



Quick Notes on “Our Sunday Liturgy”

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The following articles appeared in the Catholic Times beginning September 5, 2010 and concluded on February 6, 2011. This series of articles are a reflection on our weekend celebration of the Sunday liturgy.

They have been compiled into this booklet with reflection questions provided by the Office of Religious Education and Catechesis. It is hoped that this new format will provide a resource for all who wish to develop a better understanding of our Sunday celebration.

Many of the articles refer back to the previous article as a reminder of the connection between what was presented before and what will be covered in the current article. Therefore, reading through this pamphlet like you would a book would seem a little repetitive. The better way to study these articles would be to read one, reflect on what it says and compare it to your own experience. Think about what is similar and where there is differences, then consider how you might try to achieve that experience. Try to experience what the article calls you to experience at your next Sunday celebration, then move on to the next article.

The ultimate goal of these articles is to achieve a better understanding of what cannot be understood, to accept an experience through faith and not reason or logic. Each article takes a small step as we move through the Sunday celebration, always building on the previous article.

Individual Preparation

A New Look at Our Preparation

Over the next 15 months we will have a lot of time to prepare for the modifications in the words we will hear and say when we begin to celebrate Mass with the third edition of the Roman Missal on the First Sunday of Advent 2011. During these months it would be good to review our understanding of our liturgy. Therefore, we will begin a series of articles that will look at the individual parts of the Mass. But there is one caution, the whole is always bigger than the sum of the individual parts. So, when we complete this series we will still need to step back and not only put all the pieces together but try to understand how the larger reality of the Mass is so much more.

We begin this series on Sunday when our alarm clock wakes us in the early morning. (Those who usually attend Saturday evening or Sunday evening will need to adapt.) It is in these early hours of the morning that our minds begin to turn to the reality of Sunday and our Sunday celebration. There are many reasons we join with one another in celebration on Sunday: habit, obligation, fellowship, family commitment, etc. But the primary reason we celebrate the Mass is that we are individually called by God to be a community gathered around the head of the community - Christ our Lord. We form the mystical body with Christ heading the assembly. To miss Mass is to deny the body one of its important parts - you.

Our attitude should be one of anticipation, looking forward to being there, being part of the mystical body in a holy environment where we come together with Christ. We prepare as we do everyday with our morning prayers, and the normal bathing rituals, but on Sunday, we should also read the scripture passages that we will hear in our celebration and reflect on them as-well-as on the liturgical season, solemnity or feast we will celebrate. Our reflections combined with our personal successes and failures of the past week will help us prepare for our encounter with Christ in our celebration of the Mass.

Another aspect of our preparation is our vesting. Our priests (and deacons) put on special vestments in preparation for their encounter with Christ in the celebration of the Mass. The Chancery phones would not stop ringing if one of our priests were to celebrate Mass in cutoffs and a tee shirt without the appropriate liturgical vestments. We, too, should consider our vesting for our encounter with Christ. In the celebration of Mass we encounter Christ in the presider, who celebrates in the person of Christ; we encounter Christ through the scriptures we hear - for it is Christ who speaks to us particularly through the gospel; we encounter Christ through the assembly - for when two or more are gathered in his name he is there; and especially, we encounter Christ in the Eucharist and through our reception of communion. Our vesting is as important as the vesting of the priests and deacons that lead our celebration.

Our celebration begins long before we arrive at church. Our Sunday celebration is the destination of our preparation from the time the alarm sounds early in the morning. It is a weekly journey that reaches its summit when we pass through the doors of our parish church and we celebrate the Eucharist with the community. The celebration of the Eucharist is our fount, the source of spiritual energy that sustains us from week to week.

Reflections:

Reflect upon your own reason(s) for coming to Mass. What could you do to help yourself, in your particular situation, to prepare to celebrate the liturgy?

Considering the statement: "to miss Mass is to deny the body one of its important parts - you" how do you miss others when they are absent?

The presider "vests" for Mass; he prayerfully puts on the garments that express his formal role in the assembly and the dignity of his

actions. What would it mean for you, to consciously “vest” for Mass?

