we take time to prepare for Mass? How much did we give in order to receive?

Most of us can recall a time in our lives when we might have spent hours preparing for a big date. Why? Because we knew that to receive the attention, the love, and affection of another person, we had to give of ourselves; and that by doing so, we would receive. At Mass we meet someone in sacramental form whose attractiveness goes beyond all other experience: this is Christ the Lord. But to receive such a blessing, we must give of ourselves in order to receive. Just like the big date, we must prepare.

Our preparation should begin long before the start of Mass: ideally, during the days leading up to Sunday Mass. We might begin by reading the scriptures for that Sunday, followed by a rosary. Fasting for at least one hour before attending Mass is also a helpful preparation. Above all, we should strive to be at peace with one another, for as Jesus said, “If

you bring your gift to the altar and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift at the altar, go first to be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift." (*Matthew 5:23*)

We can prepare for Mass by forgiving and being reconciled with others. The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation can work wonders in bringing peace to an otherwise troubled conscience.

Sometimes our preparation for Mass can be jeopardized by arriving late, hurrying to find a place to park, and then searching for an inconspicuous place to sit ... certainly never the front pew! Church tradition can help us to slow down and to enter with a worshiping attitude. Pause at the entrance of the church and dip your fingers in the holy water, reflecting for a brief moment on the significance of what you are doing. Perhaps before Mass begins stop to light a votive candle and offer a short prayer. Enter the church slowly and reverently, pausing to genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament or to make a profound bow before the altar. If possible, kneel for a few minutes to offer prayers or to reflect on a special intention for that Mass.

The sacrifice of the Mass is the most important event that happens every Sunday. But to receive it well, we must be willing to give. And the more we give, the more we will receive.

## **Four-Minute Reflections on the Mass**

### **Reflection 3: The Introductory Rites, Part I**

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The preparation that we began before Mass continues as we gather as the Church. The Introductory Rites help us to discover a unity that is already ours, but still waiting to be realized by our participation. The Entrance Procession, Veneration of the Altar, the Greeting, the Penitential Rite, the Kyrie, the Gloria, and the Collect - all serve to prepare us for celebration. They help to establish a sense of unity, so that we might hear the Word of God and celebrate the Liturgy of the Eucharist joyfully.

One of the signs of that unity is our common bodily posture - when Mass begins we all stand. Standing from the beginning of the Entrance Song through the Collect signifies our sense of preparation for the whole liturgy. But standing is not the only symbolic gesture we experience at the beginning of Mass. There is movement as well, starting with the Entrance Procession. The procession serves more than a functional purpose of getting the priest and other ministers to their proper place in the sanctuary. It serves a symbolic purpose as well, for it reminds us that we are the People of God, a pilgrim people, on a journey to the Kingdom, with this Mass being an important part of that journey.

Because this journey is a joyful one, we add our voices to the Entrance Song, even though we may protest that we cannot sing. The Entrance Song is more than just “walking music;” it opens the celebration and introduces us to the themes of the liturgy. It reminds us that liturgy is a common action - a communal act of prayer, not a private act - that calls us to move beyond the limits of our own world and enter something larger.

A further sign of our preparedness occurs when the priest and other ministers reach the altar. Now we witness a sign that unites us not only to each other, but to our ancient past

- the Veneration of the Altar. Arriving at the table of the Lord, the priest and deacon venerate the altar with a reverent kiss, for it is on this table that ordinary bread and wine will become the Body and Blood of Christ. In fact, the altar represents Christ, who is the priest, the victim, and the sacrifice.

The symbolism of being one people of God continues as we join with the priest in making the sign of the cross. This symbolic gesture, dating from at least the second century, signifies the presence of the Lord and is a traditional prelude to prayer. Romano Guardini, a priest and author wrote: "It is the holiest of all signs. When we cross ourselves, let it be with a real sign of the cross. Instead of a small cramped gesture that gives no notion of its meaning, let us make a large, unhurried sign, from forehead to breast, from shoulder to shoulder, consciously feeling how it includes the whole of us at once."

The greeting by the celebrant, "*The Lord be with you,*" which follows the sign of the cross, is not intended as a friendly "good morning." Rather it is more like a wish that those assembled will experience the presence and power of the Lord in the community they have formed. Our response, "*And With Your Spirit,*" is more than a simple expression of good will; it is a reminder that our celebrant has received the Spirit of God in ordination and is, therefore, a special "servant of Christ" (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 4:1). The greeting announces that the Lord is here in this place. It indicates that what we do here is different from our day-to-day activity. It affirms that we have gathered in the name of Christ to offer praise and thanksgiving as his body. The Greeting and our

response express “the mystery of the Church gathered together.”

