

Preparing for the Sacrifice

We continue our series on the Mass by looking at the Liturgy of the Eucharist. I will split this into two weeks because there is so much to cover. Assuming one stays awake during the homily, we enter into the heart of our celebration with the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

First, the priest or deacon prepares the altar with chalices, ciboria (or plates), the Roman Missal, etc. This is a great time for quiet meditative prayer. Typically, members of the congregation bring up the gifts (i.e., bread and wine), which symbolize the “fruit of our labor.”

Traditionally, this part of the Mass is referred to as the Offertory. The bread and wine symbolize what you offer to the Lord, namely, yourselves. In prayer, one could say, “Lord, accept me (as symbolized by these gifts) and transform me as you will transform this bread and wine into the Body and Blood of your Son, Jesus.”

The priest or deacon receives the bread and wine, wherein the priest offers them to the Lord in thanksgiving at the altar. Holding the bread, the priest says quietly, *“Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life.”* It is modeled after the Jewish blessing and acknowledges what God is about to do.

The priest or deacon then puts a little drop of water into the wine. As this is done, the following is said quietly, *“By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.”* The symbolism here is extremely rich. What happens here is essentially a synthesis of the whole Mass and even of our whole Catholic faith.

The wine points to Jesus’ divinity, while the water to His humanity (and our humanity). The mingling points to the Incarnation where God (i.e., symbolized by the wine) becomes man (i.e., symbolized by the water). Even more, it symbolizes that God wills to “divinize” us. St. Peter says that we are called to share in Christ’s life, to become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pt. 1:4). In other words, this little ritual points to what God wills to do in us both today and at the end of time. Hence, it might be good to pay attention at this point!

Once the altar is prepared, the priest bows before the altar and says quietly, *"With humble spirit and contrite heart may we be accepted by you, O Lord, and may our sacrifice in your sight this day be pleasing to you, Lord God."* Humility and contrition are indispensable dispositions of the heart as the priest and congregation approach this sacrifice.

The priest then turns to wash his hands, saying quietly, *"Wash me, o lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."* This is based on Psalm 24:3-4, which speaks about going up the mountain of the Lord "clean of hand" and pure of heart." In the Eucharistic Prayer, we are about to enter the "Holy of Holies" or God's dwelling place. Therefore, it's important we do so with "clean hands" and a "pure heart."

Finally, in one last act of preparation, the priest exhorts the faithful, *"Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father."* "My sacrifice" points to Christ's sacrifice, which will be made present by the priest in the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. "Your" sacrifice refers to the Church (i.e., you!) offering yourself in union with Christ in the Mass. Again, there is a certain "posture of the heart" wherein the faithful unite themselves to Jesus offered to the Father in the Eucharist.

The faithful reply, *"May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church."* Here, the faithful ask the Lord to accept the sacrifice that is about to happen through the hands of the priest, which redounds to the praise and glory of the Lord's name and for the good of His holy Church. In other words, the celebration of Mass glorifies God and makes the Church holy.

In short, this part of the Mass is extremely rich! The prayers and symbolism point to the deeper reality of what is happening and about to take place. In this light, prior to Mass ask the good Lord to open your eyes to see and your heart to receive and understand what He will do at Mass. The more you enter into the Mass, the more you will be transformed for the "praise and glory of His name and the good of all His holy Church."

Next week we will look at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer with the Preface and *Sanctus*.

Goldy Meditating at the Offertory

