

November 27, 2022 - The First Sunday of Advent

LITURGY LESSON: INTRODUCTION

For the next year or so, each of our weekend liturgies will begin with a Liturgy Lesson presented as a part of the announcements before the opening hymn so that we can all benefit from it. These two-minute explanations of some facet of our worship will help us to understand the Mass in a much better way so that we can then become full and active participants in the Eucharistic Liturgy. The better we understand the Mass, the deeper our worship of God is, motivating us to share it with others and thereby encourage them to join us.

This is a great opportunity for us to deepen our sense of community as well as to appreciate the sacredness of the liturgy we celebrate.

We will make these lessons available on our website so you can revisit them and share them with others.

LITURGY LESSON: ENTRANCE PROCESSION

Those of us who are over fifty years old remember when there was no opening procession to begin Mass. The priest and a couple of servers simply walked out into the sanctuary, this area around the altar from the sacristy, the place where the priest puts on his vestments.

The only exception occurred when the bishop came to a parish. Then there was always a procession, just as there always was when the Pope celebrated Mass. In 1963 The Vatican Council published the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, and many things began to change. What many of us don't know is that some of the changes were not new. They were attempts to reintroduce some very old ways of celebrating Mass, including the opening procession. For instance, as long ago as the year 701AD there is record of a procession to begin Mass in Rome.¹

This procession isn't just a way to get the priest to the altar. Its purpose is to gather everyone together - to begin with something unifying - a procession and singing - bringing a sense of joy and setting the theme for the celebration. Our music director always carefully selects a processional hymn to fit the occasion, and we should sing it to the end or at least to some thematic conclusion, not just end it when the celebrant gets to the altar. A server carries a cross bearing the likeness of Christ. It leads the altar servers, deacon, and priest to the sanctuary. At the steps of the sanctuary each person genuflects or bows their head as a sign of reverence for the altar and the crucifix, and the presence of Jesus in the Tabernacle. Next week we will talk about the altar, another rich symbol of the Catholic Eucharist.

¹ *Johnson, Lawrence J., the Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of the Mass, p. 5.*

December 11, 2022 - The Third Sunday of Advent

LITURGY LESSON: VENERATION OF THE ALTAR

The altar and the pulpit are meant to be the two architectural focal points of a Catholic Church. The preliminary design for our worship space nicely balances the altar and pulpit. Did you know that both were designed and built by a parishioner and continue to be used today?

A word about the altar: Historically, the altar has had a central place in any religion which had sacrifice as a principle practice. Also, in religions where a meal was very important, such as the Jewish faith, the table was considered sacred. By the Fourth Century our altar was called "the Table of the Lord."³ The Catholic altar is a symbol of both actions: it is the place where the sacrifice of Christ is offered again to the Father, and where we gather with Christ to be nourished on the Bread of Life, His very body and blood.

With all that history and meaning, our priest and deacon enter the sanctuary and bow and kiss the altar as a sign of reverence. The priest may also incense the altar as the holy place of sacrifice from which our offerings rise to God, just like the priests would do in the Temple worship of ancient Israel.

Some of us will remember that Catholic altars also contained relics of the martyrs, pieces of bone or cloth associated with a saint. That practice started centuries ago, probably because during times of persecution Mass was celebrated in catacombs, and a tomb was used as the altar. While it is no longer required that an altar contain a relic, ours contains the relics of Saint Christine and Saint Felicity. A description of the relics can be found in the sacristy. Why is a relic no longer required? Probably for two reasons: at the time of the Vatican Council there was great concern that relics be authentic, and many were not. But more importantly, the Church did not want to take away from the central meaning of the altar itself, which is Christ's self-offering to the Father.

³ *Johnson, p. 10*

LITURGY LESSON: THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

As part of the opening greeting in the pre-conciliar, or "Tridentine" mass, the priest would greet the people using the words of St. Paul: "Dominus Vobiscum" ("The Lord be with you") and the altar boy, representing the entire congregation, would respond "Et cum spiritu tuo" ("and with your spirit"). As a part of the mass, that formula is older than the sign of the cross.³

In the renewal of the Liturgy, the first time it is used is when the priest leads us in the Sign of the Cross and then said, "The Lord be with you." The Sign of the Cross should be made with reverence and attention, not haphazardly and carelessly. By this simple gesture we identify ourselves as Christians - touching our own flesh, we are reminded that by Christ's cross, he has redeemed our bodies, and brought us into the family of the Trinity. This sign marked us even before baptism and will mark us even after death.⁴

Making the sign of the cross is unique to Catholics. The only other Christians who make this sign are the Orthodox, (who make it differently) and some Episcopalians and some Lutherans. As we begin the celebration of Mass, perhaps we should ask ourselves if we consciously make that gesture, or do we just take it for granted?

The same can be asked about the Greeting. It is the first of our dialogue with our priest as we celebrate together.

³ *Johnson, p.13.*

⁴ *Cardinal Joseph Bernadin, Guide for the Assembly, #29*

⁵ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal, #2*

December 25, 2022 – The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

LITURGY LESSON: THE PENITENTIAL RITE

Prior to the liturgical reforms of the Vatican Council, the altar boys had to memorize prayers in the Latin language, the universal language of the Church, still given pride of place in the post-conciliar mass. The second most difficult prayers to memorize was the "Confiteor". This prayer, which the altar boy said quietly on behalf of the entire congregation with the priest, was a confession of sins.

The Confiteor may still be used during the penitential rite, or another formula that comes from the Ancient Greek celebration of the Mass - the *Kyrie Eleison, Christe Eleison, Kyrie Eleison* - "Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy."

It is so important to recall at the beginning of the mass what we are doing there. We don't begin with self-congratulating affirmation; we begin with a recognition of our need for salvation, our need for Jesus. Like Bartimaeus, we begin by crying out to the Lord to have mercy on us.

In a few moments the priest will say to us something like, "My brothers and sisters, let us acknowledge our sins so as to prepare ourselves to celebrate the Sacred Mysteries." During the silence it is not the intention of the Church that we make a long, personal examination of conscience. What the Church wants us to do is to focus on that sinfulness that prevents us from becoming what God wants us to be. As a member of this community, we each make an act of faith that with God's help we can change. With the penitential act, all venial sins are forgiven.

READERS: confiteor = (con FEE tee or)

⁸ *Johnson, p. 16.*

⁹ *The Sacramentary, p. 362*

January 1, 2023 - Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

LITURGY LESSON: ASPERGES: RENEWAL OF BAPTISM

Sometimes the celebrant will choose a sprinkling rite at the beginning of mass in the place of the penitential act, whereby he sprinkles us with holy water as he walks through the church. The rite, called the *Asperges*, the Latin word for Sprinkling, seems to have originated in monasteries in the eighth century where a procession moved through the cloister, and all the rooms were sprinkled as a sign of blessing.⁸

Soon the rite was celebrated before the principal Mass in parish churches during the Middle Ages. It progressively took on a baptismal character. It served as a reminder of the life-giving waters flowing from the baptismal font. Eventually it became an optional rite in the Roman Mass, and now it can be used instead of the usual Penitential Rite.

As the priest walks through the Church, the traditional response of the congregation should be to bow and make the sign of the cross as you are sprinkled. Remember, it was the words, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" with which you were baptized.

READERS: Asperges = (a SPARE j es)

⁸ *Johnson, page 18.*

LITURGY LESSON: GLORY TO GOD

The *Gloria* is an ancient chant that incorporates the words proclaimed by the host of angels who appeared to the Judean shepherds declaring Christ's birth: "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace to people of good will." ⁹

The GLORIA was probably first sung at an Easter sunrise Eucharist in a church in Syria or Greece.

By the sixth century it was part of the Pope's Christmas Mass. By the eleventh century it was sung on all Sundays and Feast Days in the western church. ¹⁰

The *Gloria* is not sung or said at Mass during Advent or Lent. The question could be asked: "You mean we don't give glory to God in Advent and Lent?"

