

A Walk through the Mass—A Simple Outline

By Glenn Rymza

- I. **There are two main focal points in the Mass:** The “Liturgy of the Word” and the “Liturgy of the Eucharist”. To these are added in introduction and a conclusion.
 - A. **Part One: The Introductory Rites**
 - B. **Part Two: The Liturgy of the Word**
 - C. **Part Three: The Liturgy of the Eucharist**
 - D. **Part Four: The Concluding Rite**

- II. **Part One: The Introductory Rites (Gathering Rites):**
 - A. Welcome: We are greeted as we gather for this celebration.
 - B. Using Water: We make the sign of the cross with water from the Baptismal Font to remind ourselves that we entered the church through Baptism.
 - C. Genuflection: Just before entering our pew, we genuflect toward the Tabernacle where Christ is present as a sign of reverence like what was done in Medieval times before a king.
 - D. Posture, song: We stand as Mass begins. It is the traditional posture of Christina prayer. It is a sign of attentiveness. We sing a gathering song all together to lift one voice in unison up to God.
 - E. Procession: The Priest processes in with acolytes all following the lead of the Cross. The procession is a reminder that we are all on a journey to God.
 - F. Greeting: We make the Sign of the Cross and the priest greets us in the name of the Lord in the words the Angel Gabriel used when greeting the Virgin Mary in Scripture.
 - G. Penitential Act, Sprinkling Rite, Gloria: We start by confessing our sins before God. During the Easter Season this is replace with the priest sprinkling Holy Water on us as a sign of our Baptism. Then, we proclaim with all the Angels, like when they sang at Christ’s Birth, “Glory to God in the Highest...”
 - H. Collect (Opening Prayer): All of our intentions are “collected” together to conclude this introductory part of the Mass with a prayer.

- III. **Part Two: The Liturgy of the Word (Storytelling):**
 - A. Three Readings and a Psalm: One Old Testament Reading, an Old Testament Psalm, a reading from one of the New Testament Letters and Finally the Gospel Reading.
 - B. Standing for the Gospel: We stand out of reverence for Christ, who we believe is present when his word is preached. We sign ourselves with 3 crosses on our mind, lips and heart. May his word affect the way we think, guide what we say and change our hearts.
 - C. Homily: The Homily is meant make the readings apply to our lives today and help us to see Christ in the details of our situations.
 - D. Creed: After hearing the preaching of the Good News, we we respond to it by professing our faith in The Trinity, Jesus and the Church.
 - E. General Intercessions: Then we do our intercessory prayer for the needs of the Church, the world, those in special need and the needs of our parish.

- IV. **Part Three: The Liturgy of the Eucharist (Meal Sharing):**
 - A. One: The Preparation of the Gifts: This second focal point of the Mass, begins with a preparation of the altar to celebrate a meal. It is also a gathering of the gifts of bread and wine that have been brought to offer up as a sacrifice. The parishioners also contribute an offering of money that we are giving to those in need.

B. Two: Prayer Over the Offerings: The prayer over the offerings concludes the preparation of the altar and disposes the congregation to enter into the next part—the Eucharistic Prayer.

C. Three: The Eucharistic Prayer (*Anaphora* –Greek for “to carry back”): “The Eucharistic Prayer is the heart of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. In this prayer, the celebrant acts in the person of Christ as head of his body, the Church. He gathers not only the bread and the wine, but the substance of our lives and joins them to Christ's perfect sacrifice, offering them to the Father. The introductory dialogue, establishes that this prayer is the prayer of the baptized and ordained, is offered in the presence of God, and has thanksgiving as its central focus. The Eucharistic Prayers make clear that these prayers are offered, not to Christ, but to the Father. It is worship offered to the Father by Christ as it was at the moment of his passion, death and resurrection, but now it is offered through the priest acting in the person of Christ, and it is offered as well by all of the baptized, who are part of Christ's Body, the Church. *This* is the action of Christ's Body, the Church at Mass. The priest offers the Eucharistic Prayer in the first person plural, for example, 'Therefore, O Lord, we humbly implore you...' This 'we' signifies that all the baptized present at the Eucharistic celebration make the sacrificial offering in union with Christ, and pray the Eucharistic Prayer in union with him. And what is most important, we do not offer Christ alone; we are called to *offer ourselves*, our lives, our individual efforts to grow more like Christ and our efforts as a community of believers to spread God's Word and to serve God's people, to the Father in union with Christ through the hands of the priest. Most wonderful of all, although our offering is in itself imperfect, joined with the offering of Christ it becomes *perfect* praise and thanksgiving to the Father....Following this dialogue, the celebrant begins the Preface.” (USCCB Website).

