
Entering the Mystery

**Celebrating the Mass with the
Third Edition of the Roman Missal**



**Diocese of
Davenport**

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First published as a series of articles in *The Catholic Messenger*
3/3/11-6/16/11

INTRODUCTION

The publication of the third edition of the Roman Missal provides a great opportunity for each diocese, parish, and individual Catholic to grow in their love for—and knowledge of—the liturgy. As we prepare for the new Missal, we will, of course, need to talk about the changes in language (for example, as we did in the first series of articles that we published on the Missal in 2009). But we also need to talk about the basics that perhaps we've forgotten or just come to take for granted: Why it is that we gather for liturgy? What it is that we're doing when we do gather? How might we enter more fully, consciously, and actively into the mystery that we are celebrating? After all, while some of the *words* of the Mass are changing, the *structure* of the Mass itself is not.

Encounter → Transformation → Sacrifice

Theologian David Fagerberg refers to the liturgy as the “trysting place of God,” the privileged place where God the Lover meets his Beloved, the Church (that is, *all* of us). Our teachings remind us that, in addition to the Eucharist, Christ is present to us in the minister, the assembly, and the proclaimed word. So, it is fair to say, that liturgy is about encounter, about coming face to face with the God who loves and saves us.

If we are truly present, how can we not be changed by such an encounter? Of course, such transformation takes time; the liturgy has to soak into our bones. By our sharing in the liturgy, we become more and more like Christ.

As we receive, with gratitude, the gift of Christ's presence—the gift of God's love and grace—we are invited to respond with our own return-gift of love. That's what “sacrifice” means for a Christian: not “giving up” something and not trying to appease an angry god, but offering a loving response to being loved first. After all, to love is to die... to die to our selfishness... to die for the sake of the other, God and neighbor. To love is to die, yes; but to die is to live. That's Christ's paschal mystery in a nutshell. That's the truth that soaks into us at Mass.

God is faithful; Christ will be present to us in the liturgy for so God has promised. But liturgy isn't magic. We can, by our attitudes and actions, facilitate or obstruct the encounter God offers to us, the gift of Christ's real presence in word, sacrament, and in each other.

We can choose to participate *fully* in the liturgy, with our whole being. Catholic worship uses all of our senses: colors mark the seasons, art draws us to the transcendent, music gives voice to our worship, incense and burning candles echo our silent prayers, oil ministers a healing touch, bread and wine reveal God-with-us. We kneel and stand and sit, we process, we dip our hands in holy water and cross ourselves, we genuflect and we reach out in a sign of peace. Our whole bodies are part of our prayer.

We can choose to participate *consciously* in the liturgy, wrestling with the great Mystery that is being made present to us. We can take the symbols of our worship and the words we say and hear with utmost seriousness. We can read and pray and study on our own.

We can choose to participate *actively* in the liturgy by singing, by making our responses, by our silences, and, especially, by opening our hearts. For some, this might also mean taking on a special ministerial role in the liturgy; but—as the baptized—we need to keep in mind that our primary ministry is to pray the Mass.

As members of the assembly, we can work on letting go of those predispositions that make it harder for us to take part in the liturgy—our individualism, our hunger for novelty, our almost reflexive rejection of authority, our desire to be entertained. Do we have a sense that we are surrounded and infused with God’s grace? Do we embrace mystery and metaphor; are we open to imagination and beauty? Are we receptive, humble, and grateful?

As ministers, we can do better, too—for, while God is faithful, we can make it easier or harder for others to encounter Christ. Do we understand our own roles and ministries? Do we allow the People of God to see Christ *through* us, or do we make ourselves the center of attention? Do we treat ministry as just something we do, or a reflection of who we are? Do we show reverence and respect by the way we proclaim and pray the texts that the Church has given us, by the way we carry and handle the objects we use, by the way we make our gestures and assume our postures, and by the way we interact with the people themselves? Do we reject efficiency (doing the minimum, taking as little time as possible) as the highest liturgical virtue?

Series

In this series of articles, we will focus on how we might pray the Mass more intentionally, more deeply; how we might help ourselves become more open to what we are doing. We will talk about the various elements within the Mass (such as music and gestures and posture) as well as about how the Mass is put together, its structure and flow. Of course, no series, no book, no lifetime can exhaust the riches of the liturgy. All we can do is scratch the surface.

Each article will include two “sidebars”: the first will offer reflection questions to help us enter the mystery that we are celebrating more intentionally and the second will focus on the *ars celebrandi*, offering suggestions to presiders and other liturgical ministers on the art of celebrating liturgy well.

If Pope Paul VI was right, that the liturgy is our first school of spirituality, then this is a topic worth returning to again and again.

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

CALLED TOGETHER

Why do we gather as a community for Sunday Mass? Some might say: because it's an obligation... or because my parents make me go... or it's just what we do. On a deeper level, we gather—or, better, are gathered—because Christ calls us together. In other words, we do more than come together on our own; we are “assembled” by the Holy Spirit. The Greek word that we translate as “church” is *ekklesia*—and it refers to being summoned together, to an assembly. We come because we are invited. God acts; we respond. That's the basic dynamic of liturgy, and of the Christian life: God does something first, God loves us; we respond, we love God back. Since everything is gift, if we are going to really pray the Mass we must develop a deep sense of gratitude. After all, “Eucharist” comes from the Greek word for “thanksgiving.”

Let's be honest. Sometimes, that's hard to do. Advertising all around us tells us that we deserve everything we get, and then some. Most of us have never had to go without, have never had to be dependent on others. Gratitude—and the humility it requires—is not a mainstream value in our culture. So, even to say “yes” to Christ's invitation is already to step away from what passes as “business as usual” into a new way of looking at the world around us.

Church: Assembly Required

That's not always an easy transition to make; so, in the Mass, we have what's called the “Introductory Rites.” These words and actions help us to form community and enter into the world of worship. We don't leave “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties” (*Gaudium et spes*, #1) that mark our lives outside; that's the stuff of our prayers; that's what we lay on the altar. But we do step away from that world—not to abandon it or run away from it, but so we can be sent back to minister in and to it.

We step outside of normal time (what the Greeks called *chronos*, or clock-time) into timeless time, opportune time, the fullness of time (in Greek, *kairos*). If someone asks, “Do you have the time?” you might answer: “It's 3 o'clock” (*chronos*) or you might say: “Sure, what do you need?” (*kairos*). Perhaps we ought to take our watches off when we come to Mass, a reminder that we've moved from *chronos* into *kairos*; from clock-time measured in minutes into available time measured in moments; from our usual world to the liminal (in-between) world of liturgy, a world that straddles heaven and earth.

Entering the Mystery

As I go to church, do I realize that I am living out my baptismal priesthood, that I am assembling with my brothers and sisters in Christ as a response to God's call?

