

The Mass *Explained*



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The Eucharist: Our Sunday Celebration

For most people, Saturday and Sunday are “the weekend.” But Sunday is really the *first* day of the week. God gave his Chosen People, the Jews, the gift of the Sabbath rest on the seventh day. Christians celebrated Sunday as the “Lord’s Day” because that was the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. They saw that the Resurrection revolutionized salvation history, so the Sunday observance fulfilled and replaced that of the Sabbath. On the Lord’s Day, the early Christians gathered for the “breaking of the bread,” and we do the same. For us, going to Mass is an essential part of celebrating Sunday as the Lord’s Day, and this act of worship makes us publicly recognizable as Catholics.

As we enter the main part of the church, we will see holy water either in small bowls on the sides of the entrance or in a larger font in the middle. We “bless ourselves” (by dipping our fingers in the holy water and making the Sign of the Cross) to remind us of our Baptism.

At Baptism, we become part of the Mystical Body of Christ: the Church. Although anyone is welcome at Mass, only the baptized can *fully* participate. In the Eucharist it is Christ who prays and offers himself to God the Father through the person of the Priest, so the baptized participate in this offering as members of Christ. This

participation is referred to as the “priesthood of the faithful” (which differs from the ordained ministerial priesthood).

Before entering the pew, we genuflect—that is, we bend and touch our right knee to the floor—toward the tabernacle in adoration of Jesus, who is truly present in the Eucharist. Through this gesture we are, in effect, saying, “Lord, I am here at your service.” If the Blessed Sacrament is not present, we bow to the altar. (See page 34 for a diagram of the parts of the church.)

Blessing ourselves, genuflecting, and bowing are some of the many ways we pray with our body during the Eucharistic Celebration.

Seeing everyone gather for Mass is part of our preparation for the celebration. We may be called upon to make room for our brothers and sisters in the pew, and it is good to be welcoming and helpful. As we wait for Mass to begin, we can take some time to talk to the Lord about our week and what’s going on in our lives. The things we do before the Mass begins should help prepare us to listen attentively to God’s word and to receive Jesus in Communion devoutly. At every Mass, God has special graces prepared for each person. We just need to be ready to receive the inspiration and help he desires to give us.

Order of the Mass

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

When the entrance chant or song is finished, and the Priest and ministers are in their places, everyone together makes the Sign of the Cross.

Priest: In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

The Priest greets the people in these or other words:

Priest: The Lord be with you.

People: And with your spirit.

At this time, the Priest or another minister can give a brief introduction to the Mass of the day, saying something about the theme of the readings or the feast or saint being celebrated. Sometimes the intention for the Mass is announced.

INTRODUCTORY RITES

The entrance chant or song is sung as the Priest (or Bishop) processes to the sanctuary. The Priest (called the Celebrant or Presider) is accompanied by ministers, who serve in various roles during the Mass. The server who carries the Cross usually leads the procession, followed by servers carrying lighted candles. There may also be a Deacon and one or more readers (called lectors). Everyone present is called to participate in the liturgy, but these ministers have special roles.

Those in the procession genuflect to Jesus in the tabernacle or bow in front of the altar before taking their places. The Priest and the Deacon kiss the altar. This shows the sacredness of the place where the sacrifice of the Mass is offered.

The Sign of the Cross

We begin as we often begin our prayer, in the name of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Everyone makes the Sign of the Cross as the Priest says these words.

Greeting

This greeting and response goes back to the beginnings of the Church. The Priest greets all the people assembled with a prayer, which reminds us that the Lord is present as we are gathered in his name. We respond with a prayer for the Priest that recalls his ordination and that Jesus himself is offering the Mass through the Priest.

Intention for the Mass

Mass can be offered for anyone, living or deceased. The Priest may have his own intention, or a person can request to have the Mass offered for a specified intention. When requesting a Mass, it is customary to offer a small stipend. Of course, since the value of the Mass is infinite, those present can pray for all their needs and intentions.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Priest: Brethren (brothers and sisters), let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries.

All: I confess to almighty God
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done and in what I have failed to do,

And, striking their breast, they say:

through my fault, through my fault,
through my most grievous fault;
therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin,
all the Angels and Saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.

Priest: May almighty God have mercy on us,
forgive us our sins,
and bring us to everlasting life.

People: Amen.

Then:

Priest: Lord, have mercy.

People: Lord, have mercy.

Priest: Christ, have mercy.

People: Christ, have mercy.

Priest: Lord, have mercy.

People: Lord, have mercy.

Or:

Priest: Kyrie, eleison.

People: Kyrie, eleison.

Priest: Christe, eleison.

People: Christe, eleison.

Priest: Kyrie, eleison.

People: Kyrie, eleison.