The answer is that every celebration of Mass is giving glory to God. However, the Church uses our senses to create a different atmosphere as the seasons change: the vestments change color, the music reflects joy or sadness or penance.

Some traditions really highlight the Gloria. In an Italian Cathedral in the city of Luca for hundreds of years fires have been lighted in and outside the church as the Gloria begins at Christmas and Holy Saturday.¹¹ This is the most joyous day of the year, and, accompanied by the ringing of bells, we will all sing the Gloria.

⁹ *Luke 2/14*

¹⁰ *Johnson, page 22.*

¹¹ *Attwater, page 210.*

January 15, 2023 – Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: COLLECT OR OPENING PRAYER

After the Gloria, the Celebrant will address us and say, "let us pray." There will be a moment of silence, and then he will offer a prayer. Sounds simple, doesn't it? However, this prayer is one of the most ancient and most important in our liturgy.

There is a different collect every Sunday, and the Church has incorporated prayers from many ancient traditions, including the Eastern Church. Why is it so important? Remember ancient Gaul? That's the country Julius Caesar conquered in the Gaelic Wars. Gaul became a very strong area for the Catholic faith, and by the fifth century in Gaul this prayer became known as "Collecta" and was adopted by the rest of the Church.¹²

In our Roman Missal it is still called "The Collect." It has that name because when the priest says the prayer he is "collecting" or "gathering together" our personal needs or petitions which we have relected on in the period of silence after he says, "Let us pray." So the priest, standing in the person of Christ the head, offers this prayer to the Father on behalf of the Body, the Church.

¹² *Johnson, page 24.*

January 22, 2023 – Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: CONCLUSION OF THE OPENING RITE

We have been presenting these liturgy lessons for a little over a month and we have now completed the Opening Rites of the Mass. Next week we will begin the Liturgy of the Word.

So we gather, one by one, household by household, passing through the doors of this parish church of ours, greeting one another and taking our places. This building called a "church" is a kind of living room of the family of God - it is our room when we assemble as the church. Here we are at home.

[But that living room, that church] can only invite us to come together and pray together. That invitation must be accepted. Certainly, there are times of praying alone, seeking privacy, but the Sunday Liturgy is not one of these. The first task of each one who comes on Sunday is to take the open place nearest the altar. Let our church fill from the front to the back. If we gather as we ought - singing together, being silent together, responding together - we will be a community that encounters the Lord Jesus, is nourished by His Word and His Body, equipped to bring the life-transforming power of the gospel out into the world.

January 29, 2023 – Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: THE FIRST READING

Today we begin our liturgy lessons on the Liturgy of the Word by spending a moment on the first reading.

The primary part of the Jewish synagogue service was the reading from what the Jews called Torah (TOR - ah) and Nevi'im (ne - VEEM). The Torah is the first five books of the Old Testament. Torah is the Hebrew word for The Law. Nevi'im is a less well known word which means *The Prophets*, and applies to much of the rest of the Old Testament books. We know, for instance, that when Jesus was invited to read at a synagogue service in Nazareth, He chose a reading from Nevi'im; a reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah to be exact.

The earliest celebrations of the Eucharist always included a reading from the Old Testament. There was a heresy in the early Church known as Marcionism that sought to dispense with the Old Testament entirely. "What do we need the Old Testament for now that we have Christ and the New Covenant revealed in the New Testament" so the thinking went. However, the Church has, from the beginning, wisely seen God's loving plan of goodness that began with the promises to Israel culminating with Christ and the establishment of the New Israel, the Church, a universal family. The Old Testament is every bit as important for us to understand Christ as the New. For as St. Augustine said, "In the Old Testament the New is hidden, in the New Testament the Old appears." On most Sundays of the year the first reading is from the Old Testament except during the Easter Season it is taken from the Acts of the Apostles.

February 5, 2023 – Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: PSALM RESPONSE

Last week we talked about the First Reading. Today we hear something about the Psalm Response.

Continuing the practice of the Jewish synagogue, the hymns of the early Christians weren't written by musicians or composers; they weren't even hymns per se. The earliest Christians, like their Jewish brothers and sisters, sang and chanted the psalms. This is what our Lord and our Lady did - they chanted the psalms. The psalms are the Church's richest tradition for music and hymnody. In the pre-conciliar mass, these chanted psalms were contained in the *Gradulae Romanum*, or in English, the Roman Gradual. All throughout the mass, psalms are suggested and meant to be chanted, for the entrance, the offertory and the communion rite. In most parishes, like ours, only the responsorial psalm is chanted after the first reading.

Preferably the Responsorial Psalm is sung, although occasionally we recite it. The Church's instructions for the liturgy also call for periods of silence after any one of the readings at Mass; so, at times in the future we may pause for a moment between the first reading and the response so that we can reflect on what we have heard.

February 12, 2023 – Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: SECOND READING

Now we're going to discuss the second reading, which often comes from one of the New Testament epistles. The word Epistle means Letter, and it referred to the letters that a leader in the early Christian Church wrote to various communities. Most of these, of course, were written by St. Paul, but there were also letters from Peter and James and John and Jude and one, the Letter to the Hebrews, by an anonymous writer. These Epistles and two other New Testament books are now used as the Second Readings at Mass. The other two books are The Acts of the Apostles and The Book of Revelation.

Imagine, if you can, what it was like to be in the early church at Colossae. Disciples of a man named Paul had formed that community. He was an inspiring preacher and a great leader. Now he is gone. He is in prison in Rome. Perhaps the community feels left alone and begins to drift. Paul is concerned that someone in their midst is teaching them false doctrine. So he writes to encourage them.

These letters became so important to the various communities that selections from them began to be read every Sunday. We know that these letters were read in the churches of the early Christian communities because in the last verses of this very letter to the Colossians, Paul says "After this letter has been read to you, have it read in the assembly in Laodicea." ¹⁶ Now we, here in the assembly of Sacred Heart, we hear this same letter read two thousand years later. It takes us back to the First Century, to our roots as Christians, and we, too, will hear that same hymn teaching us about the true nature of Christ.

READERS: corossae = (ka LA sae) Colossians = (ka LA shuns) Laodicea = (la o di CHE a)

⁶Colossians 3/15-16

February 19, 2023 – Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: GOSPEL ACCLAMATION, PROCESSION & SIGN OF THE CROSS

During the opening procession the Gospel Book has been placed on the altar, because it is the Good News of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus which is re-presented, made visible, on our altar. However, the procession is not complete. Just as we sing during the opening procession, so we sing an Alleluia during the short completion of that process from the altar to the ambo.

ALLELUIA is one of two Hebrew words remaining in our liturgy. The other is AMEN. The Hebrew "alleluia" means "praise God". Perhaps you have noticed that when some things are not sung, such as the Psalm Response, we recite them. The ALLELUIA is the one exception. It is only to be sung, not to be recited. This shows the importance of singing this expression of joy. And it is with joy that we are to anticipate the proclamation of the Gospel, the Good News.

At the conclusion of this procession, the priest or deacon places the Gospel Book on the ambo. He greets the people in the normal way, "The Lord be with you," and the response, "And with your spirit." Then he proclaims, "A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke," to which we respond, "Glory to you, Lord". Notice that we address the Lord because it is He who is speaking to us through the Gospel.

Then the priest or deacon does something unique. Using his thumb, he makes the sign of the cross in the book, and then he makes small signs of the cross on his forehead, his lips, and his breast. Why? There are no words that accompany this gesture, but the traditional meaning of this triple sign of the cross is this: May the Word of the Lord be in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart. Finally, he may incense the gospel book as a sign of its holiness and Christ's presence in the word proclaimed.

LITURGY LESSON: GOSPEL

A liturgy lesson about the Gospel may not seem to be needed. We know that Gospel means "good news". We know that there are four Gospels, each written by a man called an Evangelist, a Greek word which means "bringer of good news." We know that those evangelists were Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We know that these men gathered the stories and sayings of Jesus and each arranged them in a book to present a particular point of view about this Man in whom they had great faith as Savior of the World.