## Four-Minute Reflections on the Mass

### Reflection 4: The Introductory Rites, Part II

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One of the most ancient Church documents - the Didache [*di-dah-kay*] - states that on the Lord's Day, people are to come together to give thanks "after first confessing their sins." We continue this ancient practice at the start of Mass by what is called, the "Act of Penitence." This act takes place at the beginning of Mass for good reason: Matthew records Christ's command that we be reconciled with God and one another before offering our sacrifice at the altar. By proclaiming our sinfulness before a merciful and loving God, we show our continuing need for conversion, healing, and reconciliation.

The Penitential Rite, as it is sometimes called, has a four-part structure. First, we are invited to reflect for a few moments in silence on our sinfulness. This is followed by a common proclamation, the Confiteor, that all are sinners before God. Recently restored to the rite are the words, "*through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.*" The priest concludes the rite by asking for forgiveness for all present. Although the rite concludes with the priest's absolution, it does not take the place of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

On some occasions, especially during the Easter Season, the Penitential Rite may be replaced by what is called, the "Rite of Sprinkling." This sprinkling of the people with holy water is a reminder and renewal of our baptism and harks back to a popular eighth-century monastic practice. Three different prayers are given for the blessing of the water to be used in the sprinkling. The third, used during the Easter season, highlights the Paschal Mystery and calls to mind Christ's resurrection, which lies at the heart of all reconciliation.

After the act of penitence, we acclaim the Lord and implore his mercy in the words:

*“Lord, have mercy.”* Addressed to Christ, this acclamation may take the form of *“Kyrie, eleison”* (Lord, have mercy), *“Christe, eleison”* (Christ, have mercy), *“Kyrie, eleison”* (Lord, have mercy). It is usually sung in dialogue by the entire assembly with the choir or cantor. Short verses, also addressed to Christ, may be inserted into the acclamation.

The Penitential Rite continues with the Gloria, which is sometimes called “the angelic hymn.” Echoing the words of the angels at Bethlehem, this hymn-anthem has a beautiful Trinitarian characteristic. The text mentions all three persons of the Trinity. The Gloria is preferably sung on Sundays outside Advent and Lent, as well as at other solemn celebrations.

Once the Gloria ends, we hear, *“Let us pray,”* signaling that the Collect follows. The name given this prayer - the Collect - describes its purpose. It is intended to “gather together” the intentions of the faithful. The Collect has the same structure as other prayers during the Mass - an address, a petition, and a conclusion. The priest invites the people to pray, and a brief silence is shared, thereby allowing those present to be aware of God’s presence and to call to mind their intentions. The prayer is addressed to God the Father; the petition is general since it sums up the prayers of those present; and the conclusion is through Jesus Christ.

## Four-Minute Reflections on the Mass

### Reflection 5: The Liturgy of the Word, Part I

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In his writings on the Eucharist, Saint Pope John Paul II often spoke of two tables that are involved in the celebration of Mass – the Table of the Word of God, where the scriptures are broken open for us, and the Table of the Bread of the Lord, on which the bread and wine are consecrated. It is from the Table of the Word of God that we receive the life-giving Word of God that sparks a burning hunger for Christ and prepares us to receive the life-giving Body and Blood of Christ.

The life-giving Word comes to us in readings from the Old and New Testaments, from the responsorial psalm, and from the gospel. The first reading is almost always from the Old Testament, a sign that our roots are firmly planted in the Jewish tradition where the reading of the Law and the Prophets was a part of the synagogue service. Only during the Easter Season does this change, for then the first reading is from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. The Old Testament reading is usually chosen to prepare for the theme of the gospel to be read that day.

The person who proclaims the Old Testament reading is called *a lector* or reader, and the book used for the reading is called *the lectionary*. We sit while the lector proclaims the reading from the *ambo*, or lectern, listening attentively until we hear the lector say: “*The Word of the Lord,*” to which we respond, “*Thanks be to God,*” signifying our assent to what has been read.

Our connection to the ancient form of worship in the Jewish synagogue continues when next we sing (or recite) together a responsorial psalm. Ideally, the psalm is led by a

*cantor* who sings the verse, while we sing the response. In the absence of a cantor, the psalm

may be recited, although singing is preferred. Singing the psalm is a wonderful way of praying. The more familiar we are with these ancient texts, the more aware we become of the Word of God speaking to us through them.

