

“Eucharist: The Work of Our Redemption”
Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions

“Joining in the Sacrifice: The Liturgy of the Eucharist”
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I. Introduction

A. Today’s talk is a general introduction: there’s much more to say and learn!

1. See *Bibliography* below.

B. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* [GIRM]:

“At the Last Supper Christ instituted the **Paschal Sacrifice** and **banquet**, by which the Sacrifice of the Cross is continuously made present in the Church whenever the Priest, representing Christ the Lord, carries out what the Lord himself did and handed over to his disciples to be done in his memory. For Christ **took** the bread and the chalice, **gave thanks**, **broke** the bread, and **gave it** to his disciples, saying: Take, eat and drink: this is my Body; this is the chalice of my Blood. Do this in memory of me. Hence, the Church has arranged the entire celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist in parts corresponding to precisely these words and actions of Christ, namely:

- a) At the **Preparation of the Gifts**, bread and wine with water are brought to the altar, the same elements, that is to say, which Christ **took** into his hands.
- b) In the **Eucharistic Prayer**, **thanks** is given to God for the whole work of salvation, and the offerings become the Body and Blood of Christ.
- c) Through the **fraction** and through **Communion**, the faithful, though many, **receive from the one bread** the Lord’s Body and **from the one chalice** the Lord’s Blood in the same way that the Apostles received them from the hands of Christ himself” (72).

1. Liturgy of the Eucharistic: Sacrifice and Sacrament

2. An activity that we take up in answer to the Lord’s command to “do this in memory of me.”

3. **Took, give thanks, broke,** and **gave**: four action verbs by which our Eucharistic celebrations are modeled after the Last Supper

II. Presentation of the Gifts

A. Jesus **took** the bread and wine

1. *GIRM*: “At the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the gifts which will become Christ’s Body and Blood are brought to the altar” (73).

a. Bring gifts to the altar now (not earlier in the Mass!).

b. Bread, wine, and gifts for the poor or the Church may be brought forward.

c. *Berakhab* prayers accompany the depositing of the offerings on the altar:

“Blessed are you...” These texts thank God very simply for the gifts of the earth and signal the intent that they might become the Body and Blood of Christ.

d. Mixture of water and wine: a sign of the Incarnation that stemmed from a practical action (diluting the wine)

- 1) Accompanied by an **apology prayer**: “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.”
- 2) Apology prayer: a personal prayer of the priest, said quietly, to assist him in focusing his attention on the spiritual significance of his action during Mass
- e. Incensation of the gifts, altar, and those present. A sign of:
 - 1) Prayers rising to heaven
 - 2) God’s Presence
- f. Offertory Song
 - 1) Optional, unlike Entrance and Communion Songs
 - 2) No need for musical texts to speak of the presentation of gifts or offering at this point of the Mass. The texts can relate to the readings, the season, or the feast being celebrated.
 - 3) These texts are not given in the *Roman Missal*.
- g. Dialogue: *Orate, fratres* (Pray, brothers and sisters...)
 - 1) “my sacrifice and yours”
- h. Prayer over the Gifts
 - 1) The priest asks God the Father to accept the gifts brought to the altar and to transform them into the Body and Blood of Christ for the sake of humanity.
 - 2) Mention is not usually made of the past action of God, which would serve as the impetus to ask for a future grace, as in the Collect or Prayer after Communion

III. Eucharistic Prayer

- A. Corresponds to Jesus’ “giving thanks” at the Last Supper
 1. *GIRM*: “center and high point of the liturgical action of the Mass” (78)
- B. **All** are called to participate in offering this prayer, albeit in different ways
 1. Most of the prayer is in the 1st person plural: “We”
 2. *GIRM*: “The Priest associates the people with himself in the Prayer that he addresses in the name of the entire community to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the meaning of this Prayer is that the whole congregation of the faithful joins with Christ in confessing the great deeds of God and in the offering of Sacrifice.” (78)
- C. Structure (followed by all Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite)
 1. Preface Dialogue – all participate vocally
 2. Preface – glorifies God the Father and gives thanks to Him for the whole work of salvation or for some particular aspect of it
 3. *Sanctus* (Holy, Holy) – a song of praise offered by the entirety of the Church, both here on earth as well as the Church in heaven (Is 6:2-3)
 4. Epiclesis – “to call down” the Holy Spirit
 - a. Here, over the bread and wine, asking that they be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ
 5. Institution Narrative and Consecration – The Priest takes up the words of Christ drawn from the Scriptural descriptions of the Last Supper and says them over the bread and wine, at which time they become the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord.

- a. Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is a substantial presence (“*par excellence*”)
- 6. Memorial Acclamation – speaks of Christ’s Paschal Mystery and its application to us
- 7. Anamnesis – by the power of the Holy Spirit, our remembrance of Christ’s Paschal Mystery in the liturgy makes that Mystery present to us again, such that we are then able to engage in the action of offering Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit
 - a. Here, we are also called to offer ourselves in union with Christ
- 8. Intercessions – we offer the sacrifice of Christ not only for ourselves as a local community, but for the entirety of the world, for both the living and the dead
- 9. Doxology – a summary of the spiritual movements of the Eucharistic Prayer, to which the people offer their assent: “Amen”
- 10. Eucharistic Prayers – 4 primary (I, II, III, IV), 2 for Reconciliation, 4 for Various Needs and Occasions, 3 for Children

IV. Communion Rite

- A. Christ **broke** the bread and **gave it**
- B. A sign that our Eucharistic celebration involves both Sacrifice and Sacrament
- C. Our Father – inserted by Pope Gregory the Great (590-604)
 - 1. Phrases such as “give us this day our daily bread” and the petition for forgiveness are appropriate and take on an enhanced meaning within the context of our preparation to receive the Lord in the Eucharist
- D. Rite of Peace
 - 1. Prayer to Jesus (unusual in the Mass!) – formerly a preparation prayer for the priest prior to receiving Holy Communion – now, a petition for peace expressed by the entire congregation
 - 2. Exchange of Peace – optional, but very much recommended
 - 3. In the Roman Rite (currently), the Rite of Peace evokes the post-resurrection appearances of the Risen Christ and joy and hope that accompanied those encounters
- E. Fraction Rite – “Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Your kingdom.” *Didache* (1st century)
 - 1. Commingling – a sign that we are in the presence of the Risen Christ
 - 2. *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God) – a litany that accompanies the fraction of the Eucharistic hosts – added by Pope Sergius I (687-701)
- F. *Ecce, Agnus Dei* (Behold, the Lamb of God)
 - 1. The Priest invites the faithful to the banquet of Christ, and, together, they make an act of humility inspired by the Gospels
- G. Distribution of Holy Communion – Jesus **gave** His Body and Blood to the apostles
 - 1. Reception of Holy Communion:
 - a. augments our baptismal union with Christ
 - b. separates us from sin
 - c. preserves us from future mortal sins
 - d. brings about the unity of the Church
 - e. commits us to the poor
 - 2. Distribution of the Precious Blood – a reintroduction

- a. See: USCCB's *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*
- 3. Communion Song – should be sung by all, as a sign of our shared communion in the Body and Blood of Christ
- 4. Prayer After Communion – refers to the recently completed reception of Holy Communion and asks God that this action may be transformative for all gathered

V. Conclusion

- A. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, we are entering into the Paschal Mystery of Christ through the very words and actions established by Our Lord Himself.

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