But it is their place in the Liturgy that is important to us today. From earliest times the primacy of the Gospel has been emphasized by special signs of respect and honor surrounding its liturgical proclamation. Last week we talked about the Gospel Procession, the Alleluia, and the triple sign of the cross.

Note, also, that we stand for the Gospel. Standing in the early church was a sign of respect - not to trivialize it, but remember when men used to stand when a woman entered the room? Also, incense and candles are often used to honor the Gospel book. Another sign of importance is that the Gospel is always to be proclaimed by an ordained minister - the priest or deacon. At the end of the proclamation, the priest or deacon says, "The Gospel of the Lord," and we respond, "Praise to Lord Jesus Christ."

Finally, note that the priest or deacon kisses the Book at the end of the proclamation. He says quietly to himself, "Through the words of the Gospel may our sins be wiped away."

The power of the Gospel is profound. It gives us faith and wipes away our sins. No wonder that here at Sacred Heart we pay it so much respect.

LITURGY LESSON: THE HOMILY

It would be interesting to have a show of hands and ask how many had ever heard the word "homily" prior to about 1965. On the other hand, most of those born since 1965 have rarely heard the word "sermon". What is the difference?

Neither word appears in the three editions of the Baltimore Catechism. As a matter of fact, in explaining the Mass, the old Catechism went right from the Gospel to the Creed, not even mentioning a sermon or homily, because the sermon was not considered part of the mass, which is why priests used to begin their sermons by making the sign of the cross and end their sermons the same way, indicating a pause from the mass, and then commencing once again.

Sacrosanctum Concilium, the Vatican II constitution on the sacred liturgy, indicated that, "There must be a homily on Sundays ...it should not be omitted without a serious reason. That same document goes on to specify what the homily is meant to be: *The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly so that a richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word...By means of the homily, the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of the Christian Life are expounded from the sacred texts.*

A homily, then, is usually to be based on the readings of the Mass, and the priest or deacon is to draw a lesson for us about what we believe or how we are to live what we believe.

March 12, 2023 – Third Sunday of Lent

LITURGY LESSON: CREED

Today's Liturgy Lesson is on the Creed, Our Profession of Faith. It will give us another opportunity to talk about a very important component of the Liturgy.

The Act of Faith that we profess right after the homily every Sunday was first expressed in the Council of Nicaea in the Fourth Century and expanded at the Council of Constantinople a few years later. The early leaders were trying to capture the essential truths of our faith in one statement of belief. The Creed reached its final form in the middle of the Fifth Century. By the end of the Sixth Century it was part of the Mass in most places. Just think, Catholics in the Roman Church have been making this act of faith together for well over a thousand years! The English word "Creed" comes from the first word of the Creed in Latin, "Credo" meaning, "I believe." We can also use the Apostles' Creed in place of the Nicæan Creed during the Lenten & Easter Seasons, as we are doing this year.

In order to emphasize the most momentous moment in the history of the universe, when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, the Church asks that we bow at the words, "...and by the Holy Spirit, was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man." On the Solemnity of the Annunciation, March 25th, the faithful are even invited to genuflect at those words.

Bowing is a special honor paid to the mystery of the Incarnation. This is a bow of the body, not just of the head. In other words, we bow from the waist at the words "...and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man..."

Let's remember to do that together today.

March 19, 2023 – Fourth Sunday of Lent

LITURGY LESSON: GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

From the very beginning, the Church's liturgy has had a cosmic dimension, bringing all of creation, all the scattered sons and daughters of the human family to the heart of the Father. In other words, the liturgy has always presented the world and the world's needs to the Father. How that has been expressed has varied through the Church's history. In the post-Conciliar mass, we bring the needs of the Church, the world, the sick, the living, the dead, and particular needs to the Father by praying the Universal Prayer, or General Intercessions as they're sometimes called.

The General Intercessions are very important. They are the "hinge of the liturgy." They move us from the Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. In these prayers *"the people, exercising their [baptismal] priestly [identity], make intercession for all,"* with the result that, as the liturgy of the word has its full effect in them, (the people) are better prepared to proceed to the liturgy of the Eucharist.²⁰

LITURGY LESSON: CONCLUSION OF LITURGY OF THE WORD

As we come to the end of our reflections on the first half of mass, the Liturgy of the Word, let us listen to the profound words on the role of Scripture in our lives as Christian that come from the Vatican Council document on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*:

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body. She has always maintained them, and continues to do so, together with sacred tradition, as the supreme rule of faith, since, as inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and Apostles. Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life. Consequently these words are perfectly applicable to Sacred Scripture: "For the word of God is living and active" (Heb. 4:12) and "it has power to build you up and give you your heritage among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32; see 1 Thess. 2:13).

LITURGY LESSON: LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Today we begin our series of Liturgy Lessons on the Eucharist. Recall that our Mass has two major parts: Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist. As we begin, an interesting point of departure is that Catholics celebrated the Eucharist before there was a New Testament, before there were Gospels.²³ In fact, the only time the phrase, “new testament” is used by Jesus *in* the New Testament, is when he’s referring to the Eucharist at the Last Supper, and not a document. The New Testament, the New Covenant, was something that Christians consumed and celebrated before it was something that they read and studied.

This is significant because what we will celebrate today was celebrated by the very earliest of the Christian communities. What we do today has been celebrated for almost two thousand years. Think how much pride Italians or Irish or any nationality take in its unique family celebrations, which may be only a few generations old. For Catholics the Eucharist is a celebration that is eighty generations old. Second, it explains why the narration of the Last Supper appears in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, and in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. There are slight differences which reflect the experience of different celebrations by different Christian communities.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with a very simple act, the preparation of the altar. Watch today as the deacon or servers bring the sacred vessels over to the altar. According to ancient custom, the chalice is brought to the altar veiled, as a symbol of the Bride of Christ, and is placed upon the altar, where, as we hear in the words of the Easter *Exsultet*, “things of heaven are wed to those of earth.” The chalice is unveiled, and the corporals, the white cloths designed to catch tiny consecrated crumbs or spilled drops of the precious blood, are spread out. The chalice purificator is removed and placed off to the side, along with several bowls called ciboria filled with unconsecrated hosts. All is then ready for the presentation of gifts, which we will talk about next week. Remember, the first gift that we bring to this celebration is the gift of ourselves. Let us pray now that we are the best gifts.

²³ Eugene Laverdiere, *The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church*

LITURGY LESSON: PRESENTATION OF THE GIFTS

"One of the most ancient customs of the church is that of the people themselves providing the bread and wine for the Eucharist...As the Roman liturgy spread to other lands, this rite became a true procession of all the people who brought forth not only bread and wine but at times also oil, candles, wheat, grapes, and other items of precious value." The practice of bringing gifts to the altar was slowly lost and replaced with more streamlined ritual actions - namely servers presenting bread and wine to the priest from the credence table. The Second Vatican Council wanted to see this practice restored to the liturgy. Since it is a procession, it may be accompanied by a hymn, but it need not be.

Note especially the connection between two directives from the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*:

At the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the gifts which will become the Lord's body and blood are brought to the altar...it is desirable for the faithful to present the bread and wine.

And

This is also the time to bring forward or to collect money or gifts for the poor and the Church.²⁵

What you and I should remember is that this is not just a way of getting the bread and wine to the altar, nor is it unconnected to the collection taken up by the ushers. The Church intends that this procession of just a few people represent all of us; and that the presentation of just a few gifts symbolizes our commitment to the church and to the poor through sharing of our wages and salaries and allowances.

²⁴ Johnson, p. 63.

²⁵ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, #49.

April 23, 2023 – Third Sunday of Easter

LITURGY LESSON: PRAYERS AT THE PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS

Last week we talked about the procession with the gifts. Today we learn about some of the prayers said over these gifts. Before the gifts are placed upon the altar, they're first offered to the Father through prayers which the priest typically, on Sunday masses, prays to the Father quietly.

Holding the host resting upon the paten, slightly above the altar, the priest prays: "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." And then with the chalice filled with the mingled wine and water mingled together. More on that in a moment. He says, "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received this wine we offer you. Fruit of the vine and work of human hands, it will become our spiritual drink."

