

## Explaining the Mass

With Fr. Mark Bentz, STL

### Part 8: Liturgy of the Eucharist-The Preparation

Last week, we finished the Liturgy of the Word, and now we come to the second half of Mass: the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We read in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*:

“At the Last Supper Christ instituted the Paschal Sacrifice and banquet, by which the Sacrifice of the Cross is continuously made present in the Church whenever the Priest, representing Christ the Lord, carries out what the Lord himself did and handed over to his disciples to be done in his memory. For Christ took the bread and the chalice, gave thanks, broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take, eat and drink: this is my Body; this is the chalice of my Blood. Do this in memory of me. Hence, the Church has arranged the entire celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist in parts corresponding to precisely these words and actions of Christ, namely:

- a) At the Preparation of the Gifts, bread and wine with water are brought to the altar, the same elements, that is to say, which Christ took into his hands.
- b) In the Eucharistic Prayer, thanks is given to God for the whole work of salvation, and the offerings become the Body and Blood of Christ.
- c) Through the fraction and through Communion, the faithful, though many, receive from the one bread the Lord’s Body and from the one chalice the Lord’s Blood in the same way that the Apostles received them from the hands of Christ himself.”<sup>1</sup>

We’ll spend the next few weeks going through each of these three sections. Before the gifts are brought to the altar, the altar must be prepared to receive them. First, the *corporal* is spread out on the altar—a square cloth where the bread and the wine are placed to be consecrated. You can see the Latin root word *corpus*, which means body. This draws our attention to what happens on the *corporal*: the body and blood of Christ become truly present. In the Tridentine liturgy before the Second Vatican Council, the priest was *required* to make an intention to *only* consecrate the things which were on the *corporal* to eliminate any confusion about what was actually consecrated during the Eucharistic prayer. In any case, the *corporal* also has a very practical purpose—it catches any fragments of the host or drops of the precious blood that the priest or deacon might accidentally spill. The small corporal is much easier to clean in a respectful manner than the huge altar cloth! After the corporal, the chalice(s), Roman Missal (the book), and any purificators (little finger towels) are brought to the altar.

Once the altar is prepared, we read in the *General Instruction* that, “The offerings are then brought forward. It is a praiseworthy practice for the bread and wine to be presented by the faithful. They are then accepted at an appropriate place by the Priest or the Deacon to be carried to the altar.

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<sup>1</sup> GIRM 72

Even though the faithful no longer bring from their own possessions the bread and wine intended for the liturgy as was once the case, nevertheless the rite of carrying up the offerings still keeps its spiritual efficacy and significance. Even money or other gifts for the poor or for the Church, brought by the faithful or collected in the church, are acceptable; given their purpose, they are to be put in a suitable place away from the Eucharistic table. The procession bringing the gifts is accompanied by the Offertory Chant [***Editors note: Remember how we said a few weeks ago that there is a prescribed chant for each part of the mass in the Church's music book, the *Graduale Romanum*?***], which continues at least until the gifts have been placed on the altar. The norms on the manner of singing are the same as for the Entrance Chant (cf. no. 48). Singing may always accompany the rite at the Offertory, even when there is no procession with the gifts.

The bread and wine are placed on the altar by the Priest to the accompaniment of the prescribed formulas; the Priest may incense the gifts placed on the altar and then incense the cross and the altar itself, so as to signify the Church's offering and prayer rising like incense in the sight of God. Next, the Priest, because of his sacred ministry, and the people, by reason of their baptismal dignity, may be incensed by the Deacon or by another minister. Then the Priest washes his hands at the side of the altar, a rite in which the desire for interior purification finds expression."<sup>2</sup> We'll pick up there next week...

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<sup>2</sup> GIRM 73-76