



**TEACHING MASS - BULLETIN INSERT
LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST, PART A
SUNDAY, JANUARY 29, 2023**



LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

The Liturgy of the Eucharist, which comprises the second half of the Mass, is considered the deepest and most profound worship that we, the human race, can offer to God. Many people believe it is simply a re-telling of the Last Supper, but it is actually far more than that. The Liturgy of the Eucharist is indeed a reliving of that night at the Last Supper, but it also relives the fullness of Christ's passion, His crucifixion and death, and even His resurrection. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, especially the Eucharistic Prayer, we partake in that one sacrifice of Jesus offering himself on the Cross and rising again.



When we celebrate the Liturgy of the Eucharist, we are not simply remembering some events that took place 2000 years ago and showing them on some kind of stage. Rather, as we participate in the Liturgy, the reality of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection are made present to us in the Eucharist. It is almost like being transported back into the Hill of Calvary, witnessing the crucifixion and resurrection before our very eyes, although hidden from our mortal view under signs. Nonetheless, with eyes of faith, we behold Christ crucified and Christ risen when our eyes are drawn to the Holy Eucharist held out to us by the priest. This is why the Mass is both the most solemn and the most joyful event of our day, our week, and of our whole life. Every time we come to the Liturgy of the Eucharist; the entire event of Christ's redemptive sacrifice is made present to us.

THE EUCHARIST'S ORIGINS AT THE LAST SUPPER

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is made up of four parts, each part corresponding to an action that Christ did at the Last Supper. These four actions we recall in the words of the Eucharist Prayer: Christ took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. We know that these four parts matter because our Lord repeated the same action again on Easter Sunday when he appeared to two of his disciples and ate with them at Emmaus. These four actions form the backbone of how Christ instituted the Mass that is now celebrated throughout the world.

TOOK: THE OFFERTORY

In the Old Testament, when a person wished to offer a sacrifice to God in the temple, he would be responsible for bringing the sacrifice, such as a lamb, to the priest at the Altar. The priest would then take the lamb and offer it as a sacrifice on the person's behalf. In our New Testament tradition, we continue this practice at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist during what is called the Offertory, or Preparation of the Gifts. The altar is set, and the people bring forth the gifts to be offered. This includes the bread and the wine that will be used for our 'sacrifice,' as well as the offerings of the people, in the form of the collection.

There is great significance to the church taking up the collection at this time. First, it is to unite our own material offerings to that of the bread and wine offered for the Eucharist. The people bring them up together to show how just as the bread and wine are brought up to be used by God for our benefit (made into the Eucharist so that we eat of it and have our souls nourished) so too our money is used by the Church to benefit the world by building up the kingdom of God. It is also significant because the money brought up comes from our own pocket. We have willingly let go of that money and handed it over to God as a sign that we are not attached to that money. We empty our hands of that money so that we can then fill our hands with the Bread of Life. To coin a phrase, we give our 'bread,' and we receive the True Bread, the bread that is the body of Christ.

BLESSED: THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

The Eucharistic Prayer is the central point of the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Mass as a whole. It is the moment of the consecration when bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and the actions of the priest. It is the moment when God comes down from heaven into our churches and chapels, enthroned within the chalice and upon the Altar. During the Eucharistic Prayer, we kneel if we can further this reality of our faith. Christ becomes truly present -- body, blood, soul, and divinity -- through this sacred prayer of the Church.

It begins with a preface which speaks about the mysteries of that celebration of the Mass, but then takes its true form when we, united with the angels and saints in heaven, acclaim, "Holy, holy, holy." From there, this beautiful prayer forms a perfect prayer of praise which requires its own in-depth analysis, which will be the subject of next week's insert. Suffice it to say that this prayer reaches its apex as the priest utters the words of consecration, changing the bread to flesh and the wine to blood. The prayer contains many types of prayers, finally concluding with us all singing the Great Amen.



BROKE: THE FRACTURING RITE

The Fracturing Rite surrounds the breaking of the bread so that we might partake of it. It begins with the Our Father or Lord's Prayer, a prayer which was taught to us by Christ Himself. It is an ancient tradition within the Mass that this prayer be what follows the Eucharistic Prayer. We recite it together in one voice, as we are one body, the mystical body of Christ, celebrating the presence of His physical body which is on the Altar. This idea of our oneness in Christ continues with the prayers for peace and unity which follow, as well as the Sign of Peace, a liturgical action which symbolizes our unity and that there is no division among us. The Sign of Peace is not meant to be an excuse to socialize or engage in conversation, but is meant to be a sacred action, sharing the peace of Christ with one another, while still maintaining our focus on the worship we are participating in.

After the sign of peace has been exchanged, the choir recites the Lamb of God, drawing our focus back to the altar. It is at this moment, while the Lamb of God is acclaimed three times, that the priest breaks the Eucharist apart. This is the 'fracturing,' and is a sign that the body of Christ was slain for our salvation as well as a sign of Christ being the food for many, not simply the priest. As the priest does this, we rightly acclaim, "Have mercy on us," and, "Grant us peace."



GAVE: THE COMMUNION RITE

The Eucharist is not a sacrifice to be performed and then discarded. Like the lamb of the Passover meal, we eat of the sacrifice. The priest partakes first, then shares the Eucharist with us, first those assisting him in giving communion, and then he and his assistant ministers hand on to us that great gift of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Each small host and every drop in the chalice is the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ Himself. It may look like bread and wine, and even taste as they do, but in faith, we believe that they are not bits of bread and drops of wine, but the real, actual, physical Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. As such, when we approach for communion, and the minister presents us with the Body of Christ, we respond, "Amen," for indeed, we truly believe.

Even as we receive communion, it is most appropriate that we take time after receiving this most precious gift to give thanks for what we have received. Indeed, even if we receive it often, it is a powerful gift which should never be taken for granted. Thus, the Communion Rite does not end the Mass. We do not leave the church once we have received the Eucharist. Instead, we are called to return to our seats and spend some time in silent prayer to reflect on the great gift of Christ's very flesh and blood that we have received. This period of reflection is followed by the Prayer after Communion, bringing the Communion Rite to a close.