Three things to note: First, the gifts of bread and wine presuppose, wheat and grape, soil, sun, air, water, the whole planet, the whole solar system, and the whole universe for that matter. We are offering a piece of creation to the Father to be sanctified. Second - "We have received the bread we offer you..." The Lord himself has provided for us the means of making this sacrifice, of giving him thanks. He's provided the gifts to be offered. Finally, what will they be? So much more than what they were. We give God the bread and wine he gave us, then He gives them back to us elevated and sanctified as the Bread of Life and our Spiritual drink.

Back to the chalice. The Deacon, or if there is no deacon, the priest prepares the chalice by pouring the wine and a small droplet of water into the wine while praying 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." It's a prayer that invokes the astounding mystery of the Incarnation - as St. Athanasius said, and as the Catechism teaches, "God became man, that man might become God" - he descended to share in our nature that we might ascend, by his grace, to share in His divine nature.

These prayers, which are typically said quietly by the priest, are extraordinary prayers.

April 30, 2023 – Fourth Sunday of Easter

LITURGY LESSON: WASHING OF THE HANDS

Last week we learned about the prayers said over the gifts of bread and wine, the consecratory prayers of offering. What comes next is referred to in Latin as the *Lavabo*. Did you ever wonder why the priest washes his hands after he has offered these gifts? The history of this ritual gesture is multifaceted; there are both practical, historical reasons as well as Biblical and Spiritual reasons. At various points in the Church's history, based on *what* was brought forward and offered, the washing of the priest's hands had a practical import. Sometimes animals were brought forward as gifts, or bread, wine, oil, candles, produce...all sorts of things. After he'd receive these gifts, often his hands were dirtied and they needed to be washed.

Biblically, the gesture of washing his hands before offering the sacrifice has deeply Jewish roots. All throughout the Old Testament, we see prescriptions for ritual washings, in Hebrew *mic'va-ot* (mick-vah-oat). The priests would be ritually washed and cleansed before entering into the Temple. The priest, standing before the throne room of God in the Heavenly Sanctuary, offering the unbloodied sacrifice of Calvary to the Father under sacramental signs, fulfills what all the signs of the Old Covenant could only gesture at.

Finally, spiritually, the *Lavabo* is significant for the priest as he prays, "Wash me, O Lord, of my iniquities and cleanse me of my sins" a verse from Psalm 51. The priest too is a sinner, in need of redemption, and it is so important for him to psychologically be aware of the profound gift he's been giving to stand at the altar and offer the sacrifice to the Father.

Consider praying quietly along with the priest in that moment those same words, "Wash me, O Lord, of my iniquities and cleanse me of my sins."

May 7, 2023 – Fifth Sunday of Easter

LITURGY LESSON: EUCHARISTIC PRAYER #1: INTRODUCTION

Having feasted upon God's word, our hearts are awake and disposed to commune with Christ sacramentally now in the Eucharist. Let us begin our reflections on the Liturgy of the Eucharist by listening to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, reflect on the Eucharistic prayer of the Church.

"[...] the Eucharist was recognized as the essential reality of the Last Supper, what we call today the Eucharistic Prayer, which derives directly from the prayer of Jesus on the eve of his passion and is the heart of the new spiritual sacrifice, the motive for which many Fathers of the Church designated the Eucharist simply as *oratio* (prayer), as the "sacrifice of the word", as a spiritual sacrifice, but which becomes also material and matter transformed: bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, the new food, which nourishes us for the resurrection, for eternal life.

Thus, the whole structure of words and material elements becomes an anticipation of the eternal wedding feast. [For this reason, we] as Catholic Christians do not call this sacrament "Supper" but "Eucharist". The infant Church slowly gave to this sacrament its specific form, and precisely in this way, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, she clearly identified and correctly represented in signs the true essence of the sacrament, which the Lord really "instituted" on that night. Precisely by examining the process by which the Eucharistic sacrament progressively took on its form, one understands in a beautiful way the profound connection between Scripture and tradition. The Bible considered solely in the historical context does not communicate sufficiently to us the vision of what is essential. That insight only comes through the living practice of the Church who lived [the] Scripture, grasped its deepest intention, and made it accessible to us.

The Eucharistic liturgy, which has its roots and DNA from the Lord Jesus and the Last Supper, grew organically according to the Holy Spirit into the form of sacrifice we offer today. The priest, ordained to stand *in persona Christi*, in the person of Christ, offers this sacrifice *in nomine ecclesiae*, in the name of the Church, to the Eternal Father. This one great prayer is our prayer; it's the prayer of the whole Christ, head and members, to the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit."

May 14, 2023 – Sixth Sunday of Easter

LITURGY LESSON: EUCHARISTIC PRAYER #2, PREFACE & HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

Today we continue our series of Liturgy Lessons on the Eucharistic Prayer. The Eucharistic prayer begins when the priest begins to say or chant the preface dialogue,

The Lord be with you

- *And with your Spirit.*

Lift up your hearts!

- *We lift them up to the Lord.*

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God

- *It is right and just.*

As you know, "Eucharist" is Greek for "thanksgiving" and so we are offering to God the only suitable means of thanksgiving appropriate, or commensurate, to what He has done for us. How DO you adequately thank the one who rescued you from the clutches of Sin, and Death, and Satan, and Hell? What sign, or word in any language, would ever be enough to thank God for creating me, redeeming me, and inviting me to experience, infinite, eternal beatitude? God HIMself has provided for us the means for giving thanks, and it turns out its offering back to the Father the Son He gave us!

In the preface that the priest chants, you hear theologically rich poetic language that highlights aspects of the faith, or the feast day that's being celebrated, whether it's for saints or martyrs, or doctors of the church; there are prefaces for the dead that are chanted at funerals, prefaces for specific solemnities like Christmas and Easter, and specific prefaces for Advent and Lent.

In a word, the preface is designed to orient us toward the mystery into which we're about to be taken. As the preface concludes, the entire congregation joins together in exuberant song as we sing the song of the angels and saints in the Book of Revelation, *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus* – Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts! In this moment, imagine the myriads of angels and saints beyond counting, standing with us shoulder to shoulder, invisibly but powerfully present, joining us in adoration of the Lamb of God seated upon the throne.

May 21, 2023 – Seventh Sunday of Easter/The Ascension of our Lord

LITURGY LESSON: EUCHARISTIC PRAYER #3: EPICLESIS

We continue today with our Liturgy Lessons on the Eucharistic Prayer, focusing on one specific moment of the prayer called the *Epiclesis*, which, in Greek, means “to call down upon.” Towards the beginning of the Eucharistic prayer, you will notice the priest changing his bodily posture. His hands move from the “orans” position, arms and hands extended, to stretching out his hands over the gifts of bread and wine spread upon the altar. During the action, the deacon kneels, while a server rings the bells once to call our attention to what is happening upon the altar. And what IS happening upon the altar?

In a word, fire! Recall Elijah in the Old Testament battling the false priests of Baal. Hundreds of priests of Baal gathered to challenge Elijah who stood alone as the lone prophet of the God of Israel. A contest was suggested where altars would be built and sacrifices would be prepared, and both the prophets of Baal and Elijah would call upon their God, and whichever God answered with fire, that is the true God. So as the day went on, the prophets of Baal danced and sang around their altars, crying out for Baal to reply, but nothing happened. They worked themselves into a frenzy, and even spilt their own blood in offering; still nothing. Finally Elijah ordered that his altar and sacrifice be completely soaked with water, several times. And he turns to heaven and speaks to the Lord and calls down fire upon the altar and it consumes the sacrifice.

The Lord, through the priest, sends down the fire of Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine not to consume or destroy them, but to transform them, to sanctify them, to divinized them. Just like at the Annunciation when Gabriel told Mary, the “power of the most high will overshadow you,” so too at the epiclesis, the Word becomes flesh through the outpouring and overshadowing of the fire of the Holy Spirit. Through this gesture and the accompanying words of consecration, which we will consider next week, ordinary bread and wine become the body and blood, soul, and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May 28, 2023 – Pentecost Sunday

LITURGY LESSON: THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER #4 - THE NARRATIVE OF INSTITUTION.