The Word of God nourishes us as well in the second reading, taken from the New Testament. During certain seasons - Christmas, for example - the second reading may correspond with the mystery being celebrated. During other times of the liturgical year, the second reading may have no direct connection to the gospel but still can have great meaning, if we listen attentively.

Once the lector or reader finishes the second reading, we prepare to welcome the Lord who is about to speak the good news expressed in the Sunday Gospel. The *Alleluia* is once again grounded in Jewish tradition, for "Hallelujah," meaning, "Praise Yahweh" was used at the beginning and end of psalms intended for use in the Temple.

The *Alleluia* is used throughout the liturgical year, except during Lent when it is replaced with an equivalent acclamation of praise. It is always sung, never recited, by everyone standing. The deacon (or the priest when there is no deacon present) elevates *the Book of the Gospels* and prepares to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel.

Before the gospel is proclaimed from the ambo, it is shown further marks of respect by the signing of the cross on the text. We make the sign of the cross on our forehead, mouth and heart, signifying a readiness to open our minds to the word, to confess it with our mouths, and to safeguard it in our hearts. At the end of the reading of the Gospel, the deacon or priest reverences the text by a kiss. When the bishop is present this sign of reverence is reserved for him. These visual signs tell us that the

Gospel is a special part of God's word to be proclaimed and broken open for us at the Table of the Word of God.

## Four-Minute Reflections on the Mass

### Reflection 6: The Liturgy of the Word, Part II

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Having proclaimed the Gospel, the priest or, in some cases, the deacon, takes up the important task of breaking open i.e. applying the Scriptures we have just heard. The homily is an integral part of the liturgy and “may not be omitted without a grave reason.” It is through the homily that the mysteries of faith and the guiding principles of Christian life are shared. A good homily is faithful both to the mystery being celebrated and the needs of the listeners. It should lead those present to celebrate the Eucharist actively. The best homilies are the result of prayerful meditation on the texts, careful selection of ideas and images, and a joyful presentation that is neither too long, nor too short. It is concluded with a moment of shared silence during which all present may reflect on what they have heard.

This brief sharing of silent reflection prepares us for the sincere response that follows, the Profession of Faith, or Creed. By this profession we agree to what we have heard in the homily and will experience in the Eucharist. This response of faith by the community of believers begins with the words, “I believe” in Latin, *Credo*, whose root words mean to give your heart to something. The Creed is more than an intellectual assent to the mysteries of the faith expressed by Church councils many centuries ago; it is also our deepest expression of faith in the mystery of which we are a part. The Creed may be sung or recited by the priest standing together with the people. At the words, “*and by the Holy Spirit ... and became man...*” we make a profound bow; at the Solemnities of the Annunciation and Nativity of the Lord we genuflect. Either the Nicene or the Apostles’ Creed may be used.

Our response to the Word of God is further expressed in the Prayers of the Faithful. These prayers have their roots in the ancient Jewish synagogue service when a series of blessings for individuals and universal needs were expressed. It is likely that Jesus joined in

these prayers. They became a fixed part of the Mass during the mid-second century. They are spoken of as “Universal Prayers” or “General Intercessions” since they go beyond the needs of the local community.

The Prayers of the Faithful begin with the celebrant addressing the people and relating the prayers to the particular mystery being celebrated or some particular aspect of the Scriptures. The deacon (or in his absence another minister) announces a series of intentions to which the people respond. After a brief moment of silence, the celebrant summarizes the intentions and asks God to look favorably upon the prayers that have been expressed. The people stand during the presentation of the intentions and respond at the end, “*Amen.*”

Since the Church is both local and universal, the intentions usually include prayers for the needs of the Church, for public authorities, for the salvation of the world, for those oppressed by any need, and for the needs of the local community. The presentation of the intercessions is traditionally given to the deacon who by his particular ministry is focused upon the sick, the poor and those in need. The dead may also be included in the Prayers of the Faithful.

## **Four-Minute Reflections on the Mass**

### **Reflection 7: The Liturgy of the Eucharist, Part I**

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The first major part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word, with the Prayers of the Faithful is completed. After the Introductory Rites, we have been fed by the rich fare of the Scriptures, carefully selected by the Church for each Mass, first from the Lectionary, then from the Book of Gospels. The meaning of the readings and the application of their message in our lives have been expanded for us in the homily.