Do I see getting ready for Mass as my way to vest and process, a symbol of my life-long journey to God?

Do I take off my watch and turn off my cell phone, reminders that I am stepping out of day-to-day space and time?

So, we physically gather, “assembled” by the Spirit. We come from north and south, east and west, to our parish church. The vesting and procession of the ministers echoes our own vesting and procession from home, as well as the journey that is the Christian life. We greet one another; it is in the simple act of hospitality that we first begin to encounter Christ. We pray quietly. In some ways, we each do our own thing—but then, we are called together. We stand. We sing. We give physical expression to a spiritual reality: we are all members of one Body, the Body of Christ, called together by the Head of the Body. By standing and singing together we not only express that reality but we help to bring it about: no longer individual “I” – and not even “we” the crowd – but “I” the Church, Christ.

The Ars Celebrandi

As a priest or deacon, do I realize that as I kiss the altar I am kissing Christ? Do I make this gesture with reverence and intention? Do I treat the assembly with similar reverence?

As we noted in the first article in this series, as ministers we can make it easier or harder for people to encounter Christ at Mass. So, if the purpose of the introductory rites is to help form us as a community:

- As a parish and as individual ministers, how are we fostering that dynamic?
- Are we a hospitable parish?
- Do ushers and greeters warmly welcome parishioners and strangers alike?
- Are our buildings, liturgies, and programs accessible?
- Do we rely too much on amplifying the voices of the cantor and choir, signaling that the voice of the assembly is not that important?
- Do we sing the opening hymn in its entirety, showing that its primary purpose is to unify the assembly rather than simply accompany the movement of the ministers?

GREETING, PENITENTIAL ACT, GLORIA, COLLECT

Sign of the Cross and Greeting

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

No other words of introduction or explanation are called for, or necessary. We do more than gather or pray—we live and move and have our being—in the name of the Triune God. We begin with the very words with which we were baptized. We begin with the words that remind us *who* we are and *whose* we are.

And, as those words are spoken, we make the Sign of the Cross. One of the aspects of being a Catholic that I truly love is that our prayer is holistic: we pray with hearts and hands and voices! But, sometimes,

we take this bodily prayer for granted; our gestures become rote repetition rather than living expressions of faith. To enter this prayer more fully, let the gesture itself be full, deliberate (see the *Entering the Mystery* sidebar below).

The priest-celebrant continues with these words from the scriptures:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Or: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Or: The Lord be with you.

Not “good morning” or “it’s good to see you all here;” liturgy isn’t a talk show or a stand-up routine. And we respond with the ancient words: “And with your spirit.”

Two points.

First, this simple exchange reminds us that liturgy isn’t a one-man show. Liturgy, by its very nature, is a dialogue. God speaks; we respond. The priest speaks; the assembly responds... and without the response the dialogue of the liturgy cannot continue.

Second, these words also remind us that the liturgy is an ordered communion. The word “hierarchical” has been misunderstood. It does not mean that someone is better or holier or more important than another. It means that everyone has his or her own particular place at Eucharist. Or, as the Second Vatican Council put it, each of us should do all that is ours to do but only that which is ours to do (*Sacrosanctum concilium* #28).

With these words, the priest prays that God’s spirit, God’s grace, be with us to celebrate the liturgy with our whole being. We pray back: may that particular spiritual gift given to you at ordination enable you to fulfill your vocation in the Church.

You’ll notice that this dialogue is used whenever an ordained minister is about to do something significant in the Mass: begin the liturgy, proclaim the gospel, pray the Eucharistic Prayer, share in the Sign of Peace, or bless and dismiss the assembly for ministry in the world.

The Ars Celebrandi

As a priest-president, do I let the liturgical greeting speak for itself? Do I avoid the temptation to impose my own words at this point?

If I do offer an introduction to the Mass of the day, do I keep it (and any other allowed-for comments) very brief, and do I write it out ahead of time (GIRM #50)?

Entering the Mystery

Father Romano Guardini, in his book *Sacred Signs*, wrote this about the Sign of the Cross:

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, our thoughts, our attitudes, our body and soul, every part of us at once. How it consecrates and sanctifies us.

It does so because it is the Sign of the universe and the sign of our redemption. On the cross Christ redeemed mankind. By the cross he sanctifies man to the last shred and fibre of his being. We make the sign of the cross before we pray to collect and compose ourselves and to fix our minds and hearts and wills upon God. We make it when we finish praying in order that we may hold fast the gift we have received from God. In temptations we sign ourselves to be strengthened; in dangers, to be protected. The cross is signed upon us in blessings in order that the fullness of God's life may flow into the soul and fructify and sanctify us wholly.

Think of these things when you make the sign of the cross. It is the holiest of all signs. Make a large cross, taking time, thinking what you do. Let it take in your whole being,--body, soul, mind, will, thoughts, feelings, your doing and not-doing,--and by signing it with the cross strengthen and consecrate the whole in the strength of Christ, in the name of the triune God.

How do I make the Sign of the Cross?

Penitential Act and *Gloria*

Liturgy requires honesty, authenticity. That's why our liturgical norms call for live music instead of recordings, for real wax candles (that die as they give life and light, an image of our Savior) instead of oil-filled tubes, for real plants and flowers that wither and die rather than the falsity of silk and plastic that obscure the paschal mystery.

So we begin by acknowledging that we are broken, in need of healing; sinful, in need of forgiveness; lost, in need of a Savior. In the Penitential Act we acknowledge that reality and we declare the mercy of God. We give voice to our belief that in Christ we are healed, forgiven, saved. It is only by first owning and proclaiming such truths that we can then honestly give God praise by singing the *Gloria*, one of our most ancient hymns.

Entering the Mystery

Do I honestly acknowledge my need to be healed, my need for a Savior?

Do I join in the singing of the *Gloria*, lifting my voice in the praise of God?

At the time of the Collect, do I use the silence after the priest's invitation to indeed pray? Do I consciously join my prayer to what the priest offers on our behalf, so my Amen rings true?

When I pray at home (for example, at mealtime), do I use the pattern of prayer that the Church gives to us in the Collects, e.g. you (name), who (attribute or past action of God's), do (petition), through (conclusion)? Might this be a way that I can help connect life and liturgy?

The Ars Celebrandi

Do the liturgical practices of our parish, and the objects that we use, reflect the values of authenticity and honesty? Do we refuse to let efficiency become a driving force in our liturgical life?

Do we routinely sing the *Gloria* in my community?

As priest-president, do I leave a space for intentional silence after the invitation, and then model what I am asking the people to do: pray? Do I remain silent as the people respond, Amen?