When We Arrive at Church

Last week we looked at our Sunday morning preparation and our vesting (how we dress) for our celebration of the Eucharist. This week we continue to examine what happens when we arrive at our parish church. There are several habitual rituals that we perform as we enter the church, even before Mass begins.

If we arrive real early or if we arrive late, there may be no one there to greet us as we enter the church. If we are early, we should greet those who arrive after us and before we settle into one of the pews. If we arrive late, we need to start earlier to allow for whatever it was that delayed our arrival. The ministry of greeter, it is often part of the usher’s ministry. A greeter welcomes us as we arrive making us feel part of a larger community and not alone and isolated within the gathered community.

As we enter the nave, we place our fingers into the *holy water font* that is near the door and make the Sign of the Cross from our forehead to our abdomen, from our left shoulder to our right shoulder. The gesture continues to identify us as one baptized in Christ. The words come from Christ’s command to the apostles to make disciples of every nation baptizing them in “the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” By making this gesture and repeating the words, we identify ourselves as a disciple of Christ present to celebrate with the community.

Our next gesture comes shortly, we genuflect toward the tabernacle that holds the reserved sacrament, which is Christ our Lord. This gesture should be done with reverence and humility. In some of our churches the tabernacle is not in the sanctuary. It may be off to the side or even in a separate chapel. A tabernacle lamp is always lit identifying the presence of the reserved sacrament in the

tabernacle. Our thoughts when we make this gesture should be that of the doubting apostle Thomas; "My Lord and my God."

When the tabernacle is not in the sanctuary and we have made our gesture of reverence toward its location or physically spent a few moments in adoration, our next gesture is to the altar. Within the celebration of the Eucharist, the altar is our primary focal point. It deserves our respect since it is a symbol of Christ. When we dedicate a church, we anoint the altar with the Oil of Chrism and from the altar we anoint the walls of the church with the same Oil of Chrism. In this way, the entire space is dedicated to the celebration of the Eucharist. Therefore, we make a full body bow to the altar before we enter our pew and, subsequently each time we enter (and leave) the sanctuary.

Now that we have arrived at the church, been greeted, signed ourselves with holy water, made our gestures and thoughts of praise to the reserved sacrament and to the altar, we find ourselves in a pew. This is a time for private prayers, reflecting on the reading we read earlier in the day and upon our lives and how we have lived the gospel values.

Between the aspects we identified last week on our preparation from the time we get up until we arrive at church and our actions and prayers identified in this weeks article, Sunday is shaping up to be a long day dedicated to our Lord.

Reflections:

What thoughts and feelings come to mind as you recall your Baptism through your signing yourself with holy water?

By practicing the simple rituals mentioned in the article in a thoughtful, prayerful way, what am I saying, to myself, to others and to God?

The Introductory Rites

We Are Called to Prayer

We began this series of articles with our Sunday morning preparation and our vesting (how we dress) for our celebration of the Eucharist. Last week we continued to examine what happens when we arrive at our parish church. Now we are ready to begin the celebration of the Mass. In many parishes we begin with a “call to prayer.” This person is often the cantor who identifies the Sunday celebration, solemnity, or feast we are celebrating according to our liturgical calendar. This of course does not happen from the ambo, a place reserved for sacred scripture, the homily that breaks open the scripture, and the general intercessions with its petitions offered by the deacon.

Our celebration begins with song, either an *introit* (a traditional proper of the Mass consisting of an antiphon, verse from a psalm, and the *Gloria Patri - Glory to the Father . . .*) or a hymn that reflects the mystery of the liturgical celebration is sung by all those who gathered. During the song, the presider, deacon, and servers join the assembly generally in procession. The procession should be led by a server carrying a processional crucifix and servers with lit candles. If incense is used, a server carries the thurible which has small charcoal disks that are burning with incense on them (the server is called the thurifer).

As the procession enters the sanctuary, the servers carrying items pause briefly before the altar then continue to their places, properly placing the items they carry. The processional crucifix is placed next to the altar if no other crucifix is present, otherwise it is put aside as to not conflict with the crucifix present within the sanctuary. Those who are not carrying liturgical items make a full body bow to the altar.