Now we enter the second major part of the Mass – the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Here we experience two ancient traditions - the Hebrew tradition of sacrifice offered to God, and the meal, or breaking of bread, which Jesus left as his memorial. We find that these two elements are woven together in the beautiful actions and prayers of the Eucharist. Today we will focus on preparations for the Eucharistic celebration and presentation of the gifts to be offered in that celebration.

Up to this point, all of the actions at the Mass have taken place away from the altar, either at the priest's chair or at the ambo. Everything now centers on the altar where the Eucharistic Sacrifice takes place. The altar is carefully prepared by the priest or deacon. We may recall the veneration of the altar, by a kiss, at the beginning of Mass. The care with which the altar is now prepared conveys appropriate reverence, indicating the importance of the actions about to occur. We see special linens: the corporal, upon which the Sacred Host and chalice are placed during the celebration of Mass, and a purificator used by the priest to purify his fingers, the chalice and paten after Holy Communion. We also see the Missal which is the priest's book of Mass prayers, and a cruet of water all carefully arranged in preparation for the presentation of the gifts. In parallel, it is now that we bring into clear focus our personal preparation

– to link ourselves to Christ’s sacrifice which is about to unfold and to the Eucharistic meal.

A key action is the procession, when members of the assembly bring the gifts of bread and wine to the altar, led by an altar server carrying a processional crucifix. These individuals represent all in the assembly, and their action in the procession calls all of us to prepare ourselves for the sacred celebration. This is very much a communal action. Its communal aspect is also reflected in the accompanying music. As the procession moves toward the altar, we all advance our hearts toward the Lord. We express our willingness to give of ourselves to God, and our monetary gifts presented along with the bread and wine acknowledge that everything we have is a gift from God. From our hearts, we offer our very selves to God at this time.

Once the gifts have been placed on the altar, the priest begins the prayers by blessing and praising God, acknowledging that we have received from God’s goodness the gifts we offer to him. As he lifts the bread and then the chalice, the priest prays according to a formula modeled on a Jewish table prayer offered by the father of the family, praising God as the creator of the world. He reminds us that the gifts of bread and wine will become for us the bread of life and our spiritual drink. We all respond by saying, *“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 are not passive observers or mere spectators at this celebration. Rather, each of us is an integral part of the action. We are invited to full, conscious and active participation in the celebration - at this point and throughout the Mass.

## Four-Minute Reflections on the Mass

### Reflection 8: The Liturgy of the Eucharist, Part II

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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.

## Four-Minute Reflections on the Mass

### Reflection 9: The Eucharistic Prayer, Part I

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The Mass is overflowing with spiritual power in many elements and the Eucharistic Prayer along with Communion is the center and summit of the entire celebration. There are four principal Eucharistic Prayers and what happens during these prayers is truly spectacular. It is the pre-eminent liturgical prayer of the Church. It is a single liturgical act, consisting of several parts woven together as a beautifully crafted masterpiece. In each part, we are called to fully attentive listening, responding, singing and praying; encountering the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as active participants in these proceedings. As we contemplate what is really happening at Mass, the wisdom of the Church's insistence on our participation at Mass every weekend becomes more and more clear.

Today's reflection is the first of three on the structure, elements and actions of this spiritual powerhouse, the Eucharistic Prayer. We will explore the first few parts – the Preface, the Sanctus and the Eucharistic Prayer.

The Eucharistic Prayer begins with a familiar three-part dialog between the priest and the congregation, where he draws us into this next phase of the celebration. The priest begins by, saying, *"The Lord be with you."* We respond, *"And with your spirit."* Then, lifting his hands, he says *"Lift up your hearts,"* to which we reply, *"We lift them up to the Lord."* With hands extended widely, he asks us to express our praise and gratitude by, saying, *"Let us give thanks to the Lord our God."* And we respond, *"It is right and just."* In this dialogue we are made conscious of our close union with the presiding priest who speaks in the name of all.

The priest then begins the Preface, which means, “proclamation”. The Preface proclaims the wonderful actions of God, both throughout history and in our lives, and offers thanks to God for all these blessings. The Preface is a variable prayer, with over eighty choices for different feast days, liturgical seasons, votive Masses and special occasions.

The Preface concludes with the Sanctus in which the whole assembly joins the song of the angels in giving praise to God in heaven. The text is inspired by the vision in the Old Testament book of the prophet Isaiah. There he recounts seeing the Lord seated on a lofty throne, with Seraphim, each with six wings, stationed above and crying to one another “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. All the earth is filled with his glory.” At every Mass, we connect with the ongoing heavenly liturgy, joining in this magnificent thundering of praise for God. The verse “blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”, is the acclamation used by the people to greet Christ at his solemn entrance into Jerusalem. The dialogue with the people and the “Holy, Holy” should ordinarily be sung.

