RCIA - The Mass

The Sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist dates back to the early Church and is spoken of as early as the 2nd century in the writings of the Church fathers.

Although the celebration of the Eucharist existed in the early Church, the term “Mass” was not introduced until the 4th century when it was used by St Ambrose and St Augustine.

The term is derived from the Latin “missa” which originated from the practice of the dismissal of catechumens prior to the Eucharist. Others relate it to the dismissal at the end of the service where we are encouraged to go forth in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the Roman Catholic Church we reserve the term Mass to liturgical services where the bread and wine are consecrated through the power of the Holy Spirit and become the True Body and Blood of Christ.

The Mass is formed by two great parts that form a fundamental unity:

The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Catechism notes that, “the Eucharistic table set for us is the table both of the Word of God and of the Body of the Lord.” (CCC)

It is important that we actively participate in Mass and not just be a passive observer.
The reason we attend Mass is to Love and Worship God and to enter into the Sacred Mystery of the Holy Eucharist where we partake of the True Body and Blood of Christ. This requires deep reverence that can be obtained by the following:

- Arrive at least 15 minutes early so that you can leave the hectic pace of the world behind you and center/focus on your love and worship of God.

- As you enter the sanctuary bless yourself with Holy Water found in the fonts at each entrance. You dip your right hand in the water and make the sign of the cross. This is to remind us of our baptism through which we died to sin. But by dying with Christ we also share in his resurrection. Through baptism we are forgiven of all sins and become children of God.
• Genuflect or Bow before you take your seat. This is a sign of Reverence to Christ who is truly present in the form of the consecrated Hosts reserved in the Tabernacle. In medieval Europe, it was a custom to go down on one knee (to genuflect) before a king or person of rank. This secular mark of honor gradually entered the Church and people began to genuflect to honor the altar and the presence of Christ in the tabernacle before entering the pew. Today many people express their reverence with an even older custom and bow to the altar before taking their place.

• Spend time in silent prayer to allow yourself to connect with God and discuss with him what is on your mind and in your heart. Through prayer you can ready yourself for the great mystery that you are about to enter.

• Reverential silence. Do not carry on a conversation once you are in the sanctuary. If you do need to speak do so with a quiet voice.

A good way to describe the Mass is to say that it is Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday made present today in our ritual.

During the Holy Triduum, the holiest three days of the church’s calendar, we celebrate Holy Thursday which centers around the Last Supper with the institution of the Holy Eucharist; Good Friday with its focus on the Passion of Christ with his suffering, crucifixion and death, and then Easter itself with the glorious resurrection of our Lord.

It is not merely a meal, which reminds us of the Last Supper, or a passion play, which helps recall Good Friday, or a sunrise service, which celebrates the Lord’s Resurrection. It is Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

The bishops at the Second Vatican Council brought together these three mysteries in a multifaceted description of the Mass:

“At the Last Supper, on the night when he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his body and blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until he should come again and in this way to entrust to his beloved Bride, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet ‘in which Christ is eaten, the heart is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us’”

(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #42).
The Franciscan father, Thomas Richstatter OFM, proposes that the “basic shape” of the Mass can be described as a meal.

When friends gather for a meal, they sit and talk. Eventually they move to the table, say grace, pass the food and eat and drink, and finally take their leave and go home.
On our walk through the Mass we will follow this same structure: we will see ritual acts of 1) gathering, 2) storytelling, 3) meal sharing and 4) dismissal/commissioning.

Introductory Rites

Coming together, assembling, is at the heart of our Sunday worship. The reason behind each of the ritual actions of the first part of the Mass can be found in this word: gathering. The purpose of these rites is to bring us together into one body, ready to listen and to break bread together.

The Mass begins with the procession of the priest, deacon(s), and altar servers through the midst of the people. It is a sign of ministry in the midst of God’s people.

When the Mass begins everyone stands. Standing is the traditional posture of the Christian at prayer. It expresses our attentiveness to the word of God and our readiness to carry it out. Often we begin by singing together. What better way to gather than to unite our thoughts and our voices in song. It is said that when we sing in Mass we pray twice.

In this presentation I will include page numbers from your Missalettes. Hopefully this will be helpful to you as you slowly become accustomed to the service.

The Entrance Antiphon (page 2) or Processional Hymn should reflect the liturgical spirit of the season or day: a Liturgical season such as Easter or Lent or possibly a Holy Day venerating a saint.
The Book of the Gospels is carried in by the deacon or lector (if no deacon is present.) The Book of Gospels is held slightly elevated as a sign of reverence to the Word of God.

