

Lesson 13: The Preparation of the Altar and Procession of the Gifts

Action:

Last week we talked in a general way about the Liturgy of the Eucharist. First of all, we said that the Mass has two parts: Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist. In the first part of the Mass we listen to the Word of God, opening our heart and mind to receive His Wisdom; in the Liturgy of the Eucharist, we receive him--Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, in Holy Communion.

The Mass is a sacrifice. It is a re-presentation of Christ's bloody sacrifice on Calvary but on the altar today the same sacrifice is re-presented that is, offered, in an unbloodied way. This has always been believed and was the reason many of the early Christians were marginalized and thought to be cannibals. But let's get on with today's lesson:

Before the gifts of bread and wine are brought up to the altar the deacon or priest prepares the altar to receive them. The altar is the center of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, in much the same way that the ambo (or lectern) is the center of the Liturgy of the Word.

The servers bring the chalice, the corporal, the paten, the purificator(s), the sacramentary and any extra vessels containing bread or cups to be used at Communion which are not brought to the sanctuary with the procession of

the gifts. The priest then spreads the corporal on the altar, arranges the sacramentary and the other vessels.

Assisted by the ushers those who are bringing up the gifts of unleavened bread and the wine come forward. In many parishes, such as ours, the collection is also brought forward at this time. And, on some special occasions they may also bring up gifts for the poor or some symbolic objects. The priest usually receives the gifts standing at the front of the sanctuary flanked by the deacon and two servers. Servers take the bread and wine and other objects from the priest to the altar or credence table. The priest places the bread and the wine on the altar.

History:

In the early Church the people themselves provided the unleavened wheat bread and wine from their own homes for the Eucharist. As the Church grew, the custom of bringing forward the bread and wine for the Eucharistic sacrifice developed into a procession in which the people sometimes brought not only the bread and wine but other items that could be distributed to the poor of the community. Gradually, the procession to the altar with the gifts faded out of common usage. However, after the Second Vatican Council the procession of the gifts to the sanctuary was revived.

What we can do to better participate in this rite

Like the entrance procession the procession of the gifts by a few people represents all of us bringing forward the gifts of ourselves and our resources. It expresses both symbolically and practically our commitment to share our financial resources and ourselves with those in need.

As the gifts are brought forward ask the Lord to give you the grace to share yourself, your talents and your financial resources with Him. After all, everything that we have we have received from God.