For our Liturgy Lesson today, we will consider the words of consecration and the gestures that accompany this moment in the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Instructed to hold the host slightly above the altar, the priest bows over the host and says, “Take this, all of you and eat of it. For this is my body, which will be given up for you.” In like manner the chalice, “Take this all of you and drink from it. For this is the chalice of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me.”

Three things to consider with the words of consecration, the most sacred and solemn words of the entire Mass. First, the “I” who is speaking in these words is not Fr. Patrick or Fr. Joe, or any priest. The personal subjectivity in the words of consecration is Jesus himself, the great high priest, who, using the instrumental causality of the priest’s own humanity, speaks HIS words over the bread and wine, the same words he uttered at the Last Supper.

Secondly, the same Jesus who said to the lepers, “be made clean” and they were made clean, who said to the dead Lazarus, “come out” and the man came out, speaks to mere bread and wine, through the priest, “this is my BODY...this is my BLOOD” and so it is. His word doesn’t merely describe reality; his word makes reality.

Thirdly, the elevation accompanied with the triple ringing of bells. The priest, by the power of the spirit, acting through and with and in Jesus, elevates the consecrated host and the consecrated chalice in a gesture of offering to the Father. Through the centuries, Catholics have been falsely accused of believing that we re-sacrifice Christ over and over again in the Mass. This is not true, nor what we believe. Christ offered himself once for all. But here and now, by the power of the spirit, we participate mystically, and TRULY, in the real ONE offering of the Son of God to the Father.

June 4, 2023 – The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

LITURGY LESSON: EUCHARISTIC PRAYER #5 – MEMORIAL ACCLAMATION

We continue with our Liturgy Lessons today with the next most significant moment of the Mass, known as the memorial acclamation. After the priest elevates the chalice, sets it back down upon the altar, and genuflects, he stands and will chant *Mysterium Fidei* [Mee-stair-ee-oom Fee-day-ee], The Mystery of Faith.

There are three options for memorial acclamation. The Church does not specify which gets used when. It's truly up to the organist or presider to determine. The three options are:

1. We proclaim your death, O Lord, and profess your resurrection until you come again.
2. Save us Savior of the world, for by your cross and resurrection, you have set us free.
3. When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your death, O Lord, until you come again.

In the theology of the Church's liturgy, these acclamations come as a response to what has just taken place...and what has just taken place? The Word has been made flesh, Christ is now present upon our altar, the Son of God, who came to rescue us and to offer himself to the Father has made his one sacrifice and self-offering sacramentally present again. We've just taken part in something extraordinary, and with a cry of the heart, the Church, the Bride responds in love with these words, the memorial acclamation.

June 11, 2023 – Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ

LITURGY LESSON: KNEELING AT LAMB OF GOD

“Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD our maker.” – Psalm 95:6

On coming to the house, [the Magi] saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down to the ground and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” – Matthew 2:11

“And when Simon Peter saw [catch of fish], he fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying “Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!” – Luke 5:8

“And a leper came to Him and bowed down before Him, and said, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.’” – Matthew 8:2

The Syrophenician woman approached him, and falling to her knees before him, says: “Lord, help me.” – Matthew 15:25

“As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God” – Romans 14:11

What do the women do when they encounter the Risen Lord the morning of the resurrection? They fell to their knees, “took hold of his feet and worshipped him” – Matthew 28:10

At this point in the liturgy, we have joined our voices with the choir of angels in their great hymn before the throne of the Lamb as we cry out, “Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace.” Where *are we* in this moment? We are before the Lamb, we before our King and champion who has triumphed over sin and death, saving us from Hell – the victor and bridegroom of our souls. And like everyone in the Scriptures who comes to realize I am in the presence of God, we should fall to our knees.

Here at Sacred Heart, beginning this Sunday, we will resume the practice of kneeling from the conclusion of the Lamb of God to the end of the communion rite. If it is true that actions speak louder than words, then the bodily action of falling to our knees in the presence of the Risen Lord reveals more than anything we might ever profess with our lips. This posture, one of humility and lowliness, places us, like the Syrophenician woman, at the feet of Jesus, expressing our hunger and radical dependency, and we say with her, “Lord, help me!” Lord, feed me. Lord, take care of me. Lord, have mercy on me! If we truly recognize him present in the sacred host and chalice, as the psalmist says, “Lord, who could stand?” As we fall to our knees, let us surrender our hearts to our good and loving God.

June 18, 2023 – Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

LITURGY LESSON: EUCHARISTIC PRAYER #6 – ANAMNESIS

A few weeks ago, we spoke about a component of the Eucharistic Prayer called the "Epiclesis", calling down the Holy Spirit to "make holy" our gifts of bread and wine that they may become the body and blood, soul and divinity of the Lord. There is another Greek word that is essential for our understanding of what is happening upon our altars, "*anamnesis*," [An-nam-NEE-sis] which is translated as "in memory" – as in "Do this *in memory* of me..."

It's not uncommon for people to do certain things to remember loved ones who have died – to make a certain recipe, to sip a particular spirit, to go to a favorite vacation spot. All of those things are "rituals" of a sort that helps us remember someone who was important to us. This is NOT what Jesus meant when he used the word *anamnesis* at the last supper, nor is it what we believe the Eucharistic sacrifice to be. We're not doing this to remember Him and what He Did. It's much deeper.

The center point of the Old Testament is the Exodus, the great liberation of God's people from slavery to freedom, and that liberation is accompanied with a meal that memorializes, ritualizes, the great deliverance – the Passover. God establishes this memorial meal Himself as a way for all Jews of all time to participate in this saving event. When the Passover is celebrated, the Jews of whatever century consider themselves spiritual contemporaries with those saving events. This is what *anamnesis* means – it's a ritual participation in and mystical representation of a historical event that makes me a contemporary with that event.

The New Testament too has a focal point, a great liberation from a tyrant far worse than Pharaoh – Jesus, the new Moses, liberates us from Sin and Death and Hell, and with his sacrifice he institutes a memorial meal as well as, the Eucharist, that makes all Christians of every age contemporaries with Jesus' sacrifice.

June 25, 2023 – Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: EUCHARISTIC PRAYER #7: SACRIFICE AND INTERCESSION

It became trendy for a while to speak of the Eucharist as the supper of the Lord, emphasizing that it is really a community meal, and that the altar was really a table, and the priest is really just like us, a minister. This is why, after the second Vatican council, high altars at the front of the Church were stripped down and new free-standing altars were erected which allowed the priest to celebrate Mass facing the people, *versus populum*, mimicking how Protestants celebrate communion services. This radical break with tradition was motivated by a desire to make the Catholic liturgy seem more accommodating to our separated Protestant brothers and sisters; it was also felt to be more “pastoral.” However, this erroneous interpretation of the Vatican II documents has led to a change of HOW people understand the Mass.

First and foremost, the Mass *is* a sacrifice. Recall what we said last week about that word, “anamnesis.” That is why Catholic theology has always referred to the altar as an altar, and not a table - sacrifices are made upon altars...and by whom? Priests. This, again, is why Catholic clergy are priests and not ministers, or reverends. Ordained clergies are united to Jesus, the great high priest, who offers himself to the Father. This theology was more clearly on display when the priest and people faced the same direction during the sacrifice of the Mass, a posture known as *ad orientem*, meaning “to the East.” From the earliest centuries, Christian churches were built with altars on one wall, often, the Eastern wall, so that the sacrifice could be offered in the direction of the rising Sun, a symbol of the victorious Christ, the Son who has risen above every shadow of death and now reigns victorious upon the throne. In this posture, the priest, at the head of the people, is clearly and visibly leading his people TO the Father. He does not, as critics say, pejoratively, “have his back to the people.” No, no with them and on their behalf, the Sacrifice of Calvary is being re-presented and offered to the Father, the gift that he has given us, “this pure victim, this holy victim, this spotless victim. The holy bread of eternal life and the chalice of everlasting salvation.”