The altar is reverenced with a kiss by the priest and deacon.

During special Masses incense may be used.

The Greeting can be found on Page 6

The priest will ask us to begin with the sign of the cross*, again reminding us of Baptism, and will greet us, saying, “The Lord be with you.” You will hear this greeting frequently. It is both a wish (may the Lord be with you) and a profound statement of faith (as you assemble for worship, the Lord is with you). It is an ancient biblical greeting: Boaz returned from Bethlehem (Book of Ruth 2:4) and said to the reapers, “The Lord be with you!” The ritual response to this greeting is always the formula, “And with your spirit.”

*The Sign of the Cross also reminds us of the Crucifixion, Death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ

All the other ritual acts of this first part of the Mass are intended to gather us together into a worshiping assembly.

We are asked to pause and recall our common need for salvation in the Penitential Rite.

Penitential Rite
This may take one of several forms and is found on pages 8-10
  - Confiteor
  - Kyrie (Lord, Have Mercy)

The Rite of Penitence to those who are truly contrite absolves one of venial sin

Rite of Sprinkling with Holy Water – page 10
This is done at special masses and replaces the customary Rite of Penitence.
This represents a form of blessing on the gathered faithful

The hymn “Glory to God in the Highest” is sung at this point. The “Gloria” has been a part of the Mass since about the sixth century. These longer hymns and responses are found in the missalette.

**Gloria (Hymn – Glory to God in the Highest)**  page 10

**Opening Prayer (Collect) – pages 12-16**

The Collect begins with the words, “*Let us pray*”

We are called to a moment of *shared*, deep silence in the presence of the great mystery we call God. This deep silence is concluded by the priest praying aloud the Opening Prayer or Collect.

The priest will ask us to join our minds in prayer, and after a few moments of silence he will collect our intentions into one prayer to which we all respond “*Amen,*” a Hebrew word for “*So be it.*”

The silence is the heart of the collect.
The words of the collect are not.
The collect concludes our gathering

The intent of the Introductory Rites is that the assembled group unites as a community properly prepared to hear God's Word and celebrate the Eucharist.

Our word church comes from the Greek *eklesia*, a verb meaning to assemble

**The Liturgy of the Word**

When we gather at a friend’s home for a meal, we always begin with conversation, telling our stories. At Mass, after the rites of gathering, we sit down and listen as readings from the Word of God are proclaimed. They are the stories of God’s people.
During the Liturgy of the Word… the Word of God is proclaimed, responded to, authoritatively explained, accepted and held fast, and appealed to.

First Reading
The first reading will usually be from the Hebrew Scriptures. We recall the origins of our covenant. It will relate to the Gospel selection and will give background and an insight into the meaning of what Jesus will do in the Gospel.

Responsorial Psalm
Following the 1st reading we will sing or recite a psalm—a song from God’s own inspired hymnal, the Book of Psalms of the Hebrew Bible.

Second Reading
The second reading will usually be from one of the letters of Paul or another apostolic writing.

Gospel Acclamation (Alleluia) STAND
Because of the unique presence of Christ in the proclamation of the Gospel, it has long been the custom to stand in attentive reverence to hear these words. We believe that Christ “is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the church” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #7).

Gospel Reading SIT after the completion of the Gospel

The deacon or priest if there is no deacon will again greet us with “The Lord be with you.” He then introduces the Gospel reading while marking a small cross on his forehead, lips and heart with his thumb while praying silently that God cleans his mind and his heart so that his lips may worthily proclaim the Gospel. The congregation also performs this ritual action along with the priest. The Gospel reading concludes with the ritual formula “The Gospel of the Lord” and we respond, “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ,” again proclaiming our faith in the presence of Christ in the word. Then we sit for the homily.

Some visitors to the Catholic Mass are surprised to find us reading from the Bible. We Catholics have not generally been famous for our Bible reading, and yet the Mass has always been basically and fundamentally biblical: Not only the three readings and the psalm, not only the obviously
biblical prayers such as the Holy, Holy, Holy and the Lord’s Prayer, but most of the words and phrases of the prayers of the Mass are taken from the Bible.

**Homily**
- A homily and sermon have subtle differences.

A *homily* explains a passage of scripture and gives practical applications. The homily takes the word just proclaimed and brings it to our life situation today. Just as a large piece of bread is broken to feed individual persons, the word of God must be broken open so it can be received and digested by the congregation.