The Collect

Most of the Collects in the Missal are ancient in origin, and are put together in a particular way. They begin with the priest chanting (or saying), "Let us pray"—not because we haven't been praying already, but in order to invite us into a period of silence during which we might pray in our own words. The silence is key; without it the invitation and the prayer that follows don't make much sense. We call this prayer the "Collect" because the priest "collects" our individual prayers and gives voice to them using the words of the Church. The prayer itself begins by addressing God (the Father), and then names an attribute of God or what God has done in the past. Having recalled God's faithfulness, we can now make our petition. The concluding formula reminds us that by and large all our liturgical prayer is made to the Father through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. We express our consent to the prayer, and our willingness to enter the mystery that we are about to celebrate, by our "Amen!"

LITURGY OF THE WORD

THE WORD PROCLAIMED

Readings

One of the greatest blessings of Vatican II is that we get to hear much more of the Bible at Mass now than we did before—especially from the Old (First) Testament. After the Council, the Lectionary that we use at Mass was thoroughly revised, and even adopted (in an adapted form) by many Protestant communities. On Sundays, instead of just one reading before the gospel, we now hear two—from both the New and Old Testaments. And instead of a single cycle of readings, we now have a richer variety of readings spread over three years.

In Year A, the gospel reading comes from Matthew; in year B it is from Mark and year C from Luke. During Ordinary Time, the first (Old Testament) reading and psalm are chosen to echo the gospel. The second (New Testament letter) reading is independent; in each of the three years we read from a different set of letters. During the other liturgical seasons, all the Sunday readings are chosen to work together; during Easter, the first reading comes from the Acts of the Apostles and the second reading from Revelation. John's Gospel is also read during the Easter Season, as well as during the summer in year B (because Mark's Gospel is shorter).

The weekday lectionary is on a two-year cycle: the first reading changes but the gospel stays the same (before the Council, most of the time the Sunday readings were simply repeated during the week).

As Pope Benedict XVI reminds us: in the Liturgy of the Word, "God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own words, proclaims the Gospel" (*Sacramentum caritatis*, #45). How can we listen to our Lover, with heart as well as head, if we are reading along? Unless there is a problem with hearing the reader, close the missaletes. Read the readings at home, before Mass, and after Mass. Study them all week long. But when they are being proclaimed, listen! At Mass, we listen not to learn facts (our study during the week can be for that) but to encounter our Friend and Lord. If we really believe that God is

Entering the Mystery

Do I take the time to read the readings before Mass, preferably a number of times during the week? Do I take advantage of opportunities to study the Bible?

When at Mass, do I *listen* to the readings (not read along), so I can hear not just with my ears, but with my heart?

Do I try to enter the readings imaginatively so as to hear what God is saying to me *today*?

The Ars Celebrandi

As one who proclaims the scriptures, whether lay or ordained, do I carefully prepare for this ministry? Do I take the time to pray and study the scriptures, as well as to practice the readings?

As a parish, do we have a sound system that helps people hear the proclaimed word? Do all our ministers know how to use the microphone?

speaking to us, should we not pay attention? When we are having intimate conversations with our spouse or a close friend, do we read along from some script? Then why do so at Mass?

In order to more deeply engage the readings, embrace your imagination. We are part of the story, so put yourself in it. Who are you, with what character do you identify with as you listen? Maybe we're just in the crowd, watching from a distance. Or maybe we're the one Jesus is addressing... in words of challenge or words of healing. Regardless, "thanks be to God" doesn't mean we're glad the reading is over—but it is our ritual way of saying "yes" to what the readings are calling us to do, to whom the scriptures are calling us to become.

Homily

There are probably some of you who remember that when the priest mounted the pulpit to preach a sermon, he made the Sign of the Cross before beginning, and then again at the end; in some cases he even took his chasuble off before preaching. The message was clear: this isn't part of the Mass; it's an interruption. First the good news: Thanks to the Second Vatican Council, those days are over! No longer should we have to endure a sermon that has nothing to do with the liturgy or the readings, but the ancient tradition of preaching a homily has been recovered. A homily (as opposed to a sermon) is part of the liturgy: it flows from the texts, the season, the feast being observed, the rite being celebrated. The homily is also liturgy itself; it is intended as its own act of praise, thanksgiving, and worship. Now the bad news: almost every survey of Catholic life suggest that people come hungry to hear what the priest or deacon has to say, but that these preachers often fall short in feeding them.

Entering the Mystery

Am I looking to be entertained by the homily, or to have my political views confirmed? Or am I honestly listening for what God might have to say to me through the preacher? Am I willing to be challenged to live my faith more deeply, or do I "check out" and not even bother?

Am I overly critical of those who preach at my parish? When offering feedback, am I truthful, constructive, and concrete?

The Ars Celebrandi

As a preacher, do I give this part of my ministry its due? Do I schedule time to study the scriptures, to learn more about homiletics, and to prepare to preach?

When I prepare my homily, do I practice the liturgical virtue of authenticity, which requires that I preach to *this* community, in *this* time and place, for *this* occasion?

Does my preaching reflect the words spoken by the bishop during the ordination of deacons: "Receive the gospel of Christ, whose herald you have become. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach"?

How willing am I to receive feedback on my preaching? Have I considered forming a homily preparation/feedback group, as mentioned in the U.S. Bishops' *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*?

Maybe, for both preachers and listeners alike, it would be good to recall what a homily isn't. A homily is not a lecture or catechetical session, though it does teach. A homily is not an exercise in moral exhortation, a list of do's and don'ts, though it may inspire us to live more Christ-like lives. A homily is not a stand-up routine, though it may contain humor. A homily is certainly not a commercial for a church project or a fundraising appeal.

Rather, a homily is intended to help us connect liturgy and life, to interpret life through the lens of the scriptures (the readings themselves or the scriptures that provide the basis for our liturgical prayers), to move us from word to sacrament, to help us make meaning. It may comfort as well as challenge. It ought to lead us more deeply into the mystery that we are celebrating, to move from the Table of the Word to the Table of the Sacrament.

Therefore, a homily must be particular. A good homilist takes into account the specific community he is addressing as well as the liturgical feast, day, season or rite in which the preaching is taking place, not to mention the wider social and cultural contexts of our lives. There is no place in Catholic liturgy for a canned sermon pulled off a website or out of a book. In my own preaching ministry in Kentucky, I found the use of a homily preparation (and feedback) group to be invaluable. We would gather for *lectio divina*—a prayerful reading of the scriptures and sharing of our insights. These insights informed my preaching as much as my studies did, and helped ensure that my preaching was grounded in the particularity of the community I was serving.

A PRIESTLY PEOPLE RESPONDS

Profession of Faith

By proclaiming the Creed, we remember not only what God has done in the past, but who we are. In the new translation, we begin the Creed with “I” instead of “we.” We are reminded that we need to take personal ownership of our faith; we believe as individuals. Just like at the Easter Vigil or on Easter Sunday when we renew our baptismal promises, and just like we take personal ownership of our vows (“I do” not “we do”) and our sinfulness (“I confess” not “we confess”), we speak for ourselves at the Creed. At the same time, we are also reminded that we are not saved as isolated individuals. We are part of the Body of Christ, the Church. The “I” refers to us as individuals as well as to the Church as a whole. We are saved, we journey to God, together.

