

OUR SUNDAY EUCCHARIST



**WHAT ARE WE DOING AS A
COMMUNITY OF FAITH WHEN WE
WORSHIP ON SUNDAY?**

**A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF THE
STRUCTURE AND PARTS OF THE
MASS.**

“The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows.” [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Vatican II, 1963]

THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY OF FAITH, FULLY AND ACTIVELY PARTICIPATING IN THE WEEKLY (SUNDAY) EUCHARIST, IS THE HEARTBEAT OF CATHOLIC LIFE AND FAITH.

Through the **Eucharistic Liturgy** all that we are and believe and experience, all that we do and hope for, enter into the once-for-all saving work of Jesus Christ. We connect our lives to and participate in the saving sacrifice of Christ, which we call his “**Paschal Mystery**”—his life, death and resurrection.

As a weekly ritual the **Mass** (the popular name Catholics give to the Eucharistic liturgy) has a defined structure and flow. We come as we are this day; we listen; we offer ourselves and give thanks and

praise; we remember; we eat and drink; we go forth to live the paschal mystery in our own daily lives until we come again to the next Eucharistic celebration.

We experience Christ as present in the people of God gathered in Christ's name around the altar, as well as specifically in the leadership of the ordained priest or bishop. Christ is actively present in the Word proclaimed. Christ is truly and fully present in his Body and Blood through the consecrated bread and wine we receive at communion.

Our linear, historical time—each changing day, week and year—becomes part of the eternal, once-for-all time of Christ's salvation, with the whole communion of God's people, living and deceased, joining in. The Sunday Eucharist is the weekly heartbeat of the faith community that sustains us in good times and in bad.

Eucharist is a participatory drama, which forms and transforms us so that we can more deeply embrace the reality of our lives. It is divided into two great "acts" and three "transitional moments". We hope the following summary will help you better understand and enter into this celebration of the saving mystery of Jesus Christ. We use voice in song and response; we lift our hands in prayer, bow our heads and bodies in reverence, walk in procession, listen with open ears and hearts, meditate in silence. Full participation in the Eucharistic liturgy touches all our senses as our whole being is invited to be part of this great act of worship, praise and thanksgiving.

**First Transitional Moment:
The Introductory Rites. We Gather**

We transition from our everyday lives into the liturgy by gathering at Christ's invitation. We unite our personal journeys to the journey of faith of the whole assembly of God's people. We remember our baptism and discipleship in Christ, so as to be ready to hear God's Word and give thanks.

- **Entrance Chant/Song and Greeting.** In the midst of our diversity and differences, *we stand, process, and sing.* We unite as one worshipping

assembly around the altar that represents Christ and his sacrifice for us, which the priest celebrant kisses on behalf of us all. *We make the sign of the cross* and say “Amen” to begin. We then *respond* “And with your spirit” to the opening greeting, a reminder that the presence of Christ is to be found in all the community assembled.

- **Penitential Act or Rite for Blessing and Sprinkling of Water.**

We recall our common need for God’s mercy by praying the *Kyrie eleison* (Lord, have mercy) or remember our common baptism in Christ by being sprinkled with blessed water (*the Asperges*).

- **Gloria.** An ancient hymn which offers praise to the Father and Christ the Lamb. Used on Sundays except during Advent and Lent, setting the tone for the Eucharist as one of praise to God.

- **Collect.** This opening prayer is called a “collect prayer”. It is voiced by the presider on behalf of all present, who have had an opportunity to pray a personal prayer during the brief period of silence that occurs after “*Let us pray*”. It gathers together (“collects”) these heartfelt prayers and petitions. It is addressed to God the Father, reminding us of what God has done for us on this feast we are celebrating, *through* Jesus his Son, *in union with* the Holy Spirit. We respond “Amen.”