- A *sermon* develops a point of doctrine or morals in a systematic way.

**Silence**
The homily is often followed by a few moments of silence during which we each thank God for the word we have heard and apply the message of today’s readings to our daily living.

We then stand and together recite the creed.

**Profession of Faith – Nicene Creed**
The creed is more than a list of things, which we believe. It is a statement of our faith in the word we have heard proclaimed in the Scripture and the homily, and a profession of the faith that leads us to give our lives for one another as Christ gave his life for us.

**General Intercessions (Prayers of the Faithful)**
The General Intercessions help us become who God is calling us to be. We are the Body of Christ by Baptism. We pray that our assembly really comes to look like the Body of Christ, a body at peace, with shelter for the homeless, healing for the sick, food for the hungry.

We pray for the Church, nations and their leaders, people in special need and the local needs of our parish—the petitions usually fall into these four categories. A minister will announce the petitions, and we are
usually given an opportunity to pray for the intentions in our heart, making some common response aloud like, “Lord, hear our prayer.”

**Liturgy of the Eucharist**

After the readings, the Liturgy of the Word, we move to the table.

As at a meal in the home of a friend, we:

1) set the table
2) say grace
3) share the food (we eat and drink).

At Mass these ritual actions are called:

1) the Preparation of the Gifts
2) the Eucharistic Prayer
3) the Communion Rite.

The following is an outline of the Liturgy of the Eucharist

Preparation of the Altar and of the Gifts
Prayer over the Gifts

Eucharistic Prayer
- Preface dialogue (Invitation)
- Preface
- Preface acclamation: Holy Holy Holy (*Sanctus*)

Eucharistic Prayer continues
- Epiclesis
- Institution Narrative
- Memorial Acclamation

Eucharistic Prayer resumes
- Doxology
- Great Amen
Communion Rite
- Lord’s Prayer
- Rite of Peace
- Breaking of the Bread/Comingling
- Lamb of God (Agnus Dei)

Communion

Prayer after Communion

Let's discuss the Liturgy of the Eucharist in detail

Preparation of the Gifts

The early Christians each brought some bread and wine from their homes to the church to be used for the Mass and to be given to the clergy and the poor. Today a similar offering for the parish and the poor is made with our monetary contributions. Members of the parish will take up a collection from the assembly and bring it to the priest at the altar along with the bread and wine to be used for the sacrifice.

The ordinary bread and wine in part, represent us as we are presented to God in sacrifice.

The Offertory is not about the collection of money and should not be equated to the collection. In the Offertory the priest offers the bread and wine to God the Father - the bread and wine that will be changed into Jesus' Body and Blood when the Consecration comes.

The offertory is about our presentation of ordinary bread and wine, made of human hands, which by the power of the Holy Spirit will become the Body and Blood of Christ.

The priest places the bread and wine on the table. He (or the deacon) then mixes water with the wine and washes his hands to help us think of the Last Supper. (Mixing water with wine and washing hands are things all
Jews did at meals in Jesus’ day.) Finally, he invites us to pray that the sacrifice be acceptable to God: “May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for our good and the good of all his holy Church.” We respond “Amen” to the Prayer Over the Gifts and stand to participate in the central prayer of the Mass.

**Preparation of Altar / Presentation of the Gifts**

The priest prepares the altar and the gifts, prays over the bread and wine, and helps the assembly to prepare for the tremendous sacrifice that will take place

- Preparation of the Altar
- Preparation of the Bread
- Preparation of the Wine
- Washing of Hands

**Invitation to Prayer**

- Prayer over the Gifts

**Eucharistic Prayer**

The long prayer, which follows, brings us to the very center of the Mass and the heart of our faith. While the words of the prayer may vary from Sunday to Sunday, the prayer always has this structure:

1) We call upon God to remember all the wonderful saving deeds of our history.
2) We recall the central event in our history, Jesus Christ, and in particular the memorial he left us on the night before he died. We recall his passion, death and resurrection.
3) After gratefully calling to mind all the wonderful saving acts God has done for us in the past, we petition God to continue those deeds of Christ in the present: We pray that we may become one body, one spirit in Christ.

The Eucharistic Prayer is the center and high point of the Mass that makes Christ present for us in His Passion, Death, and Resurrection. During it, the entire assembly joins Christ in acknowledging the works of God and in the offering of Sacrifice.
These prayers are very ancient.