The celebration advances to the Epiclesis, which is the calling down of the Holy Spirit. It is a petition asking that the Father send the Holy Spirit to “make holy” or “sanctify” the gifts on the altar so that they may become the Body and Blood of the Lord. To sanctify is a role properly attributed to the Holy Spirit who completes and brings to fullness the work of the Father and the Son. As the priest makes this petition, we see him extend his hands over the gifts of bread and wine in the ancient gesture signifying the giving of the Holy Spirit so that the gifts are sanctified.

## **Four-Minute Reflections on the Mass**

### **Reflection 10: The Eucharistic Prayer, Part II**

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Our earlier talk (the first of three discussing the overall Eucharistic Prayer) brought us to the invocation of the Holy Spirit to sanctify or make holy the gifts on the altar, so that they may become the Body and Blood of the Lord.

This second part dovetails with the first. Just as the Eucharistic Prayer is part of a continuous action extending from the preparation of the gifts to Holy Communion, so are the words of institution part of the Eucharistic Prayer. They are an account of key events at the Last Supper, including the words used by Jesus to institute this rite, commanding that it be done perpetually by the Church in his memory, not just merely recalling it but re-presenting it.

The whole Eucharistic Prayer relates to the consecration, but the words of institution in particular are seen as actually bringing about the change in the gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. We should listen intently with our ears, our minds and our hearts as these sacred actions unfold, noting the gestures of the priest at this time and the deliberation with which he speaks and acts. At this point, the priest is addressing himself primarily to God the Father. He is not doing something solely for the people to see and hear, but even more-so that the Father may see and hear this sacred action. Thus, the holy Sacrifice of Himself, which Christ instituted during the Last Supper, is affected and re-presented to the Father. The priest is acting in the person of Christ. Jesus is the victim and the priest.

The priest retells what Jesus said and did at the Last Supper, not just in words, but also in gestures - lifting the bread, raising his eyes to heaven, bowing over the gifts.

The

priest says the words of Christ over the bread, which the people have presented for this celebration, the very words he said to the apostles at the Last Supper *“Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my body, which will be given up for you.”* Without speaking, he presents or shows the host to the people for all to see and adore, then genuflects in adoration. This action may occur in silence or bells may be briefly rung.

The prayer and gestures are then repeated with the wine. The words are familiar, *“Take this, all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me.”*

By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Body and Blood of Christ are now on the altar, but still under the appearance of bread and wine. This change in substance is referred to by the Church as *“transubstantiation.”* The elements still taste like bread and wine, but Faith tells us that Christ is truly present. We are invited to worthily receive the body and blood of Christ for our spiritual nourishment and to deepen our union with God.

The priest then draws us directly into the action as he sings the *“Mystery of Faith”* referring to the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s death, resurrection and presence among his people, inviting our acclamation. With a sense of the profound nature of what has unfolded on our behalf, the priest’s invitation hopefully summons a heartfelt response sung by the entire assembly. We sing one of three responses addressed to Christ, for example: *“When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your death, O Lord, until*

*you come again"* thereby affirming our belief that the whole mystery of the Risen Christ is present and active in the celebration.

## Four-Minute Reflections on the Mass

### Reflection 11: The Eucharistic Prayer, Part III

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We have explored some of the key elements of the Eucharistic Prayer, closing our last reflection with affirmation of our belief that the whole Risen Christ is present and active in the celebration. Today's presentation will complete our discussion of the Eucharistic Prayer, looking at some additional aspects of it.

Earlier in the liturgy, we proclaimed the "*Mystery of Faith*" in the Memorial Acclamation. We are now reminded in the Anamnesis, which is a prayer of remembrance whereby the Church calls to mind the Lord's passion, resurrection and ascension into heaven that the Church is acting in memory of the Lord and obeying his specific command to: "*Do this in memory of me.*" In this prayer, the assembly affirms its devotion to that command in its gathering to celebrate, remember and proclaim Christ's Paschal Mystery.

Earlier, when the gifts were presented, the priest asked the Lord to accept these gifts of bread and wine. Now that the consecration of the gifts has taken place, the Body and Blood of Christ are what we offer to God. The Church and the assembly offer the Spotless Victim to the Father. However, the Church also intends that the faithful actively offer not only Christ, but also offer ourselves, our lives, our efforts to become more like Christ, and our efforts as a community of believers to serve each other as Christ once served. In doing so, we surrender ourselves, through Christ, to more complete union with the Father and with each another.