Entering the Mystery

Do I really believe what I say I believe? What have I done to learn more of about this faith that I profess, about being a Christian?

Do I hear in the Prayer of the Faithful not a list of demands that we make on God, but instead a call to action? If I dare pray for justice, for healing, for the drying of tears—what am I doing, filled with God's grace, to make those things come to pass?

Prayer of the Faithful

And, together, we raise our voices in prayer. Baptized into Jesus Christ, we share in his priestly office of offering praise and thanksgiving to the Father, and of interceding on behalf of the world.

It is important to keep in mind how the Prayer of the Faithful is structured. The presider first addresses the *people*, inviting them to prayer. Next, the deacon (or, in his absence, another minister) announces the intentions. We call these “general” intercessions because they ought to be petitions that the assembly can, by and large, agree on, and because they do not focus on the needs of any one individual. This is not the time for a “mini-homily,” the place to make a particular point; or to tell God how to

The Ars Celebrandi

As one who leads prayer, do I let my body reflect what I am doing? Here, as well as throughout the liturgy, do I look at the people when I am addressing them? Where is my gaze when I am addressing God?

As a deacon, does my liturgical role of being the one who announces the intercessions truly reflect my ministry of charity outside the liturgy—that I am the one who knows the cares of the community so well that I can give voice to those needs before God? Or is there a disconnect between what I do within the walls of the church and outside them?

answer our prayers. It is neither the time to pray for an unknown “special intention” (to which the assembly cannot assent) nor to offer prayers of thanksgiving (the Eucharistic Prayer makes that part of its structure and focus).

Rather, we are called to imagine the Reign of God as proclaimed in the scriptures and give voice to what we see: a world of justice, a world where the hungry are fed and the sick made whole, a world where death and tears are no more. Finally, the presider closes the intercessions by addressing *God the Father*, through Christ—the one through whom all prayer is made.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

PREPARATION

Preparation of Gifts & Altar

As Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, “In the bread and wine that we bring to the altar, all creation is taken up by Christ the Redeemer to be transformed and presented to the Father” (*Sacramentum caritatis*, #47). The bread and wine—and our gifts for the ministry of the Church and care of the poor—symbolize who we are, all we have

Entering the Mystery

Do I place myself—who I am and what I have done, my hopes and dreams, my pains and sorrows, in the procession? Do I offer myself in the bread and wine? Do I enter into this “holy exchange” with God with gratitude, and acknowledging my need to be transformed? Do I see in these simple gifts all of creation “groaning” (Rom 8:22) for redemption?

done in the previous week (our “work”), and all of creation. Even the “pain and suffering of the world” is taken up in order to be transformed. In other words, everything has value in the eyes of God. There is a powerful dynamic at work here. God has given us the gift of creation and of human work. We offer back to God the “fruit of the earth and work of human hands,” which are transformed, for our sake and for the sake of the world, into the very Presence of Christ. Praying the Eucharistic Prayer, and receiving such a gift in Holy Communion, we are transformed—and make to God the return-gift of a life lived in accord with the gospel. As the U.S. Bishops put it (*Introduction to the Order of Mass*, #105):

The procession with the gifts is a powerful expression of the participation of all present in the Eucharist and in the social mission of the Church. It is an expression of the humble and contrite heart, the dispossession of self that is necessary for making the true offering, which the Lord Jesus gave his people to make with him. The procession with the gifts expresses also our eagerness to enter into the “holy exchange” with God....

But such a “divine exchange of gifts” is impossible to see if we routinely use only part of the wine that is presented or commune members of the assembly from the tabernacle. The symbols of bread and wine, offered and transformed and returned, are powerful if we let them speak. This is one of the key differences between Eucharist and communion services.

The Ars Celebrandi

Do we allow the symbols to speak fully? Do we make sure that all the wine that is offered—a symbol of the gifts these people offer, the people themselves—is used? Do we prepare enough wine so that all who wish to commune under both species are able to do so? Do we make sure that all commune from the bread brought in procession, and not from the tabernacle? Or do we subtly (or not so subtly) give the message: We do not want you or your gifts! Do we subtly (or not so subtly) reduce Eucharist to distribution of communion?

Have we considered marking the importance of the procession of the gifts by having the gifts accompanied by lighted candles so this procession mirrors the others? For example, candles accompany the Cross during the processions into and out of the church and candles accompany the Book of the Gospels during the gospel procession. Do we sing a song during the collection, and then leave the procession of the gifts in silence?

Prayer over Gifts

After the priest invites us to prayer, we stand and then reply: “May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands....” He then offers the Prayer over the Gifts, which asks not only for the transformation of our gifts but for our transformation as well. Perhaps the next time that we are at Mass we can listen for the petition—the change that the prayer is calling us to—and make it our own.

THE GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING: GIFT/RECEPTION/RETURN-GIFT

The Eucharistic Prayer (Part 1)

What are we doing here? The *General Instruction* tells us: “The Church’s intention...is that the faithful not only offer this spotless Victim but also learn to offer themselves” (GIRM 79). In the Eucharistic Prayer, our daily lives—presented earlier with/in the gifts—are joined to Christ’s self-offering to the Father. As liturgist Father Gil Ostdiek put it: Through, with, and in Christ we become a “holy and living sacrifice” offered to God in thanksgiving.

My guess is that many of us, rather than *actively* engaging in the Eucharistic Prayer, fall into the habit of just *passively* listening to the priest pray—or, even pay no attention at all. Or perhaps we’ve not understood that “doing Eucharist” is more than receiving communion; that “Eucharist” is more verb than noun?

So how can we engage in this prayer more fully? Perhaps a first step is to understand how the prayer is put together—how it “works”—and we’ll use Eucharistic Prayer II as our example. In doing so, we’ll use the insights of French sacramental theologian Father Louis-Marie Chauvet. To begin with, we can divide the Eucharistic Prayers into three major sections. We can talk about each section in terms of time (past, present, future) and in terms of the “Body of Christ” that is our focus: Christ’s historical and glorified body, Christ’s eucharistic body, and Christ’s ecclesial body. We can speak of the dynamic of the liturgy in terms of gift, reception, and return-gift.

Gift (Remembering that leads to Encounter)

In this first section—the Preface and Holy, Holy—we recall the past (God’s gift of self) with gratitude as we focus on the historical and glorified Body of Christ.