Preface Dialogue
The prayer begins with a dialogue between the priest and the assembly. First, the priest greets us with “The Lord be with you.” He then asks if we are ready and willing to approach the table and to renew our baptismal commitment, offering ourselves to God: “Lift up your hearts.” And we say that we are prepared to do so: “We lift them up to the Lord.” We are invited to give thanks to the Lord our God. And we respond: “It is right and just.” To give “thanks and praise” translates the traditional Greek verb which now names the whole action: Eucharist.

Preface and Acclamation
In the preface, the Church gives thanks to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, for all his works: creation, redemption, and sanctification.

The priest enters into the Preface, which prepares us to come before the face of God. We are brought into God’s presence and speak of how wonderful God has been to us. In the ritual language of the Mass, this acclamation takes the form: “Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.”

Eucharistic Prayer

Epiclesis
In the epiclesis, the Church asks the Father to send his Holy Spirit (or the power of his blessing) on the bread and wine, so that by his power they may become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ and so that those who take part in the Eucharist may be one body and one spirit

Institution Narrative: Consecration.
He then recalls the events of the Last Supper—the institution of the Eucharist. In the institution narrative, the power of the words and the action of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit, make sacramentally present under the species of bread and wine Christ's body and blood, his sacrifice offered on the cross once for all.

Memorial Acclamation
At this important moment in the prayer, we proclaim the mystery of faith. Several texts are possible, for example: “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.” Recently at St. Teresa of Avila we have sung, “When we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim your death O Lord, until you come again.”

**Eucharistic Prayer** continues  
**Prayer for unity and intercessions.**
The priest continues recalling the wonderful deeds of salvation: the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. The grateful memory of God’s salvation leads us to make a bold petition, our main petition at every Eucharist: We pray for unity. “May all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit” (Eucharistic Prayer II). To this petition we add prayers for the Bishop of Rome (the Pope) and for the bishop of the local Church; we pray for the living and the dead and especially for ourselves that through the intercession of the saints we may one day arrive at that table in heaven.

**Final Doxology**  
We look forward to that glorious day and raise our voices with those of all the saints who have gone before us as the priest raises the consecrated bread and wine and offers a toast, a doxology, a prayer of glory to God in the name of Christ: “Through him, and with him, and in him, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is yours, for ever and ever.”

**Great Amen**  
Our “Amen” to this prayer acclaims our assent and participation in the entire Eucharistic prayer.

**Lord’s Prayer**  
We prepare to eat and drink at the Lord’s table with those words taught us by Jesus: “Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

**Sign of Peace**  
Aware that communion (the word means “union with”) is the sign and source of our reconciliation and union with God and with one another, we
make a gesture of union and forgiveness with those around us and offer them a sign of peace.

Fraction Rite / Breaking of the Bread / Commingling  page 134
He prays silently, “May the mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.”
- Symbolizes the Resurrection.
- Symbolizes the unity of the Church.

Lamb of God (Agnus Dei)  page 134

Invitation to Communion.  page 134
The priest then shows us the Body of Christ and invites us to come to the table: “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.”

We respond: “Lord, I am not worthy to enter under your roof but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”

Communion  page 134
As God fed our ancestors in the desert on their pilgrimage, so God gives us food for our journey. We approach the minister who gives us the Eucharistic bread with the words “The Body of Christ,” and we respond, “Amen.”
We then go to the minister with the cup who gives it to us with the words “The Blood of Christ,” to which we again profess our “Amen.”
During this procession we usually sing a hymn, which unites our voices, minds and thoughts, even as the Body and Blood of Christ unites our bodies. Then we pray silently in our hearts, thanking and praising God and asking for all that this sacrament promises.

Prayer after Communion  pages 142-146
This prayer speaks to the graces we have just received from the Body and Blood of Christ.
The priest unites our prayers in the Prayer After Communion, to which we respond, “Amen.”

Dismissal
The priest says, “The Lord be with you”—the ritual phrase serves now as a farewell.

**Blessing and Dismissal**

We bow our heads to receive a blessing. As the priest gives us a final blessing in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit—we make the sign of the cross.

The priest or deacon then dismisses the assembly: “Go in peace…” and we give our liturgical “yes” by saying, “Thanks be to God.”

Just as we should strive to arrive for Mass early we should not be in a hurry to leave. We should never leave before the last hymn is completed.

Come early and stay late.