We recall presenting intercessions to God earlier in the Mass during the Prayer of the Faithful. Similarly, petitions are also embedded within the Eucharistic Prayer.

These petitions make it clear that we celebrate the Mass in communion with the entire Church in heaven and on earth, and that the offering is for the Church and all its members, living and deceased. The Intercessions are usually divided into three parts: for living Christians, for the dead, and in relation to the saints in heaven.

For the living, our prayers include those whom the Holy Spirit has set as shepherds over the Church - the pope and our bishop. We pray for the entire Church spread across the globe and for ourselves as a local community of believers. We also pray for those who have died in the peace of Christ, so that on the basis of the communion among all of us as believers, our petitions for spiritual help may bring comforting hope for the faithful departed. Finally, we invoke the assistance of all those who are now in heaven. We also ask God for some share in their fellowship and express our desire to share with them the heavenly inheritance.

All the Eucharistic Prayers end with a doxology, which is a song of praise to God. It is concise, familiar and Trinitarian; *“Through him (that is, Christ), and with him, and in him, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, forever and ever.”*

The final response is simple, yet deep - the Great Amen - which is both an assent and a conclusion. Our offering, which is Christ's offering on the cross, calls for a resounding, unanimous and enthusiastic, *“Amen.”* St. Augustine said, *“Amen is the people's signature.”* Indeed, the *“Amen”* is the people's ascent as they respond affirmatively to the Eucharistic Prayer prayed by the priest on their behalf. The Great Amen is typically sung, and possibly repeated a number of times, in a joyous manner to emphasize our agreement to all that the Eucharistic Prayer says and does. Recognizing

the beauty and power of this celebration, let us put our spiritual signature on these holy proceedings with our hearty, "Amen."

## Four-Minute Reflections on the Mass

### Reflection 12: The Communion Rite, Part I

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The Liturgy of the Eucharist might be compared to a great symphony, with one movement leading harmoniously to the next, rising and falling, only to rise again to a new level. In the Eucharistic Prayer we reach a spiritual crescendo as the words of consecration are spoken, followed by the Great Amen as we prepare to receive Communion - the Body and Blood of Christ. The transition to the next high point of the Mass is the Lord's Prayer, and it is fitting that it should be a part of our liturgical worship since it is the prayer Jesus gave us.

The petitions of this model Christian prayer are closely linked to the Eucharistic Prayer - asking for bread and forgiveness. We ask for the bread of the Eucharist as well as for bread to satisfy our daily needs, both physical and spiritual. And we ask to be reconciled with one another so that we might share our bread worthily at the Table of the Lord. The Lord's Prayer helps us look forward to Communion where we will receive the Bread of Life.

After the final petition of the Lord's Prayer, the priest offers a petition for perfect peace. This additional request is referred to as the "embolism" from the Greek meaning an "insertion" and acts as a transition to the doxology - "*for the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours ...*" proclaimed and sung, if possible, by all the faithful. These words were probably added at an early date so that the Lord's Prayer would end on a positive note, rather than "deliver us from evil."

In recent years, different postures for praying the Lord's Prayer have appeared - some prefer to pray with hands raised in what has traditionally been called the *orans* or praying position, harking back to early depictions in the catacombs at Rome. Some

prefer to hold hands, symbolizing unity, while others prefer to keep a respectful distance, perhaps praying with hands folded and eyes closed. None of these ways of praying is either recommended or forbidden by the instructions for the Mass.

The reconciliation and unity that we ask for in the Lord's Prayer find further expression in the Rite of Peace or what has been traditionally called, "the kiss of peace." This rite, which the priest initiates with the words, "*Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your apostles ...*" has over the centuries been placed at different points in the liturgy. It is closely linked to the reception of the Eucharist and has always been viewed as a sign of mutual love required by Christ.

After the priest extends the sign of peace to those assembled and the words "*And with your spirit*" are heard, the deacon or, in his absence, the priest, invites everyone to share the sign of peace with one another. But it must be kept in mind that the Rite of Peace is a sign, a sign that need not be exhausted by trying to give this greeting to everyone or even a great number of those present. The celebrant must be especially mindful of this limitation, since a more elaborate or extended exchange of peace can become a distraction. It is best to limit the sign only to those who are nearest. Except on special occasions, such as a wedding or a funeral, the priest should remain within the sanctuary so he does not disrupt the celebration.