1. **Preface--Thanksgiving:** The Preface (Latin for “before the face”) is focused on Eucharist (the Greek word meaning, “to give thanks”). We give thanks for God’s whole work of Salvation or a more specific work that is celebrated at that feast day or time of year. The Preface begins with the priest engaging us in dialogue saying, “The Lord be with you.” We respond with, “And with your Spirit.” Then the priest says, “Lift up your hearts.” We respond: “With lift them up to the Lord.” Finally, the priest says, “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” We respond: “It is right and just.” This introductory dialogue is almost the exact wording found in the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus from 235AD. The preface ends with the singing (it’s always sung) of the Sanctus (goes back to the Apostles, is recorded in the 4th Century) by which we proclaim three times (Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus or Holy, Holy, Holy) how Great God is. In Hebrew, to repeat something three times is a superlative, thus, meaning “Holiest.”
2. **The Canon (The Major Body of the Eucharistic Prayer):**
 - a) Epiclesis: This is as Greek word that means “to call down upon”. The Latin word is for this is translated into English as “invocation.” This is when the Holy Spirit is called down upon the Bread and Wine that they might become the Body and Blood of Christ. This is the moment at which the Eastern Orthodox Church thinks the transformation occurs. There is also a later Epiclesis on the congregation that we might become transformed into the Body of Christ.
 - b) Narrative of the Institution: The priest recalls the events of the Last Supper and tells the story of the institution of the Eucharist. In the medieval period this is where Catholics thought the bread and wine became the Body and blood—it was effected by the words of institution.
 - c) Memorial Acclamation (Anamnesis—Greek word for “to remember back” or “to cause to remember”): The priest continues to recall the wonderful deeds of salvation: the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. We are

invited to proclaim the mystery of faith: “Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.”

- d) Offering and Prayer for Unity: The memory of God’s salvation leads us to pray: “May all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit.” (Eucharistic Prayer II).
- e) Intercessions: To the petition for unity we add prayers for the bishop of Rome and for the bishop of the local Church. We pray for the living & the dead and ourselves that through the intercession of the saints we may arrive at the table of which this is only a foretaste.
- f) Final Doxology: We raise our voices with the saints as the priest raises the bread and wine and offers a toast, a doxology or prayer of glory to God in the name of Christ: “Through him, with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever.” Our Amen to this acclaims our assent and participation in the entire Eucharistic Prayer.

D. Four: The Communion Rite:

- 1. **Our Father and the Sign of Peace**: We prepare to eat and drink at the Lord’s table with the Our Father Prayer. **(The Lord’s Prayer is part of every Sacrament)**. Then we express the unity that God is bringing about with us through the sign of peace: God has reconciled us to himself and offered us his peace and we offer his peace to one another. In the Old Testament the theme of Peace or Shalom meant peace or rest from one’s enemies. In the Old Testament the enemies were the nations surrounding Israel who were constantly invading and taking over. Jesus clarified that God gives us rest from our true enemies: sin, sickness, suffering, and death.
- 2. **Invitation to Communion**: The priest shows us the bread and wine & invites us to come to the table **(The Fraction Rite and the Breaking of Bread)**. “This is the Lamb of God.../ Happy are those who are called to the supper of the Lamb.” The members of the assembly approach the altar in procession.
- 3. **Communion**: Then we express our unity by processing to receive communion in which Christ feeds us with his body and blood and unites us to himself. Being united with Christ, we are also drawn into union with all those who are in the body of Christ. When receiving we respond with the word “Amen.” This means, “I believe it” or “it is true.”
- 4. **Prayer after Communion**: The priest unites our prayers in this prayer to which we respond Amen.

V. **Part Four: The Concluding Rite (Commissioning):**

- A. Announcements: We prepare to go back into the world, now strengthened by the Eucharist and this community. The announcements tell us of the important events coming up in the life of the Parish and important news. “The Lord be with you.”: The priest says this again. This ritual phrase now serves as a farewell.
- B. **Blessing and Dismissal**: Then, we bow our heads to receive God’s blessing. Like during the beginning of the Mass, we make the sign of the Cross—our expression of God as 3 in 1. We are then dismissed by the priest with the words, “Go in Peace.....” And we give our Liturgical Yes, “Thanks be to God.” **“Ite, missa est” (Go!! She (Church) is sent!!)**. This is the Latin form of the dismissal, which is where the word Mass comes from.