July 2, 2023 – Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: THE GREAT AMEN

The culmination of the Eucharistic prayer is the elevation of the host and chalice by the priest and deacon, accompanied by the chanting of the Doxology:

“Through Him, and with Him, and in Him, O God, Almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor are yours for ever and ever.”

What is happening at this moment? We are present again at Calvary when Christ the priest and the lamb sacrifice mounted the wood of the cross willingly, like Isaac willingly laying down his life before his father Abraham. Jesus offered himself to the Father in the bloody sacrifice of the cross. Here in the mass, mystically, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the same Christ and Lord offers himself again to the Father in an unbloody manner, under the veil of sacramental signs. The Son is giving himself as a blameless, willing victim of love to the Father. And the Father, receiving the Son’s offering, gives him back to us to receive. If we could see with the eyes of the angels this moment in the mass, we would die of joy. The Bride, the Church, responds to the Bridegroom’s self offering by declaring boldly: “AMEN!”

The Great Amen is the Church’s response to all that the Lord has done for us - “I believe it...” “It is so.” How often the Great Amen is proclaimed in rote, half-hearted singing voices. During mass today, let Hell tremble as we raise our voices and cry out AMEN!

July 9, 2023 – Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: CONCLUSION OF THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

Does all the pageantry matter? The smells, the bells, the precision of the servers, the ornamented fabric, the fancy golden chalices? Is all of that necessary? Shouldn't the mass be more humble? More simple? Wasn't the last supper a simple meal after all?

Well yes...and no. Nothing that the Incarnate Lord did was a "mere anything." Everything he did was charged with infinite value and beauty and significance. So no, the last supper wasn't really "simple." Additionally, over the centuries, as the Church reflected more and more on the immense gift of the Lord Jesus, his coming among us, his dwelling among us in the eucharist, the gift of the sacraments, especially the mass, the Church became more and more consciously aware of the enormity and the preciousness of these gifts. These realities are indeed the greatest treasures that man possess. But, like the Lord himself, they are hidden within the most humble of elements: bread, wine, oil, and water. So, as the Church's liturgy developed organically, the faith that surrounded these realities became more and more embodied and incarnated in ritual gestures - outward signs and symbols that more aptly conveyed the mystery. In other words, the only way for us to perceive value in something is to surround it with ornamentation, with ritual, with gesture, with signs that seem extravagant and over the top. If you watched King Charles coronation ceremony back in May, you saw that full on display.

Or travel to Washington D.C. to Arlington National Cemetery sometime to witness the changing of the guard at the tomb of the unknown soldier, and there you will see the highest level of ritual, gesture, sign, and liturgy. The value of the sacrifice of the unknown soldier is revealed BY and revealed THROUGH the over-the-top ceremony of the tomb guards.

This is why the Church always prefers a maximalist approach to the sacraments rather than a minimalist approach. Our skeptical hearts need all the help we can get to really believe that the miracles we profess actually take place - if we make the Eucharistic sacrifice look mundane, look and sound ordinary, it's not surprising that more and more people find it difficult to believe he's really present.

July 23, 2023 – Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: OUR FATHER (PART 1)

At the conclusion of the Eucharistic prayer and following upon the Great Amen, the priest intones: “At the Savior’s command and formed by divine teaching we dare to say...” leading the congregation into the chanting of the Our Father.

The Our Father appears in both Matthew and Luke. The disciples of Jesus have been traveling with him, listening to his teaching, witnessing his miracles, absorbing his manner of life and way of being...and most especially, they’ve witnessed his prayer. They’ve seen him go off by himself and enter into deep communion and dialogue with his Father. And so, like little children, they ask him: “Lord, teach us how to pray!” The Our Father is what flowed out of Jesus’ heart as a response to their asking. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “The Lord’s Prayer is the quintessential prayer of the Church” and “is at the center of the Scriptures” (CCC 2774). Perhaps the most astonishing aspect of this prayer is that it is directed to the Father.

Since Christians pray the Our Father from their youth, it is easy to forget how daring, bold, and even audacious it is to address God as our Father. Moses was instructed from the burning bush: “Do not come near.” And when he asked God his name, God did not reveal himself as “Father.” Only Jesus could cross that threshold of the divine holiness and the “good news” is that he invites us to cross it with him into an astounding intimacy with God our Father.

The personal relation of the Son to the Father is something that man cannot conceive of nor the angelic powers even dimly see: and yet, the Spirit of the Son grants a participation in that very relation to us who believe that Jesus is the Christ and that we are born of God. It’s beyond our wildest imaginings...that we are grafted into the Son, and in the Son we have access, by the power of the Holy Spirit to the Father.

July 30, 2023 – Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: OUR FATHER (PART 2)

Last week we began reflecting on the Our Father, in particular the incredible gift we've been given in Jesus to address God as our Father! Today, we want to address the posture of our prayer during the Our Father and offer a corrective and an invitation going forward.

In the Tridentine Mass, for those who are old enough to recall, the *Pater Noster* or the Our Father was prayed only by the celebrant. In the reforms of the liturgy, the Our Father became a communal and congregational prayer for both the priest and the people. Since there was no specific instruction about the posture to be assumed during the Our Father, some innovations crept in. For a while, the congregation held hands during the Our Father. Then that was replaced with the congregation holding out their hands in what is known as the "Orans posture." The "orans posture" is the posture of the priest during certain parts of the Mass, including the Our Father. He stands with his hands out, palms up and elbows bent. It's the posture the priest assumes when he's addressing the Father during worship. The question is, what ought to be the people's posture?

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website states, "No position is prescribed in the Roman Missal for an assembly gesture during the Lord's Prayer." This is not helpful at all. This may lead you to believe that the orans posture is acceptable. But using this reason, jumping jacks might also be acceptable during the Our Father. Thankfully, the Church does have an Instruction from 1997, which is titled: *On Certain questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests*. In Article 6 of the instruction under the heading, *Liturgical Celebrations*, it states:

- In eucharistic celebrations, deacons and non-ordained members of the faithful may not pronounce prayers – e.g. especially the eucharistic prayer, with its concluding doxology – or any other parts of the liturgy reserved to the celebrant priest. Neither may deacons or non-ordained members of the faithful use gestures or actions which are proper to the same priest celebrant.

In a nutshell: The laity are NOT to assume the orans position during Holy Mass. During the Our Father, the priest alone is standing in persona Christi, in the orans posture, speaking to God on our behalf. And the hands of the faithful should remain together or down, praying or chanting the Our Father.

LITURGY LESSON: THE OUR FATHER (PART 3)

Today we want to begin reflecting on the structure of the prayer, the petitions of the Our Father.

The first three petitions concern God directly: thy name; thy kingdom; thy will. The final four petitions concern our deepest needs in this present life and commend our wretchedness to his mercy: give us; forgive us; lead us not; deliver us [see CCC 2804-2805]. If we are to enter the true spirit of the first three petitions, we must allow the “burning desire, even anguish” of the Son for his Father’s glory to seize us. The final four petitions exemplify the cry of the heart in Psalm 42: “Deep calls to deep” [see CCC 2803].

The first petition, “Hallowed Be Thy Name.” To “hallow” God’s name is to recognize God’s holiness. This line of the prayer, however, is not a declaration but a petition. In other words, we are not declaring to God that we recognize the holiness of his name. Rather, we are acknowledging that we [and the whole world] don’t recognize the holiness of his name and we need to.

The second petition, “Thy kingdom come.” This petition refers primarily to the coming of Christ in glory. It is “the cry of the Spirit and the Bride, ‘Come, Lord Jesus’” that we hear in the Book of Revelation. It’s a cry of longing, a cry of hope for the fulfillment of all things in the consummation of the Marriage of the Lamb. The Church longs to be united with Christ, her Bridegroom, in the glory of heaven where she will rejoice one day with [her] Beloved, in a happiness and rapture that can never end.