The Preface begins with a dialogue between the priest and people. Dialogues are an important element of the Roman liturgy. They are sacramental: they both express and help to bring about the communion between priest and people. Dialogues require the participation of both parties; one can’t go on without the consent of the other. This particular exchange ends with the priest calling us to give thanks to God, to which we respond: “It is right and just.” The priest then begins the Preface with those very words: “It is truly right and just....” In a sense, we hand the priest the words that he is going to use to give voice to our prayer. While it doesn’t seem like a big deal, this is a small example of the way that the liturgy reminds us that the Eucharist is the prayer of the entire community. While we might have different ministries at Mass, we are all one Body.

While the Preface differs according to the season, the feast, or the rite being celebrated, its purpose remains the same: to highlight the particular reasons for our gratitude. So one way that we can enter more intentionally into the prayer (instead of zoning out) is to offer a silent “thank you” after each of the sentences or phrases in the Preface that mention a cause for thanksgiving. For example, take a look at the Preface that goes with Eucharistic Prayer II:

*It is truly right and just, our duty and salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks, Father most holy,
through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ,
your Word through whom you made all things,
(Thank you – for the gift of Creation)
whom you sent as our Savior and Redeemer,
(Thank you – for the gift of our salvation)
incarnate by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin.
(Thank you – for the mystery of the Incarnation, of a God willing to take on human flesh)
Fulfilling your will and gaining for you a holy people,
(Thank you – for calling us into the Church)
he stretched out his hands as he endured his Passion,
(Thank you – for Christ’s willingness to suffer on our behalf)
so as to break the bonds of death and manifest the resurrection.
(Thank you – for transforming death into life)
And so, with the Angels and all the Saints...*

With all the angels and saints, with the entire Church across time and space, we praise God with words taken from both the Old (Isaiah) and New (Revelation, Matthew) Testaments: “Holy, Holy, Holy...!” How often are we aware that our praise and prayer is part of something so much bigger than ourselves or our parish?

Entering the Mystery

Have we “lifted” up our hearts in prayer, and do we do so routinely at home?

For what are we grateful (or, in contrast, do we feel entitled)?

Are we aware that we are part of the communion of saints that transcends time and space, and that we are all raising our voices in praise and thanksgiving to God?

The Ars Celebrandi

As a priest-president, do I respect the form and function of the dialogues, or do I treat them as solo lines? Do I take my time and make eye contact with the assembly? Do I wait for the people’s responses—and their posture changes—before going on?

Am I careful to keep in mind when I am to join the people in their parts (the *Confiteor*, Creed, and communion invitation) and when I am not (Memorial Acclamation, Amen, Lord’s Prayer doxology, responses in the dialogues)?

Editor’s Note: Father Paul Turner has an excellent article on the literary genres found in the Mass; it can be accessed at: http://www.paulturner.org/pdf_files/genre.pdf.

The Eucharistic Prayer (Part 2)

Reception (Encounter that leads to Transformation)

In the middle section of the Eucharistic Prayer, we focus on the present—on what Christ is doing here and now, his perpetual sacrifice of self to the Father, and on our joining of ourselves to his great act of love. In other words, our focus becomes the eucharistic Body of Christ.

Transitioning from the Preface, we praise the Father (*You are indeed Holy, O Lord, the fount of all holiness*) and then ask the Father to send down the Spirit (the first *epiclesis*) on the gifts of bread and wine:

*Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray,
by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall,
so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.*

We then pray the Institution Narrative:

*At the time he was betrayed and entered willingly into his Passion, he took bread and, giving thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND EAT OF IT: FOR THIS IS MY BODY WHICH WILL BE GIVEN UP FOR YOU.
In a similar way, when supper was ended, he took the chalice and, once more giving thanks, he gave it to his disciples, saying: 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*

The point of the Institution Narrative is not play-acting; it is not about mimicking what Jesus did 2000 years ago. That's why the priest does not break the bread at this time; and why he is directed to bow and look at the host and chalice while speaking the words of institution, not at the people as if he were pretending to be Christ at the Last Supper. By obeying Christ's command to "do this" in his memory, we experience in its fullness here and now what he did at the Last Supper and on the Cross. It is about remembering, a special kind of remembering—or making memorial—that we call *anamnesis*.

The Catechism (#1363) puts it this way: "In the sense of Sacred Scripture, the memorial is not merely the recollection of past events but the proclamation of the mighty works wrought by God for [humanity]. In the liturgical celebration of these events, they become in a certain way present and real."

The next section, known as the *anamnesis*, names what it is that we are doing in the Eucharistic Prayer as a whole. *Anamnesis* is an interesting Greek word. If you look closely, you may see a familiar English word: amnesia, or "not remembering." An-amnesia, therefore, is "not-not-remembering." It is more than just recalling what has happened before; it is, in the words of Dom Gregory Dix: "the past made present by its effects."

*Therefore, as we celebrate the memorial of his Death and Resurrection,
we offer you, Lord, the Bread of life and the Chalice of salvation,
giving thanks that you have held us worthy to be in your presence and minister to you.*

This section returns us to the reason we've raised our voices in prayer in the first place: giving thanks.

Entering the Mystery

Do I realize that the Eucharistic Prayer is the prayer of the whole Church, not just the priest's prayer? Do I join my heart and mind to what the priest is proclaiming on our behalf, or do I do my own thing? Have I taken the time to read and meditate on the Eucharistic Prayers at home, to make them part of my own prayer life?

When I hear the words of institution, do I realize that the "you" for which Christ gave himself is me?

The Ars Celebrandi

As priest-presider, am I careful not to confuse anamnesis with mime? Do I respect the different actions called for in the rubrics; for example, the differences between "slightly raising", "raising", and "showing" the elements to the people?

Do I feed my community with the full range of Eucharistic Prayers that the Church has given us to use?

A Note on the Eucharistic Prayers

While the words of the institution narrative are the same in each one, we have 10 different Eucharistic Prayers in the new Missal. Eucharistic Prayer I (the Roman Canon) has its earliest roots in the 4th Century (as testified to by St. Ambrose), and is a slight revision of the only Eucharistic Prayer that we used for the roughly 400 years preceding the Second Vatican Council. Because it developed over roughly 1000 years, it has a form all its own. Eucharistic Prayer II is adapted from the *Apostolic Tradition*, an early third century text traditionally attributed to Hippolytus of Rome. The pattern of prayer found here was used to craft the remaining Eucharistic Prayers. This prayer has its own optional preface. Eucharistic Prayer III, composed after Vatican II, picks up the themes of the first Eucharistic Prayer and renders them in the format of the second. Eucharistic Prayer IV is adapted from Eastern Christian prayers dating back to the fourth century and is marked by having its own required preface. The two Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation were composed for the Holy Year 1975, and may be used in Masses in which the mystery of reconciliation is conveyed to the faithful in a special way (such as during Lent). Of Swiss origin and composed in 1995, the Eucharistic Prayer for Masses for Various Needs and Occasions is really four prayers in one; there is a fixed section and a section (including the proper preface) that varies—giving us four unique prayers.