Penitential Act

The Eucharist is such an important celebration (here called “sacred mysteries”) that we need to prepare ourselves. We look briefly at whatever in our heart might be blocking our love and self-giving. We turn from those sins or sinful inclinations (we “repent”), and we turn our heart back to God as fully as we can.

There are several options for the Penitential Act, or the Rite for the Blessing and Sprinkling of Water may be used instead, especially during the Easter season because Easter is an ongoing celebration of Baptism.

The Confiteor

“Confiteor,” the first word of this prayer in Latin, means “I confess.” We confess aloud that we have sinned not only in what we have done, but also in what we have neglected to do. The gesture of striking our breast is an ancient expression of sorrow and humility. We accept responsibility for our failings, and we ask Mary, the angels, and the saints to pray for us. We also ask each other for prayer—all the members of the Church present here and everywhere in the world.

The Priest prays these words of absolution or forgiveness. While not the same as the Sacrament of Penance (which is required in the case of mortal sin), participation in the Eucharist (and in particular, the reception of Holy Communion) brings forgiveness of venial sins and helps us grow in the grace needed to resist future temptations.

The Kyrie

After or instead of the Confiteor we pray the “Lord have mercy,” which is often prayed in the original Greek: *Kyrie eleison* (KEER-ee-ay ay-LAY-ee-sohn). Other parts of the Mass may be sung or prayed in Latin, the traditional language of the liturgy. The Kyrie was never translated into Latin, but was preserved as it was sung in the early Church.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
 have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
 receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
 have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

People: Amen.

Gloria

The Gloria is an ancient hymn that is sung or said on Sundays, except during Advent and Lent. “Gloria” is the first word of the hymn in Latin. Since it is a song of joy and celebration, we omit it during the penitential seasons. (See page 41 for information on the seasons of the liturgical year.)

The first two lines are a quotation from the song of the angels in the Gospel of Luke (2:14) who appear to the shepherds to announce to them the birth of Jesus. The hymn praises and thanks God, jubilantly heaping up the verbs in an effort to express God’s glory and all he has done for us.

After the first part addressed to God the Father there is an extended section praising and petitioning the Son, Jesus. We see the title “Lamb of God,” and “you take away the sins of the world,” which will be used again to address Jesus right before Communion.

The end brings in the Three Persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Collect

The celebrant says, “Let us pray,” and pauses briefly for a moment of silence, which helps us gather our thoughts and be aware of God’s presence. We can also call to mind all of the people and the needs we want to pray for. The Priest then prays the Collect (CAHL-ect), which “collects” and includes all the prayers silently offered by the assembly. The Collects for each Sunday bring out the theme or focus for each Mass.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

FIRST READING

All sit and the lector reads at the ambo.

At the end, the lector acclaims:

Reader: The word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

This is led by a cantor or lector, with the people singing or praying the response between the stanzas.

SECOND READING

Then follows the *Alleluia* or, during Lent, another chant, such as Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, King of endless glory! or Praise and honor to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

GOSPEL READING

The Gospel is proclaimed by the Deacon if there is one. He bows before the Priest and asks for a blessing. The Priest prays in a low voice:

May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips,
that you may proclaim his Gospel worthily and well,
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, ✠ and of the
Holy Spirit.

The Deacon makes the Sign of the Cross and responds: Amen.

If there is no Deacon, the Priest prays in a low voice:

Cleanse my heart and my lips, almighty God,
that I may worthily proclaim your holy Gospel.

Priest or Deacon: The Lord be with you.

People: And with your spirit.

Priest or Deacon: A reading from the holy Gospel
according to **N**.

People: Glory to you, O Lord.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

The two main parts of the Eucharist Celebration are the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Word includes the readings, the homily, the Creed, and the Prayer of the Faithful.

Readings

It is important for lectors to read clearly and to understand what they are reading so that everyone present can follow. To get more out of the readings it helps to read them ahead of time from a missal or other printed or online resource. (See page 55 for suggestions.) Those who have a hard time hearing or understanding the lector or who find themselves distracted may wish to follow a printed text during the reading.

Sundays and major feasts have two readings and a psalm before the Gospel. The first reading is from the Old Testament (except during the Easter season).

The Responsorial Psalm is taken from the Book of Psalms, which has been called “the prayer book of the Bible,” or from song-like sections of other biblical books.

The second reading is taken from the Letters of Saint Paul or other books of the New Testament.

After the second reading, we rise and sing *Alleluia* to prepare for the Gospel. We stand, as it were, at attention to hear and to be ready to act on the good news we will hear.

As we say, “Glory to you, O Lord,” we make a small cross with our thumb on our forehead, lips, and heart. This gesture is a physical prayer expressing our desire that the word of God will be in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts.

This reading is always taken from one of the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. The Holy Spirit inspired these four Gospel writers to produce accounts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Each was written for a different audience and so each has different points of emphasis and details. (See page 43 for information on the three-year cycle of readings.)