The third petition, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.” This petition is a prayer that “earth no longer differ from heaven.” This petition is fulfilled and lived out perfectly in Mary’s “fiat”: “Let it be done unto me according to your word.” In this petition, we ask our Father to unite our will to his Son’s, in order to fulfill his will, his plan of salvation for the life of the world. We are radically incapable of this, but united with Jesus and with the power of his Holy Spirit, we can surrender our will to him and decide to choose what his Son has always chosen: to do what is pleasing to the Father.

August 13, 2023 – Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: THE OUR FATHER (PART 4)

Let us continue with the final four petitions of the Our Father, breaking them down and unpacking what they really mean according to the Church's deep reflection and teaching.

The fourth petition: "Give us this day our daily bread." This petition acknowledges the Father as the giver of all good gifts: he "who made you ... satisfies you with his good gifts" (Sirach 32:13), or from Psalm 81: "Open wide your mouth and I will fill it." This petition is an entrustment of all of our needs – physical and spiritual – to the loving providence of the Father. It is saying: "Father, into your hands I commend the satisfaction of my every desire."

The fifth petition: "Forgive us our trespasses..." As the Catechism acknowledges, this petition is both "astonishing" and "daunting". Jesus teaches us that our cry for forgiveness will not be heard unless we have met a strict requirement: we must forgive those who sin against us. Our cry for God's forgiveness hinges on this all-important "as"... We must let the Spirit of God enter deeply so that our hurts can be turned into intercession, and our cry for mercy can flow from the gift of showing mercy.

The sixth petition: "Lead us not into temptation." The Greek verb translated "lead" means "do not allow us to enter" or "do not let us yield" to temptation. For God "himself tempts no one" (James 1:13). Christ's own temptations reveal that victory over temptations is possible only through prayer. It is a petition to the Spirit to help us discern the movements of our hearts and to distinguish the voices that vie for our attention.

The seventh petition: "Deliver us from evil." The Catechism, quoting St. Ambrose of Milan, writes: "In this petition, evil is not an abstraction, but refers to a person, Satan, the Evil One, the angel who opposes God. The devil, *diabolos* in Greek, is the one who 'throws himself across' God's plan and his work of salvation in Christ. One who entrusts himself to God does not dread the devil. [For indeed] 'If God is for us, who is against us?'"

August 20, 2023 – Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: THE SIGN OF PEACE

At the conclusion of the Our Father, the priest says:

“Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles: Peace I leave you, my peace I give you; look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and graciously grant her peace and unity in accordance with your will. Who live and reign for ever and ever.”

Facing the people, he continues: “May the peace of the Lord be with you always” - and then the Deacon, if the deacon is present, says, “Let us offer each other the sign of peace.”

Where does this come from? It’s the Church’s liturgical response to the Lord’s teaching in the gospel of Matthew: “If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” Before we approach to receive Him who is the cause and sign of our communion as the body of Christ, we embody through ritual gesture that we are in communion with one another by offering each other the sign of peace.

It is important to remember however, that at this time, the sign of peace that we offer to those around us should maintain proper reverence and decorum. The Lord himself, the King of kings and Lord of lords, is sacramentally present on our altar. Let us greet each other with the sign of peace and then redirect our attention to the Lord who is now among us, upon the altar.

LITURGY LESSON: THE ANGUS DEI - The Lamb of God

For us as Catholics, there is nothing more spiritually dangerous than growing accustomed to that which is objectively magnificent. The danger in ritual is that we lose touch with the majesty of what is communicated in and through the rituals. There is perhaps no greater example of this than how we typically enter into this next moment of the liturgy, chanting the *Angus Dei*, the Lamb of God. Pause and consider what the Church believes, and has believed for centuries, is actually taking place: The Lord Jesus has lowered himself yet again in an act of sublime condescension, and He is **HERE**, among us, in our midst, upon our altar, longing to join his sacred humanity to our lowliness. **THE** treasure is about to pour Himself into the earthen vessels of our bodies and souls. We begin to cry out with the words that John the seer wrote down for us in the Book of Revelation. John who was caught up in ecstasy into the throne room of God, and was given a vision of the heavenly worship, tells us that perpetually, the angels, myriads of angels beyond counting, hail the savior as the Lamb of God, the Lamb standing as though slain! As we sing those words, we too are caught up mystically to that same heavenly realm. We are surrounded by all the angels all the saints who cast down their golden crowns before him crying out “Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace.” We need to ask God for the grace of faith to see beyond mere appearances: We are before the Lamb, we are before our King and champion who has triumphed over sin and death, saving us from Hell - the victor and bridegroom of our souls.

September 3, 2023 – Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD

At the conclusion of the *Angus Dei*, the priest elevates the chalice with the Precious Blood of Christ and a particle of the consecrated Body of Christ, and declares: “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.” The entire sweep of Salvation History is contained in these words.

After the Fall in Eden, God began a rescue mission called Israel. He first called Noah and his family, and then Abram and promised that He would be the father of a great nation, and He gave Abraham a son, Isaac in his old age—When God spares Isaac’s life on the mountaintop after the great test of Abraham’s faith, the same spot where the Temple would be built centuries later, Isaac asks his Father, “Where is the lamb for the sacrifice?” And his father responds, “God will provide Himself the lamb for the sacrifice.”

Several centuries go by, and God’s people, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had become enslaved to Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And when God had Moses lead his people out of slavery in Egypt into the promised land, their exodus was preceded by a meal, the Passover meal during which each household had to procure for itself an unblemished, year old male lamb, sacrifice and consume its flesh and anoint the doorposts of their house with its blood.

And all through the long corridor of Israel’s history, the people would pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem to make sacrifice. All those millions upon millions of lambs sacrificed upon the altar were never able to perfectly atone for or heal the sinful hearts of men. And growing in the hearts of God’s people was a longing, a cry that echoed Isaac’s words: God, where is the lamb that will finally atone for our sins, the lamb who will take away the sin of the world, the lamb that will finally re-establish communion between heaven and earth, to give us what we lost in Eden?

And then Isaiah prophesied that the lamb of God, the one who would finally bear away humanity’s guilt and re-establish the communion of Eden, would not be an animal at all but a man—a man of suffering and sorrow, an appointed servant who would bear man’s infirmities, endure mankind’s sufferings, be scourged and crushed and pierced for our iniquities. And then one day, to the shores of the Jordan, while John is baptizing, comes a man, a certain Yeshua of Nazareth—the Baptist points to him and cries out, just like we’ll hear in Mass—“Behold, the lamb of God...” That’s who He is. And that’s who we receive.

September 10, 2023 – 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD, pt. 2

Last week, we began reflecting on the words uttered by the priest: “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.” Last week, we reflected on the first half, this week, we want to dive into what it means that we are “invited to the Supper of the Lamb.”

The Bible begins with a marriage - Adam and Eve in an earthly paradise - and the Bible ends with a marriage - Christ the Victorious Lamb with his Bride, the Church, in a heavenly paradise. The two bookends of Scripture are marriages. Marriage is the sign above all others that God wrote into creation and into the story of salvation history to unveil who He is, as a Trinity of persons, an endless exchange of love and life, and to unveil our ultimate destiny, where all this is headed. Heaven is not a great big space where God lives; no, it’s something “eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man.” Heaven is, if we can put it simply, union with God, union with the Trinity.

And that is what is revealed in the Book of Revelation, the marriage supper of the lamb where Christ and his Church are united, Head and Body together, Bridegroom and Bride. That heavenly reality that John saw and wrote about in the Book of Revelation is made mystically present in and through the signs, the symbols, the gestures, and the actions of the liturgical celebration. That is why we say in the mass, we receive a “pledge of future glory.” In the Eucharist, which Pope St. John Paul II called the “sacrament of the Bridegroom and the Bride” the Church-Bride comes forward to meet her divine Bridegroom hidden under the appearances of simple bread and wine and there the two become one flesh, a pledge of that future glory to which we’re all destined. Blessed indeed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb.

