

Lesson 14: The Blessing of the Bread and the Wine

Action:

Last week we talked about the Preparation of the Altar and the bringing up the of gifts of bread and wine that will soon become the Body and Blood of Christ. During the preparation of the altar and the bringing up of the gifts is a good time to offer ourselves to the Lord – beg Him to allow you to be transformed and made Christ-like even as the bread and wine will be changed into Christ.

After the bread and wine has been brought forward and been placed on the altar, the priest goes to the center of the altar and bows. With both hands, he raises the paten with the bread slightly above the altar and says a prayer, “Blessed are you...” At the completion of this prayer the people respond, “Blessed be God forever.” Unless the deacon prepares the chalice for him, the priest next pours wine into the chalice and then a small amount of water while saying a prayer. He then goes back to the center of the altar and raising the chalice slightly prays, “Blessed are you...” The people respond, “Blessed be God forever.”

Sometimes the blessings are said by the priest silently over the bread and wine or he may say them aloud. Sometimes, too, the bread and the wine are incensed after the blessing as a way of showing that the bread and wine are to be made sacred. On more solemn occasions, both the priest and the people will be incensed; the priest because of his Holy Orders and the people because of the dignity they possess through baptism.

History:

The blessings the priest prays over the bread and the wine are derived from ancient Jewish prayers, called the Kiddush. These prayers are still in use today by religious Jews who celebrate the Sabbath. Given the context of the Last Super, it is probable that these prayers are very similar to those Jesus would have said.

The prayer the priest says when he pours water into the wine asks that we who participate in this Mass may come to share in the divinity of Christ (symbolized by the wine) who humbled Himself to share in our humanity (symbolized by the water).

Originally mixing water with the wine had a very practical purpose. In early centuries wine was very thick and strong. It was common, both in secular and religious usage, to dilute it with water. This practical action was soon given symbolic meaning based on the water and blood that poured forth from the side of Christ when he was pierced by the soldiers lance.

What we can do to better participate in this part of the Mass

As the priest offers the bread and wine to God we should join our prayer with his, offering ourselves- our sufferings, shortcomings and our talents, our whole selves, along with the bread and wine that will become, through the action of the Holy Spirit, the body and blood of Christ.