The Eucharistic Prayer (Part 3)

The Ars Celebrandi

How well do I understand the Eucharistic Prayers—their origins, theology, spirituality, and language? Does my understanding inform how I proclaim those prayers (including remaining silent for the Amen)? Do I keep in mind the bishop's words as he hands the chalice and paten to a newly ordained priest: "Receive the oblation of the holy people, to be offered to God. Understand what you do, imitate what you celebrate, and conform your life to the mystery of the Lord's cross"?

Editor's Note: The Notre Dame Center for Liturgy has posted a series of excellent videos on its website (<http://liturgy.nd.edu/webcatechesis/>).

Sr. Joyce Ann Zimmerman provides a four-part presentation on the Eucharistic Prayers, using Eucharistic Prayer II as her example. The other Prayers are explored in depth by Msgr. Bruce Harbert (I, III) and Fr. Paul Turner (IV).

Return-Gift (Transformation that leads to Sacrifice)

Finally, we turn to the future. Our liturgy reflects what we can call an "eschatological tension." The Greek word, *eschaton*, refers to the end, to our final goal, to the destination of our journey, which is eternal life with God. In the meantime, we live in tension, we live with the reality that the Reign of God is and is-not-yet. We are straining towards a future of God's making but have not yet arrived. This part of the Eucharistic Prayer shifts attention to the ecclesial Body of Christ—to us, the Church, we who live in this betwixt-and-between time.

This section begins with a second invocation of the Spirit, or *epiclesis*. We pray that the Spirit—the same Spirit which transformed the gifts—will now transform (or, better, continue to transform) us:

*Humbly we pray that, partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ,
we may be gathered into one by the Holy Spirit.*

While it is true that, through baptism, we are already the Body of Christ, we are also a sinful people. We turn our backs on our identity as Christ's Body, the Church. Rather than the unity of the Body, we put ourselves, and our agendas, first. So, here, we plead for a fresh outpouring of the Spirit to deepen our oneness in Christ.

As liturgist Sister Joyce Ann Zimmerman has noted, just as there is a double epiclesis there is also a double offering. As Christ offers himself to the Father, we, too, offer ourselves. Having been brought together by the Holy Spirit, and baptized into Christ's priesthood, we are joined to Christ's own self-offering to the Father. As Christ prays for the whole Church, we, too, intercede for the living and for the dead:

Remember, Lord, your Church, spread throughout the world, and bring her to the fullness of charity, together with N. our Pope and N. our Bishop and all the clergy.

Remember also our brothers and sisters who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection and all who have died in your mercy: welcome them into the light of your face.

Have mercy on us all, we pray, that with the blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God,

with the blessed Apostles, and all the Saints who have pleased you throughout the ages, we may merit to be co-heirs to eternal life, and may praise and glorify you through your Son, Jesus Christ.

Note that the prayer ends on an eschatological note; we still await the fullness of that Reign of which the Eucharist is only a foretaste. More importantly, the offering of ourselves in the liturgy does not occur in isolation. The sacrifice of praise celebrated in the liturgy must reflect lives of sacrifice—of loving service to God and neighbor—outside the liturgy (remember, intercessions are also about reminding ourselves of what our faith calls us to do). The two go hand in hand. We proclaim the story; we celebrate the memorial of Christ; and, changed, we are sent to live Eucharistic lives. As Father Louis-Marie Chauvet has noted, the Christian life must include the three dimensions of scripture, sacrament, and ethics. We'll talk more about this last point when we get to the Concluding Rites.

The Concluding Doxology

The priest then raises the paten and chalice (if a deacon is present, he raises the chalice) and says:

*Through him, and with him, and in him, O God, almighty Father,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, for ever and ever.*

Just as at the beginning of the prayer, with the preface dialogue, the Eucharistic Prayer ends with a communal exchange: we (*not* the priest) respond: Amen! Having knelt after the Holy, Holy, we now stand.

Entering the Mystery

As one baptized into the priesthood of Christ, for whom else do I pray during the intercessions of the Eucharistic Prayer?

Does my "Amen" at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer reflect the awe, wonder, and gratitude that this prayer ought to evoke in us? Can I make the following words from Sr. Joyce Ann Zimmerman my own?

And how can we not shout AMEN at the end of this great recital—this great story, this awesome remembering—of all God's mighty deeds accomplished for our salvation, of the transformation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, at the transformation of ourselves into being more unified and holy members of the Body of Christ. Yes, definitely, AMEN! So be it!

THE COMMUNION RITE

Preparing for Communion

Lord's Prayer, Sign of Peace, Fraction

The Preparation for Communion can be divided into three parts: the Lord's Prayer, the Sign of Peace, and the Fraction (accompanied by the Lamb of God). This part of the rite begins with the priest inviting us to pray the Lord's Prayer with these provocative words: *At the Savior's command and formed by divine teaching, we dare to say.* And, together, we all pray: *Our Father....*

"Dare to say...." That certainly fits if we really take to heart what Jesus is asking of us in this prayer: that God be above all else in our lives, that God's will and not our own be done, that we be forgiven only to the degree that we forgive others. Easy words to say; much harder to live!

After we pray the familiar part of the Lord's Prayer, the priest adds what is called the embolism:

Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We (and not the priest) then finish the prayer with the doxology:

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for ever.

The Sign of Peace is then shared with those around us. Far more than simply a social nicety, the Sign of Peace is a reminder: what we do in here ought to be reflected in what we do out there. In other words, do we share Christ's peace with all those we encounter beyond the four walls of the church?

Entering the Mystery

In my own time of prayer, do I pray the Lord's Prayer slowly, even line by line, reflecting on what each line means? Have I explored the implications for my own life of "daring" to pray these words?

Do I include the embolism and the doxology when I pray this prayer on my own, as a way to make a connection between my prayer at home and the prayer of the liturgy?

As we introduce the new Missal, will we—as a community—take the opportunity to *slow down* as we pray this prayer together?

Do I realize that the Sign of Peace that I exchange with the few people around is meant to be a sign of the peace that I bring to the world beyond the walls of the church? Do my actions at Mass reflect the reality that I live outside of Mass? Am I willing to be "broken" for the sake of others, to feed them with my very self?

The Ars Celebrandi

Since the Lord's Prayer is the prayer of the entire community, when I join the prayer do I soften my voice (or turn off my microphone) so as not to be heard above the others?

Do I maintain the dialogical nature of the prayer by remembering that while I pray the embolism it is for others to pray the doxology?

Do I recognize that the Fraction is the high point of this part of the rite? Do I wait to begin the action of breaking the bread until the Lamb of God begins, and the people have turned their attention from the Sign of Peace back to the Altar? Do I take my time and make my actions deliberate? Do I complete the fractioning at this time?

Do we sing the Lamb of God for the entire time that it takes to fraction and distribute the consecrated Bread?

