

The Mass: Moment by Moment

Part 3: The Communion and Concluding Rites

Communion Rite

The Communion Rite follows the Eucharistic Prayer, leading the faithful to the Eucharistic table.

The rite begins with the Lord's Prayer. Jesus taught this prayer to his disciples when they asked how to pray (cf. Mt 6:9-13, Lk 11:2-4). In this prayer, the people join their voices to pray for the coming of God's kingdom and to ask God to provide for our needs, forgive our sins, and bring us to the joy of heaven.

The Rite of Peace follows. The celebrant prays that the peace of Christ will fill our hearts, our families, our Church, our communities, and our world. As a sign of hope, the people extend to those around them a sign of peace.

In the Fraction Rite, the celebrant breaks the consecrated bread as the people sing the *Agnus Dei* or "Lamb of God." John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). The action of breaking the bread recalls the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper, when he broke the bread before giving it to his disciples. One of the earliest names for the Eucharistic celebration is the breaking of the bread (Lk 24:35; Acts 2:42, 46).

Before receiving Holy Communion, the celebrant and assembly acknowledge their unworthiness to receive so great a gift. The celebrant receives Holy Communion first and then the people come forward.

Those who receive Holy Communion should be prepared to receive so great a gift. They should fast (except for medicines) for at least one hour before receiving the Eucharist and should not be conscious of having committed serious sin.

Because sharing at the Eucharistic Table is a sign of unity in the Body of Christ, only those in communion with the Catholic Church may receive Holy Communion. To invite others present to receive Holy Communion implies a unity which does not exist. Those who do not receive Holy Communion still participate in this rite by praying for unity with Christ and with each other.

The people approach the altar and, bowing with reverence, receive Holy Communion. People may receive the Body of Christ either on the tongue or in the hand. The priest or other minister offers the Eucharist to each person saying, "The Body of Christ." The person receiving responds by saying, "Amen," a Hebrew word meaning, "So be it" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2856).

As the people receive Holy Communion, the communion chant/song is sung. The unity of voices echoes the unity the Eucharist brings. All may spend some time in silent prayer of thanksgiving as well.

The Communion Rite ends with the Prayer after Communion which asks that the benefits of the Eucharist will remain active in our daily lives.

Concluding Rites

During the Concluding Rites, announcements may be made (if necessary) after the Prayer after Communion. The celebrant then blesses the people assembled. Sometimes, the blessing is very simple. On special days, the blessing may be more extensive. In every case, the blessing is always trinitarian: "May almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." It is in the triune God and in the sign of the cross that we find our blessing.

After the blessing, the deacon dismisses the people. In fact, the dismissal gives the liturgy its name. The word "Mass" comes from the Latin word, "*Missa*." At one time, the people were dismissed with the words "*Ite, missa est*" (literally meaning "Go, she—meaning you, the Church—has been sent"). The word "*Missa*" is related to the word "*missio*," the root of the English word "mission." The liturgy does not simply come to an end. Those assembled are sent forth to bring the fruits of the Eucharist to the world.

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