

Series on the Mass, Part 60: The Libera Nos, Part 2

May 2, 2021

Last week we discussed the content of the Libera Nos. This week we will look at the liturgical action that takes place, its historical development and its signification.

During the Libera Nos, the priest uncovers the paten, which, at a Low Mass, has been “hidden” halfway under the corporal and covered with the purificator. At a High Mass, the paten is held in the humeral veil by the subdeacon. The priest takes the purificator and quickly purifies the paten, then takes it by the edge, resting it on the altar. He says the Libera Nos silently and, after the words “*et omnibus Sanctis,*” makes the sign of the cross with the paten, kisses it and slips it under the consecrated host that has been resting on the corporal.

The Libera Nos is very ancient, dating to before the time of St. Gregory the Great (+604). St. Gregory was a legate in Constantinople before he was elevated to the papacy and the Eastern Rite influenced some of the changes he made to the liturgy, such as placing the Pater Noster in its present location in the Mass. St. Andrew was likely added to the prayer by St. Gregory since St. Andrew is particularly venerated in the East and adding his name after Ss. Peter and Paul shows a sign of friendship with the Eastern Church.

The uncovering of the paten during the Libera Nos is tied to the ceremony of the intinction which takes place after the prayer. There was a custom of taking a particle of the host from the Bishop’s Mass and mingling it with the hosts of the Mass being celebrated by the priest to show the unity of the sacrifice. It would be at this time that the host was brought forward, so the paten is uncovered at the Low Mass (or brought to the altar by the subdeacon at the High Mass) in memory of that ceremony.

The sign of the cross with the paten points to the sacrifice that has taken place on the altar and is present in the Eucharist on the corporal. The paten is kissed since it will be receiving the Body of Christ.

Sincerely in Christ,

Rev. Charles Van Vliet, FSSP
Pastor, Regina Caeli Parish