The exchange of Christ's peace is not of value if we see it as simply a "Hello" to people we know and care about. It is more than that; it continues our preparation for Communion by reminding us that we desire for others the perfect peace that Christ promised us. This simple gesture is truly a complex sign - a greeting, a prayer, and a reminder that we are

always seeking for the unity that we are about to experience when we receive Christ's Body and Blood. Indeed, the sign of peace symbolizes that just as Christ gave himself for us, so too I desire to give my life for you.

## Four-Minute Reflections on the Mass

### Reflection 13: The Communion Rite, Part II

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The Liturgy of the Mass is rich with signs of communion with Christ and each other. One ancient sign of unity that comes right after the sign of peace is “the breaking of the bread.” In fact, the entire Eucharistic rite was once simply known as, “the breaking of the bread.” By participating in the one bread that is broken and shared, we express symbolically the reality of being one in Christ.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says: “The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for all partake of the one loaf” (1 *Corinthians* 12:16b-17). The unity Paul speaks of is highlighted by the priest breaking the large consecrated host and sharing at least some of the fragments with those present. The deacon may also assist in the breaking of the bread. While it is desirable that as many as possible share in the bread that is broken, the use of smaller hosts consecrated at the same time is a practical necessity at most Masses.

The sign of our unity with Christ expressed by the breaking and sharing of bread continues as the priest adds a small piece of the consecrated host with the consecrated wine. This gesture, introduced in the eighth century, signifies the unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the work of salvation. A prayer, dating from the middle of the eighth century, is spoken inaudibly by the priest and requests the fruits of Communion for everyone present.

Since the breaking of the bread was especially lengthy in the earlier celebrations of the Mass, it was accompanied by a chant. This later became what we call the *Agnus*

*Dei* - the Lamb of God. The words "*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world*" are taken from the acknowledgment given Jesus by John the Baptist (*John 1:23-26*). It acknowledges that Christ is

the Paschal Lamb who has conquered death. The chant was originally sung by the people and was repeated for as long as necessary. As the time required for the breaking of the bread became briefer, it gradually was reduced to the text as we know it and is usually sung only three times, although it may be repeated, if necessary. From the tenth century on, it has always ended with the words - "grant us peace," linking it to the sign of peace. Today the *Agnus Dei* is a litany-song of the choir, cantor and congregation, and may be repeated as often as necessary, but does not include the priest who is engaged in breaking of the bread.

After the Lamb of God concludes, the people kneel and prepare to receive Communion. The priest prepares himself by a prayer said quietly while those celebrating with him do so by praying silently. With these prayers, all are ready to receive Communion.

## Four-Minute Reflections on Mass

### Reflection 14: The Communion Rite, Part III

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When we share a meal with family and friends, we are likely to hear at some point a welcome invitation to dine - *Come to the table ... a comer [co-mair] ... mangia! [man-jeeh]* The same happens at Mass. Over the past several weeks we have seen how the Eucharistic meal is prepared, and how we prepare to receive it. Now, the invitation comes as the priest elevates the chalice and host and proclaims, "*Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world*" (John 1:29). He then proclaims words from the book of Revelation, "*Blessed are those who have been called to the Supper of the Lamb*" (Revelation 19:9). We respond in words that express both humility and confidence: "*Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed*" (Matthew 8:8). We are invited to look at the Eucharistic Bread and to express reverence, confidence and faith.

The celebrating priest receives the consecrated bread and wine first before distributing the Lord's body and blood to each communicant. When distributing communion, the priest, deacon or extraordinary minister of holy communion shows the host to each person and says, "*The Body of Christ*", to which the communicant responds, "*Amen.*" A similar formula, "*The Blood of Christ*", precedes reception from the chalice. It is important to remember that we always receive communion; it is never permitted for a communicant to simply take the Body and Blood of Christ from the altar. It is received from a priest, deacon or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion.

Up to the eleventh century, the norm was to receive communion under both kinds: both the Precious Body and the Precious Blood. Over the centuries, a practice

developed of not receiving from the chalice, except in special circumstances. The Second Vatican Council

initiated a gradual extension of the ancient practice of receiving the Eucharist under both

kinds. Thus, receiving both the consecrated bread and the chalice is now permitted at all Masses. Another ancient practice - receiving the Eucharistic bread in the hand - has been revived in recent years. Communicants now have the option of receiving either in the hand or on the tongue. Receiving from the chalice brings out the fuller meaning of the Eucharist.