“*The Church is nourished spiritually at the twofold table of God’s Word and the Eucharist.*” [Introduction, Lectionary for Mass, # 10]

Act I—The Liturgy of the Word: We Listen to God’s Word and Respond in Faith and Prayer

“Liturgy” means “*the work of the people*” or “*common action*”. *The first great work or common action we do is to receive God’s Word as it is proclaimed. By actively listening with open hearts and minds, God’s Word nourishes us as a living Word, touching us here and now, shaping and transforming us.*

- **First Reading.** Taken from one of the books of the Old Testament or, during Easter season, from the Acts of the Apostles, it is chosen to fit thematically with the Gospel. A lector proclaims it from the ambo, as *we sit and listen with our hearts*. We affirm the reading

by praying together “*Thanks be to God,*” followed by a short period of silent reflection.

- **Responsorial Psalm.** Usually sung and led by a cantor, it is taken from one of the Biblical psalms or canticles. The assembly joins in by singing the antiphon.
- **Second Reading.** Except during Lent and Easter, this is a semi-continuous reading week after week, from a New Testament book other than the gospels. In this way, most major passages in the New Testament are heard in the course of a three-year cycle. At the end we respond “*Thanks be to God,*” again followed by a short period of silent reflection.
- **Gospel Acclamation.** *We stand* and sing forth our desire to be open to the Gospel message through an *Alleluia* or, during Lent, another acclamation.
- **Gospel.** The high point of the Liturgy of the Word, a deacon or priest proclaims it. It comes from one of the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. As it is announced we respond “*And with your spirit*” and then “*Glory to you, O Lord.*” At the end we acclaim: “*Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.*”
- **Homily.** A reflection that connects the Scripture we have heard with the mysteries of our faith, the Eucharist we are celebrating, and our daily lives. Afterward we briefly take time for quiet personal reflection.
- **Dismissal of Catechumens.** Those preparing for baptism, called *catechumens* (“learners”), are sent forth with a catechist to reflect more deeply on the Word of God. When they are fully initiated (usually at the Easter Vigil), they will then remain and join the community in the rest of the Eucharistic liturgy.
- **Profession of Faith (The Creed).** As a way to assent to the Word of God we have just received, *we stand* and call to mind the rule of faith that guides us. During the Creed (usually we pray what is called the Nicene-Constantinople Creed) we are invited to *bow* as we pray “*and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.*” Or, if we are using the Apostles’ Creed, we bow during the words “*who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary*”.

- **Prayer of the Faithful (Universal Prayer or Bidding Prayers).** We further respond to God’s Word by praying for the needs of the universal Church and the world, for the local community, those oppressed by any burdens, and for those in greatest need. At the end of each we respond: “*Lord, hear our prayer*” or something similar.

**Second Transitional Moment:
Focus on Altar and Gifts**

The gathering and the shaping done by God’s Word makes us ready to share in the offering of the Eucharist. We transition by preparing the altar and presenting the gifts.

- **Preparation of Altar and Presentation of Gifts.** A time to collect offerings for the Church and those in need. The bread and wine are brought forward in *procession* by representatives of the community and placed on the altar. The priest prays quietly and washes his hands as a sign of his desire for inward purification.
- **Prayer over the Offerings.** *We stand* and pray. We place ourselves and our prayers among the gifts on the altar. At the end of the prayer we respond: “*Amen.*”

**Act II—The Liturgy of the Eucharist:
We Remember and Give Thanks.
We Are Fed by the Body and Blood of Christ**

“Eucharist” means “to give thanks.” The sacramental gift of Christ’s Body and Blood is sheer gift of God’s love, rooted in Jesus’ obedience as Son. During the first part we offer praise and thanksgiving in remembrance of what God has done for us in and through Jesus, especially at the Last Supper. In the second part we take and eat and drink the transformed (transubstantiated) bread and wine so that we might be transformed more fully into Christ’s living Body.

- **The Eucharistic Prayer.** The central prayer of the entire cele-

bration. We remember what God has done for us, especially in Jesus, and we give thanks. We unite ourselves to the offering that Jesus makes of his life to God the Father. We actively participate through listening, responses, and acclamations. There are several versions of this prayer (also called the *canon* or *anaphora* of the Mass). They ordinarily have the following parts.

* **Preface.** Following an introductory dialogue between priest and assembly (our responses: “*And with your spirit*”, “*We lift them up to the Lord*”, “*It is right and just*”), the priest celebrant leads us in praising the Father for the work of salvation, often connecting the prayer to a special feast or season.