Finally, the Eucharistic Bread is broken. This is the high point of the preparation for communion. As we pray to Christ (the Lamb of God), rather than to the Father (the Person of the Trinity that we usually address in the liturgy), we are reminded that Christ was broken for us. And we are reminded that, as those who claim to be Christ's disciples, we must be broken, too, in order to feed the world with our very selves.

A word on holding hands....

The preparation for communion is put together in such a way that it leads us from ourselves to deeper communion not only with those around us but with God and with all of creation, through Jesus Christ. Each element (Lord's Prayer, Sign of Peace, Communion) builds on the one before it and leads to the next one. If we make the Lord's Prayer the high point of expressing our unity by holding hands, and then make the Sign of Peace only about greeting those next to us (and not extending that same peace to the world), and then reduce communion to just something between me and Jesus, then we have gotten things backwards.

Posture

As Catholics, we pray with our bodies—and what we do with our bodies affects how we pray. So there are times during Mass when we sit, a posture of relaxed attention. There are times when we stand, a posture of heightened attention and

respect. There are times when we kneel, which can be a posture of penitence or a posture of adoration.

In the United States, it has become the familiar practice to kneel after the Lamb of God (for the invitation to communion) and remain kneeling through the rest of the Communion Rite except when making one's way to and receiving communion. Parishes can choose to keep doing things that way. However, there is another option which is common in the rest of the world: to remain standing until all have received communion.

Bishop Martin Amos, in encouraging this option, recognizes that standing better reflects what it is that we are doing at this point in the Mass. As our diocesan policy explains:

Communion is an act of the assembly together; therefore, to have those in their places, those in the communion procession, and the clergy adopting the same posture both expresses and helps

to bring about our oneness in Christ. In addition, standing facilitates the participation of the assembly in singing, which also serves to foster our unity.

Communion is something that we do together; ought not our body-language express that reality?

Part of the Mass	Posture of the Assembly
Beginning of Mass until the first reading	Stand
First reading until gospel acclamation	Sit
Gospel acclamation to end of gospel	Stand
Homily	Sit
Profession of Faith through Prayer of the Faithful	Stand
Preparation of the Gifts and Altar	Sit
<i>After</i> the priest says, “Pray, brothers and sisters...,” but <i>before</i> the reply, “May the Lord...”	Stand
<i>After</i> the Holy, Holy (<i>Sanctus</i>) until <i>after</i> the Great Amen	Kneel (unless temporarily impeded from doing so)
Our Father through Lamb of God	Stand
<i>Option One:</i>	
• After Lamb of God (for the Invitation to Communion)	Remain Standing
• While receiving communion	Stand
• On returning to one’s place	Remain Standing (sit or kneel if necessary)
<i>Option Two:</i>	
• After Lamb of God (for the Invitation to Communion)	Kneel
• While receiving communion	Stand
• On returning to one’s place	Kneel (or sit if necessary)
Silence after communion*	Sit or kneel
Prayer after Communion to end of Mass	Stand

*If there is to be a hymn of thanksgiving (GIRM 88) after communion, then all stand and join in the singing.

Invitation

The priest invites us to communion with these words:

*Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world.
Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.*

And we respond:

*Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof,
but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.*

This exchange is filled with references to the scriptures: the Lamb of God (John), the supper of the Lamb (Revelation), the words of the centurion (Matthew, Mark). More importantly, this exchange reminds us that we are *blessed* (not just happy) to be *called* to the Lamb's Supper—of which the Eucharist is a foretaste. We come because we are invited, not because we are *worthy*; the Eucharist is not earned or merited, but is pure gift.

Entering the Mystery

Do I realize how “hungry” I am for spiritual food? Do I come to Eucharist with a heart full of gratitude for the gift I am receiving (a gift; nothing that I can ever merit or earn)?

The Ars Celebrandi

Will I use the advent of the new Missal to help my community revisit how our posture reflects our prayer and our unity with the wider Church? Will I explore with our parish leadership the possibility of moving to standing for the Communion Rite (option 1 below)?

Here is a summary of the postures called for by the GIRM, as made particular for our diocese:

Communion

The Communion Procession

Entering the Mystery

Do I approach the Sacrament with the proper disposition? For example, if I am conscious of having committed any serious sins have I celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation? And if Church law requires that I not receive the Eucharist, do I abstain as a sign of my communion with the Church?

Have I fasted for an hour before communion? Have I thrown out any gum I was chewing (before Mass even began, but certainly before receiving communion)?

Do I receive communion in the forms of both Bread and Wine?

Because the priest is part of the community, the procession and the music to accompany it begin as the priest communes. We go to communion together, and so the music accompanies the entire action and concludes only once all (including musicians) have communed. As a Body, we journey to the Table together (which is why standing as the common posture is preferred, as mentioned in our previous article). Liturgical processions remind us that, as Christians, we are a pilgrim people, journeying to God. Just as we travel up the aisle towards the altar, we spend our whole lives journeying to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.

When we approach the minister for communion, we make a simple bow of the head, and then he or she says: The Body/Blood of Christ. Not, “this is....” The Body/Blood of Christ is so much more than the Eucharistic Bread and Wine held before us. So, then, what does our “Amen” mean? Yes, it means that we believe that Christ is truly, substantially present under the forms of Bread and Wine in the Eucharist. But it also means that we are willing to become what we receive; we are giving our consent to being transformed. In a sense, when we look at the host and the chalice, we are looking in a mirror. Yes, I am part of the Body of Christ. Yes, I want to be changed more and more into the Body of Christ. In the words of St. Augustine (Sermon 272):

If you are the body and members of Christ, then it is your sacrament that is placed on the table of the Lord; it is your sacrament that you receive. *To that which you are* you respond “Amen” (“yes, it is true!”) and by responding to it you assent to it. For you hear the words, “the Body of Christ” and respond, “Amen.” Be then a member of the Body of Christ that your Amen may be true.

The communion procession has a purpose: to bring those who are to receive communion to the Table. While it has become common for those not receiving communion to join in the procession and receive a “blessing” instead, perhaps this is a good time to rethink this practice. While some argue that including everyone in the procession is an act of hospitality, it also ‘says’ something that is not true: that everyone can and may receive the Eucharist. It also changes the meaning of the rite, making the reception of communion and the reception of a blessing somehow equivalent.

Prayer after Communion

The Communion Rite ends with the Prayer after Communion. We close this part of the Mass by asking that the Sacrament which we have just received would have an effect in our lives here and now, as well as help bring us to the fullness of life with God at the end of time. Next time that we are at Mass, we may want to listen carefully to the words: In what way are we asking to be renewed? In what ways do I need the Eucharist’s effects?