September 17, 2023 – Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: COMMUNION UNDER BOTH KINDS

Matthew's gospel tells us, "The kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the old and the new." This is very much like the point that these liturgy lessons often make. The renewed liturgy is comprised of both the new and the old. It is a treasure of our Church.

At the Last Supper Jesus said, "Take and eat take and drink." Receiving Holy Communion under the form of both the bread and the wine was the normal way that people received Holy Communion for over a thousand years. However, in the Middle Ages, as piety and practice changed, it became common to receive Holy Communion under the form of the bread only. From that time until the Second Vatican Council our experience was to receive Holy Communion only in this way.

The Church has now restored the invitation to receive Holy Communion under the forms of both the bread and wine. The Church says, "Holy Communion has a more complete form as a sign when it is received under both kinds. It is a clearer expression that the new and everlasting covenant is ratified in the blood of Jesus Christ."

We encourage people to receive from the chalice. The Eucharistic Minister presents the chalice and says, "The Blood of Christ." You say, "Amen," take the chalice in your hands, take a sip, and return the chalice to the Eucharistic Minister, who wipes the chalice with a purificator.

Because there is so much more to say about this, there is a special insert in the parish bulletin today. It is in a question-and-answer format. It is a new treasure for us that the Church has brought from the storehouse of its tradition.

LITURGY LESSON: RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION pt. 1

Our bodies speak a language. Imagine the different ways you might express yourself silently while playing a game of charades - the gestures you'd use, the facial expressions you'd make in order to communicate, for example: Anger...or Sadness...or Fear...or Disgust...or Delight...or Trepidation...etc.? Or, what do the hands of a man and woman being held together during an evening walk communicate? What does a handshake at the end of a business meeting communicate? What does the kiss at the end of a wedding mass communicate? Our bodies make visible invisible realities. Our bodies speak!

In the liturgy, the Church proscribes different body language for us throughout the mass, different ritual gestures and movements and postures, all intended to communicate something both outwardly, as a declaration of faith, and also inwardly, that is to oneself. We stand at the beginning of mass, why? Not because it's expedient, but because it's fitting, in the same way the bailiff announces, as the judge enters the courtroom, "All rise." Christ, the principal celebrant of the liturgy is processing in, and we arise to greet him. Why do we sit during the liturgy of the Word? Not because our legs need a break, but because the posture of sitting communicates an active receptivity, an attentive listening.

Over the many, many centuries of the Church's life, the body language employed for the reception of communion has evolved to more eloquently and accurately speak and communicate the mystery that is unfolding before our eyes. The most ancient practice of distributing Holy Communion was, with all probability, to give Communion to the faithful in the palm of the hand. The history of the liturgy, however, makes clear that rather early on a process took place to change this practice. From the time of the Fathers of the Church, a tendency was born and consolidated whereby distribution of Holy Communion in the hand became more and more restricted in favor of distributing Holy Communion directly on the tongue. The motivation for this practice is two-fold: first, to avoid, as much as possible, the dropping of Eucharistic particles, each of which IS the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus; and second, to increase among the faithful devotion to the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. In other words, to communicate vis-a-vis body language and ritual gesture and posture the Faith of the Church in the real presence of Christ in the sacramental species.

The norm of the Church in the U.S. is that Holy Communion may be distributed to the faithful standing or, if the individual desires, kneeling, and either on the tongue or upon the palm of the hand. More on this in the coming weeks. For now, let us reflect attentively upon what the body language of each of those gesture is communicating.

October 1, 2023 – Twenty Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION pt. 2

John Paul II, in his last Encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, wrote: “By giving the Eucharist the prominence it deserves, and by being careful not to diminish any of its dimensions or demands, we show that we are truly conscious of the greatness of this gift. We are urged to do so by an uninterrupted tradition, which from the first centuries on has found the Christian community ever vigilant in guarding this ‘treasure.’ Inspired by love, the Church is anxious to hand on to future generations of Christians, without loss, her faith and teaching with regard to the mystery of the Eucharist. There can be no danger of excess in our care for this mystery, for ‘in this sacrament is recapitulated the whole mystery of our salvation.’”

There can be NO danger of EXCESS, in our care for this mystery, the sainted pontiff said. This is, again, why the Church has, through uninterrupted history and tradition, always taken a maximalist approach to the sacraments rather than a minimalist approach, preferring lavish excess rather than stripped down simplicity. Look at the great Cathedrals of Christendom, Chartres, Notre Dame, St. Peter’s basilica...look at the art and statuary and stained glass that adorns those spaces - listen to the soaring music of the tradition, unrivaled and unparalleled in excellence and beauty. Look at the norms concerning what sacred vessels may be made from - only precious metals are permitted. Our skeptical hearts need all the help we can get to really believe that the miracles we profess actually take place. If we construct ugly sacred spaces, stripped of beauty and ornamentation of any kind, if our celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice looks mundane, if the goal is to do the least amount required for validity, if the mass looks and sounds ordinary, or even totally comprehensible, lacking in all transcendence, all mystery, all signs of prodigality, if we approach the Eucharistic Lord casually, and should we receive Him casually, more and more people, especially the young, will find it harder and harder to believe that the Eucharist IS what the Church professes it to be, namely the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of the Incarnate Lord!

Perhaps with St. John Paul II, we should err on the side of excess. After all, do we not surround that which we love with the most beauty possible? Do we not treat precious things with the utmost care? Why should the Eucharist be any different?

October 8, 2023 – Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION pt. 3

St. Ignatius of Antioch, writing in the early 2nd century wrote: “They [non-Christians] abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not admit that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, the flesh which suffered for our sins and which the Father in His graciousness raised from the dead.” The testimony of the earliest Christians is unanimous and unambiguous - that bread is not merely bread; it’s *Him*, the bread of angels, the risen and glorified flesh of the savior.

One question remains: Why would God *do* this? Why would He give us this gift? Consider a different question: “What does love want?” Love wants union, love wants to be one with the beloved; you can hear that yearning in every love song and ballad, in every sonnet and poem, love wants union, and God IS love, and we are His beloved. Pope St. John Paul II referred to the Eucharist as the sacrament of the bridegroom and the bride. Not the sacrament of matrimony where you actually have a bridegroom and a bride; no, he said the Eucharist is the Sacrament of the Bridegroom and the Bride. God wants union with you. And none of us have earned it. For reasons we cannot comprehend, He desires for all that He is to be in us; He wants us to share in everything that He is; He who needs nothing, who is infinitely happy wants His life to be in us!

He whom the heavens could not contain was contained within the womb of the Virgin; he whom the heavens could not contain empties himself into bread and wine. Who is man that you should keep him in mind? Who are we to receive such a gift? Who are we to be loved like this? There will never be enough lifetimes to express the requisite gratitude.

October 15, 2023 – Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

LITURGY LESSON: THE CONCLUDING RITE & THE DISMISSAL

We have reflected on every part of the Mass up to this point, and now we come at last to the end. After a period of silence, during which the priest purifies the sacred vessels, ensuring that every single drop and crumb of the LORD's precious body and blood are consumed and not lost, he will sit. And a great silence falls over the church as every single one of us turns our hearts and minds to the Eucharistic Lord now tabernacling within each individual member of the congregation. The priest will rise and intone the usual, "Let us pray," he'll chant the prayer after communion, and then comes the final blessing and dismissal. If a deacon is present, the deacon pronounces the dismissal. There are three options:

1. Go forth, the Mass is ended
2. Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord
3. Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life

Notice what each formula has in common - they all begin with the command, "Go." Next to the words of consecration, it is said that these are the next most sacred words of the Mass. The Lord Jesus who drew us together, to himself, who has nourished us with his Word and strengthened us with His Body, now sends us forth into the world to be his emissaries, walking, talking tabernacles to bring the presence of Christ into the world. We are being deployed back out into mission territory, to Christify the world, to be salt, and light, and leaven, agents of transformation and agents of sabotage, blowing up the Kingdom of darkness with the weapons of OUR king: forgiveness, mercy, love, joy, patience, peace, and kindness.