* **Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy) Acclamation.** The first major acclamation. We join in with the entire communion of saints and angels, here and in heaven, all united in prayer. Afterward *we kneel or remain standing*, according to the custom of the community.

* **Epiclesis.** As the priest celebrant’s hands are extended over the gifts we offer on the altar, we call upon the Holy Spirit to consecrate them, so as to become the body and blood of Christ for us.

* **Narrative of the Institution (Consecration).** We recall the Last Supper and Jesus’ words and actions, which give us this Eucharistic memorial. We do as Jesus asks: in memory of him. If standing, the assembly *bows in reverence* after the consecrated bread and then the consecrated wine are placed back on the altar.

* **Mystery of Faith Acclamation.** The second major acclamation, wherein the entire assembly responds to “The mystery of faith” with “*We proclaim your death, O Lord, and profess your resurrection until you come again*” or “*When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your death, O Lord, until you come again*”, or “*Save us, Savior of the world, for by your cross and resurrection you have set us free*”.

* **Anamnesis.** We further remember (that is the definition of *anamnesis*) the meaning of Jesus’ saving death, resurrection, ascension, and gift of the Spirit.

* **Offering.** We explicitly offer the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God, sacred Victim, to the Father. We ask that we too can

be an offering in union with Him and that the Holy Spirit transform us, parallel to how we earlier asked the Holy Spirit to transform the gifts of bread and wine.

* **Intercessions.** We make it clear that this offering is in communion with and for the whole Church, heaven and earth, living and deceased, and for all members, not just the ones present.

* **Final Doxology.** The third great acclamation, often called the “Great Amen”, sums up in praise and thanksgiving all that we have just celebrated. The consecrated bread and wine are held up as we sing out our “*Amen!*”

• **The Communion Rite.** As we “take and eat” and “take and drink,” our communion unites us to the body and blood of Christ and to one another. It nourishes us for our going forth to be that body of Christ in the world. The communion rite consists of:

* **The Lord’s Prayer.** We begin our immediate preparation for this great gift of communion by praying as Jesus taught us to pray. A short prayer (*embolism*) then follows, to which *we respond* with the doxology: *The kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever*”.

* **Rite of Peace.** We offer each other Christ’s peace. *Not our* hello or *our* peace, but *Christ’s* peace, a greeting that can and should be given even to those we struggle to love [cf. Matthew 5:23-24].

* **Breaking of the Bread with Lamb of God.** From early apostolic times the Eucharist was called by this action of “breaking bread,” because we who are many will be made one in the one Bread of Life who is Christ. Accompanying this action we sing the Lamb of God (*Agnus Dei*).

* **Lord, I Am Not Worthy.** Before approaching the table of the Lord we show our grateful awe that the Lord is offering this gift of himself to us by praying “*Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed*”.

* **Communion Procession and Hymn.** All *stand* and those

who are able to partake of communion process forward, while a hymn accompanies us, uniting us in this common action of receiving the priceless gift of this sacrament. The standing and the hymn remind us that this is not a time of private prayer but of common recognition of our communion in Christ Jesus. Before receiving communion (bread or cup) we make a slight bow. We respond “*Amen*” to the faith statement: “*The body/blood of Christ*”.

* **Prayer after Communion.** After taking time for personal prayer in an extended period of silence, the priest who is presiding again “collects” all the unspoken prayers of the assembly and lifts them up to God. All respond “*Amen*”.

“It is your own mystery which is placed on the Lord’s table; it is your own mystery which you receive.” [St. Augustine, Sermon 272]

**Third Transitional Moment:
The Closing Rites. We Are Sent Forth**

In many ways, the Mass ends quite abruptly. We do not linger over the good feelings that receiving communion brings, but are sent forth to be that Body of Christ, broken, poured out and shared for the salvation of the world.

- **Blessing.** This can be done simply, or more solemnly on special feasts. As the priest proclaims the blessing, we *make the sign of the cross and respond “Amen”*.
- **Dismissal.** We cannot keep our Christian discipleship inside the church building. We respond “*Thanks be to God*” and go forth to live in a way that gives God honor and glory.

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