

"Come to the Feast" Part II

Exploring what we do and why we do it.

A basic introduction to the Roman Catholic understanding of the Sacrifice of the Mass.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST AND SENDING FORTH

- * WE CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD AND LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST *** In a sense we are fed at the "table of the Word" and the "table of the Eucharist". Both are necessary and intricately connected, drawing life and meaning from each other.
- * THE CHURCH IS ABOUT COMMUNION *** We are called to communion with God, communion with the entire human race and the world. This sacrament of unity sadly becomes a source of division at times over style, which way the altar faces and other issues. We celebrate Eucharist as both a SIGN and an INSTRUMENT of unity. St. Augustine would say we "become what we receive"- that is, the Body of Christ.
- * PREPARATION OF THE ALTAR TABLE*** We have celebrated the Word, together proclaimed the Creed and offered the Prayers of the Faithful. Now the altar table is prepared ("set") by bringing *corporal, Missal, and vessels*. Bringing the gifts of bread and wine, and the offerings follow. Ideally these are brought forward through the assembly to signify the offering of ourselves to the Lord. The priest/presider receives the gifts and offers them on behalf of the assembly, using prayers derived from Jewish meal prayers. Then he alone places them on the altar of sacrifice. Wine and water are mixed into the chalice and offered, and the priest then washes his hands. Both of these originally came from cultural actions and later were given spiritual meanings. As a sign of reverence and prayers rising to heaven, incense is used on special occasions. This part concludes with the prayer "Pray, brothers and sisters..."
- * THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER*** If the Mass is the "source and summit" of our prayer, the Eucharistic Prayer is the source and summit of the Mass. It begins with the Preface, a prayer of thanksgiving. The Holy Holy Holy follows as an acclamation by the assembly. The posture of the assembly varies somewhat according to country. For many European countries, a more proclamatory interpretation has the assembly standing and only kneeling at the time of the Consecration. In the United States a more devotional interpretation is followed with the assembly kneeling from the Holy, Holy through the Great Amen.

Every Eucharistic Prayer (of which there are 10) contains the “epiclesis” (invocation of the Holy Spirit) and the Institution Narrative (the re-telling of the Last Supper discourse). Each contains options for the assembly to respond. Each prayer has an “anamnesis” (remembrance that the Church has received this from Christ), the “oblation” (the offering of this sacrifice and the offering of our very selves as well), the “intercessions” (specific prayers offered in communion with the whole Church of heaven and earth) and the concluding “doxology” (called the “great Amen”).

*** THE COMMUNION RITE*** Our immediate preparation for receiving Holy Communion begins with the Lord’s Prayer and our petition for “our daily bread”. We pray to be released from sin and delivered from evil so that what is holy may be given to the holy. The SIGN OF PEACE asks for peace and unity for the whole Church and the whole family of God- much like the Jewish concept of “shalom”. What follows now is very significant – the FRACTION RITE – formerly called the BREAKING OF THE BREAD. This was the name of the rite in Apostolic times. It finds its roots in Jesus at the Last Supper. It also is the ritual action describing not only Jesus’ life, but also an exhortation to us as well, to lives that are “broken and shared.” In the Emmaus account, they “recognized him in the breaking of the bread.” (Lk 24:35) This action is accompanied by a hymn called the “Lamb of God”, which concludes when the Fraction Rite and preparation of Holy Communion has been completed. Following this, the priest/presider issues the call to communion: “Behold the Lamb of God...”, to which all respond with the scriptural “Lord, I am not worthy...”. (Mt 8:8)

*** THE COMMUNION PROCESSIONAL*** This is an intimate and very holy time for the assembly and for the individual. We approach the altar singing the processional hymn (if there is one) and before receiving we make a sign of reverence, as determined by the local bishop. In our archdiocese this action is a reverent bow. Then we present ourselves for receiving in one of two ways; outside of pandemic times, we extend our tongue and have the Host placed on our tongue, step aside and make the Sign of the Cross. Or we cup both of our hands (with dominant hand under), have the Host placed in our hands, take our dominant hand and communicate ourselves and make the Sign of the Cross. It is always worthy to approach Holy Communion with an intention in mind, and then go back to our place in the assembly for a brief period of private prayer.

*** THE COMMUNION RITE CONCLUDES WITH THE PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION*** Announcements may follow at this time.

*** THE FINAL BLESSING AND DISMISSAL/SENDING FOLLOWS**