The Ars Celebrandi

As a cleric or lay minister of communion, do my words and actions foster an encounter with Christ for the communicant? Do I wait for the communicant to bow and step forward, before speaking? Do I make eye contact? Do I take my time, or am I so rushed that I treat the communion procession like a conveyor belt?

Does the music that we use at this point in the Mass foster the unity (the communion) of those present—so that common action (procession, singing) and posture (standing) work together to express and bring about our unity as the Body of Christ?

If we have a hymn of thanksgiving after communion, is it sung by the entire assembly while standing (rather than as a “meditation” by the choir or cantor alone)—as directed by the liturgical books?

THE CONCLUDING RITES

BLESSING AND DISMISSAL

The term “Mass” comes from the Latin *dismissal* (see the word in there, too?) formula: *Ite, missa est* (which is translated in the new Missal as “Go forth, the Mass is ended”). So we have come to name all that God has just done in the liturgy with the last thing that God does: send us on mission.

To dare to celebrate Eucharist is to consent to being changed not only for our own good but for others. Jesuit theologian Father Larry Madden put it this way: “The only reason for the transformation of the bread and wine is our transformation; and our transformation is not just for our sake but for the sake of the world (and is a life-long project).”

As Pope Benedict XVI has reminded us, the Eucharist is not just a mystery to be believed and celebrated, it must also be a mystery to be lived. He states in *Sacramentum caritatis*:

Entering the Mystery

As I listen carefully to the new dismissals, do I ask myself: Who am I being called to be? What am I being called to do?

The Ars Celebrandi

Do I respect the integrity of the Communion Rite by praying the Prayer after Communion at the proper time and not after the announcements?

Are announcements, if any, brief—and do they relate to how it is that we might live the gospel in the coming week?

In the Eucharist Jesus also makes us witnesses of God's compassion towards all our brothers and sisters. The eucharistic mystery thus gives rise to a service of charity towards neighbour, which “consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, affecting even my feelings. Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ...” Our communities, when they celebrate the Eucharist, must become ever more conscious that the sacrifice of Christ is for all, and that the Eucharist thus compels all who believe in him to become “bread that is broken” for others, and to work for the building of a more just and fraternal world.... Each of us is truly called, together with Jesus, to be bread broken for the life of the world (88).

“All who partake of the Eucharist must commit themselves to peacemaking in our world scarred by violence and war, and today in particular, by terrorism, economic corruption and sexual exploitation.” All these problems give rise in turn to others no less troubling and disheartening. We know that there can be no superficial solutions to these issues. Precisely because of the mystery we celebrate, we must denounce situations contrary to human dignity, since Christ shed his blood for all, and at the same time affirm the inestimable value of each individual person (89).

To emphasize this often-forgotten aspect of Eucharist, the Holy Father has added three new formulas for the dismissal. These are the newest words in the Catholic liturgy, a liturgy that has continued to evolve over 2000 years:

Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.

OR: *Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.*

OR: *Go in peace.*

We are sent to announce the Good News of God’s justice; we are sent to glorify God by living lives of sacrificial service; we are sent to be peacemakers. We are not sent to go back to our lives as if nothing has happened.

The blessing that comes before the dismissal is one final prayer on our behalf: that we would be blessed as we are sent to be whom the celebration of Eucharist has called us to be, and to do what celebrating Eucharist has called us to do. It is a reminder, like the Sign of the Cross at the start of Mass, of *who* we are and *whose* we are!

SINGING THE MASS

Entering the Mystery

Do I sing? Do I fully, consciously, and actively enter the liturgy by raising my voice in praise, thanksgiving, and petition? Do I honor God’s gift of song, reflecting that the primary musical instrument in the liturgy is the human voice?

Note that the title isn’t “Singing *at* Mass.” Those who spearheaded the liturgical reforms that took shape at Vatican II were fond of saying: don’t just pray *at* Mass, but *pray* the Mass! We can say the same thing about singing.

Mass is not “American Idol.” We are not auditioning; we are praying. Singing involves the whole body in the act of worship. A sad side-effect of recorded music is that we think songs are just for listening, for entertainment. Such a view is completely foreign to the liturgy.

Roman Catholic liturgy is intended to be sung; but that does not mean that we sing everything possible every time that we assemble for worship. In choosing what to sing, we are governed by two principles: the principle of progressive solemnity and the principle that certain Mass texts or parts are more important than others.

Progressive Solemnity

Citing the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, the U.S. Bishops define progressive solemnity as follows: “Progressive solemnity means that ‘between the solemn, fuller form of liturgical celebration, in which everything that demands singing is in fact sung, and the simplest form, in which singing is not used, there can be various degrees according to the greater or lesser place allotted to singing’” (*Sing to the Lord*, #111).

How do we decide which celebrations call for a greater solemnity and which a lesser? First, there is the day: Sundays ought to be observed with greater solemnity than weekdays. Second, the liturgical season also calls for adjustments in our singing. The Easter and Christmas Seasons, for example, call for greater singing while Lent and Advent are more subdued. Finally, individual Solemnities and Feasts call for greater solemnity; the key feasts of Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas, for example, would call for the greatest use of music.

Mass Parts

But what should we sing? As we've mentioned before in this series, the most important Mass parts are the dialogues and acclamations. These are the most important to sing. The antiphons and psalms are likewise intended to be sung on a regular basis. At the other end of the spectrum might be the chanting of the gospel, which could reasonably be reserved to the most solemn of occasions. The key is that each community must discern for itself how best to live out these principles.

Silence

The Ars Celebrandi

As a priest or deacon, do I model the full participation called for by the Council by joining in the singing? Do I carry a hymnal in the procession so I can sing along? Have I learned to chant the parts of the Mass, to the degree that I am able? Can I let go of my shyness or embarrassment and give voice to the long-standing tradition of sung (unaccompanied) liturgy in the Church? Do I turn my microphone off, so as not to overshadow the assembly?

As a music minister, do I keep in mind that my ministry is to support the community in their sung prayer, not to take center stage? (For example, when a presider or minister chants a prayer, am I able to lead the assembly's response in a similar chant style?) Do I avoid any sense that I am the master, and not the servant, of the liturgy? That I am there to entertain? Do I avoid becoming the center of attention by stepping away from the microphone when the assembly is singing—and by stepping out of view when we are singing well-known pieces? Do I avoid exaggerated or extraneous gestures, as well as limit my gesturing to only when absolutely necessary?

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that silence is a crucial component of liturgy, as *Sing to the Lord* #118 mentions:

Music arises out of silence and returns to silence. God is revealed both in the beauty of song and in the power of silence. The Sacred Liturgy has its rhythm of texts, actions, songs, and silence. Silence in the Liturgy allows the community to reflect on what it has heard and experienced, and to open its heart to the mystery celebrated. Ministers and pastoral musicians should take care that the rites unfold with the proper ebb and flow of sound and silence. The importance of silence in the Liturgy cannot be overemphasized.