In the United States, the norm is for communicants to receive Communion while standing, although kneeling, while not encouraged, is permitted by those who choose it. As a sign of reverence, we make a slight bow before receiving the Eucharistic Bread and the chalice. No genuflection should be made.

Since the earliest centuries, it has been the custom to sing a psalm during the Communion procession. The communion song, expressing unity, encounter with the Lord, and joy, should begin when the priest receives the Sacrament and should continue as long as is convenient. When there is no song, the antiphon found in the Missal is recited by the faithful, a lector or by the priest himself. To foster participation of the faithful, there should only be one hymn during the Communion Rite, although if the Communion procession is lengthy, an additional piece of music may be permissible. There may be a choral piece during the period of reflection.

After every meal, someone must do the dishes. After Communion, there must be a reverent cleaning of the vessels used during the Mass. Any consecrated hosts that remain may either be consumed or placed in the tabernacle. Any consecrated wine that

remains must be consumed by the priest, the deacon or the extraordinary ministers. It may never be disposed of in any other way. In the Diocese of Salt Lake City, the priest or deacon purifies the vessels with water, at the credence table. Care must be taken that no fragments of consecrated hosts are left on the altar.

The Eucharistic meal concludes with the Prayer after Communion. It should be preceded by a period of silence and is introduced with the words, "*Let us pray.*" This prayer is not a prayer of thanksgiving but, rather, asks for the spiritual effects or fruits of the Eucharist. It always concludes the Communion Rite, and only after this prayer may other activities follow, such as brief announcements.

## Four-Minute Reflections on the Mass

### Reflection 15: The Concluding Rites

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How do we know when the Communion Rite is over? Some people leave the church after they receive Communion; is this acceptable practice? To close our series of reflections on the Mass, let's investigate the ending of the Communion Rite and the Concluding Rites.

As we move forward to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, and return to our seats, a period of calm prayer follows. We may offer a song of thanksgiving and praise. Sometimes we rest in the Lord's Presence and simply enjoy the silence. The Communion Rite ends when the celebrant offers the "Prayer after Communion" in which the celebrant invites us to recall that the Lord is with us and we respond. This grace-filled ending expresses our gratitude for the great gift we have just received. It offers our hope that we will go out into our daily lives and continue to build the Kingdom of God.

The time between the Prayer after Communion and the Rite of Dismissal is the proper time for making very brief announcements, to the community. In the past, announcements often occurred immediately before or after the homily and this practice interrupted the flow of the Eucharist. Following the liturgical reform in the late 1960's, announcements were placed in the Concluding Rites. Many parishes have since discovered that their weekly bulletins, emails, websites or message boards communicate best. Indeed, it is preferable not to have announcements except in special circumstances or special need.

During this time, the presider may choose to comment on the sacred rites we have just experienced. We may hear brief thoughts about the value of a Confirmation retreat or suggestions about choosing suitable godparents. Or we might listen to a brief appeal for refugee resettlement or special aid to a diocese that has been hit by a massive flood. As the parish family, we receive this information and we allow our hearts to be moved by appeals to assist our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In the Final Blessing, the priest speaks of the Lord's presence to the community. He uses a prayerful gesture with his arms extended. We respond back, "*And with your spirit.*" The priest makes the sign of the cross and says, "*May almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*" We respond, "*Amen.*"

On some occasions the Mass may end with a solemn blessing, which is a bit more formal. The deacon, if there is one, asks us to bow our heads and pray for God's blessing. The priest then offers a prayer that consists of three parts. As he prays, his arms are extended and he encompasses all the People of God. The deacon again speaks and instructs us to go in peace to love and serve the Lord. The original Latin, *Ite, missa est* actually instructed us: "*Go; your mission begins.*" The deacon will say; "*Go forth; the Mass is ended.*" This is the absolute conclusion of the Mass. As God gives us precious gifts, there is new work for us to do. We prepare to leave with gratitude for all that has been given to us. We leave now to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others. We respond with our grateful hearts: "*Thanks be to God.*" We watch the priest go through the same beautiful ritual that began the Mass. He kisses the altar, a symbol of Christ, and we sing a final hymn or listen to an instrumental selection.

In our original question, we wondered whether it would be acceptable to leave after the Communion Rite. We have learned that the Concluding Rites assist us to offer our humble thanksgiving and gratitude to the Lord who has invited us to this banquet and given us gifts to take with us. Who among us could leave without accepting these precious gifts?