

Introductory Rite

The Mass is a celebration of thanksgiving to God. Because we belong to God we begin every Mass by signing ourselves with the cross in the name of the Trinity – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We then ask God to forgive us of our sins.

Having been forgiven by God it is natural to give thanks. We want to thank God for his love for us and we do so using the Gloria which is a hymn as old as the fourth century. It begins with the words of the angels to the shepherds on the first Christmas night. The Gloria is only sung at a Sunday Mass, not a weekday Mass.

Then Father says an opening prayer, called Collect. It begins with the priest saying, “Let us pray...” followed by a pause for the people’s silent prayer. All of these silent prayers of the people are then ‘collected’ (hence the name Collect) and offered to God in the prayer offered by the priest. The priest offers this prayer with outstretched arms symbolizing being freed by Jesus dying on the cross and rising for us.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Now we begin the first major part of our Mass, the Liturgy of the Word, which consists of readings from the Bible. Because God speaks to us in his Word in the Bible we listen to these readings with great attention. The congregation sits for the reading and the Psalms. The First Reading is usually from the Old Testament. Then a reading from Psalms is read. This is where we respond with a verse from Psalms. A Sunday Mass would have another reading, usually from the New Testament. Lastly, comes a reading by the priest from one of the four Gospels. As a sign of reverence we all stand. The Gospel is the highpoint of the Liturgy of the Word. Since the Book of the Gospels is a symbol of Jesus, the priest concludes by kissing the book. After the reading, we sit and listen to Father give a reflection of the readings, called a homily.

The Liturgy of the Word concludes with the Prayers of the Faithful or General Intercessions. In these simple prayers we pray to God for all our needs and respond, “Lord, hear our prayer.”

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Preparation of the Gifts

We begin by sitting for the second part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, in which the gifts of bread and wine are prepared. The word Eucharist means “thanksgiving”. The Liturgy of the Eucharist takes place at the altar. We call it the altar because a sacrifice will take place here, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross will be made present to us here by offering God bread and wine. Both the bread and wine are the “work of human hands”. So in presenting the bread and wine to God, we are presenting something of ourselves. The priest also washes his hands as an expression of his desire for inward purification. When washing his hands the priest prays, “Lord wash away my iniquity and cleanse me from my sins.”

Eucharistic Prayer

We kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer, which is a great prayer of thanksgiving. The priest prays with both hands stretched over the gifts. At this time he prays that the Holy Spirit may come upon the gifts and make them holy. The bread and wine now begin changing into the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Communion Rite

At the end of this prayer, we all stand and say the Lord’s Prayer, the “Our Father.” Then, as a sign of that oneness and to prepare for receiving Jesus in Holy Communion we offer each other a sign of peace by shaking hands with the people around us and saying, “Peace be with you.” This is followed by preparing for Holy Communion by praying “Lamb of God.”

We come in procession to the sanctuary to receive Holy Communion, or Eucharist. This reminds us that we are on a pilgrimage in this life, a journey from birth to death, a pilgrimage to our Father in heaven. The Catholic faith teaches that Jesus is truly present in the bread and wine, therefore, receiving the Eucharist is reserved for those Catholics actively practicing their faith. Those who are not Catholic are welcome to process up and receive a blessing. All school students will process up to Father for either the Eucharist or a blessing. For parents in attendance, you may choose to receive the blessing or remain seated in the pew. For non-Catholics who are receiving the blessings, cross your arms over your chest when you are standing in front of the priest as a sign that you will receive the blessings and not the Eucharist.

After receiving Holy Communion, people return to their seats and kneel in prayer. In the prayer after Holy Communion the priest asks God that the mystery celebrated may have an effect on our lives. Thus ends the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Concluding Rite

The final part of the Mass is the Concluding Rite. Now the priest blesses the people and sends them from the church to love and serve the Lord, to do good works, to live the faith celebrated during the Mass.