If the tabernacle is within the sanctuary, all those not carrying liturgical items first genuflect toward the tabernacle before making a profound bow to the altar. This ritual with the assembly standing, (the entrance procession, and the introit or entrance hymn) physically symbolizes our coming together as a single body of believers - the mystical body of Christ with Christ our head present in the presider.

The priest and deacon reverence the altar with a kiss, a gesture made on behalf of all assembled. The altar is the symbol of Christ as well as the whole Christian community "for we are the living stones from which the Lord Jesus builds the Church's altar" (*Dedication of a Church and an Altar, #2*). If incense was carried in, it is used to encircle the altar and crucifix with incense while we encircle the altar with prayer.

As the smoke from the incense rises, we have the image of our own prayers rising to God. No longer are they our individual prayers, for they have been joined together as we have joined together as one body. Throughout the liturgy we continue to pray as one body with short periods of personal reflection and prayer which again is gathered together as one prayer offered to God our Father.

Reflections:

What is the symbolism of our standing and joining in song while the entrance procession takes place?

Why are these opening rites important to the celebration of the liturgy?

Our Ritual Dialogue Begins

The first three articles in this series presented various rituals. The first article identified the various ritual we perform as we prepare Sunday morning for Mass. The second article discussed various personal rituals we do when we arrive at our parish church. Last week we looked at our common ritual of singing the opening hymn and the rituals of the presider, deacon, and servers as they enter the sanctuary. This article will take up the ritual dialogue that happens when we begin Mass. Ritual is something we do that is repeated every morning or when we find ourselves in the same place or situation. There is little variation in ritual and that brings with it comfort and security. Our liturgy is ritualistic in that all Catholic liturgies have a prescribed ritual that is to be followed. No matter what Catholic church you enter and no matter what language is used the liturgy being celebrated follows the same ritual.

With that being said, the ritual dialogue for Mass begins with the *sign-of-the-cross*, not "Hello" or "Good morning". Following the *sign-of-the-cross* is a ritual greeting, a greeting that lets us know that something special and unique is beginning. It is a formal greeting not an informal greeting like we offer to one another. We are greeted with: "*The Lord be with you*" or "*The grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you*" or "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*" In other words, **the Lord will be with us in this celebration**. This is a statement. How can the presider make that statement? How can he, or the ritual say, without hesitation, that the Lord will be with us?

Our response which we will begin using the First Sunday of Advent 2011 will help us understand. When we begin to use the third typical edition of the Roman Missal, we will no longer say: "*And also with you,*" we will respond: "*And with your spirit.*" The response does not refer to the personal spirit of the presider but to the Spirit he received at ordination, the Holy Spirit. Through the presider's ordination, he assumes a unique role within our assembly - he

presides *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ). It is that unique role that allows the presider to make the definitive statement that the Lord will be with us in our celebration. Our response makes sense within this understanding. Our new response will correspond with the non-English liturgies celebrated around the world.

Before continuing with the *penitential act*, the priest or some other minister **may briefly** introduce the faithful to the Mass of the day. The *penitential act* which was a private prayer, prayed at the foot of the altar by the presider, became a prayer of the assembly with the initial Second Vatican Council reforms. The *penitential act* has four parts: an invitation requesting the community to recall its sinfulness, a period of silence for reflection, the *confiteor* / a common proclamation that all are sinners before God / or invocations addressed to Christ incorporating the *Kyrie*, and a prayer by the presider requesting forgiveness. There will be some changes to the *confiteor* and additional gestures of striking one's breast while saying the additional words: "*through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault;*" and we will add the word "*greatly*" when we say we "*have [greatly] sinned*". The *Kyrie* follows this four part *penitential act* unless it was incorporated.

By this time in our series, we should realize that our Sunday celebration of the Mass is not something that we do casually but with deliberation and desire. There is something very formal about what we do, how we prepare, how we vest, and why we gather as a community to celebrate. Our celebration is not about us but about our relationship with God.

Reflections:

What are some "rituals" that your family observed when you were a child, that you do now as a family? Why are they important?

As we come together for worship, how does ritual facilitate our experience of Mass?

What do you think about the statement, "Our celebration is not about us, but about our relationship with God"?

The Gloria

The *Gloria* is a very ancient hymn. It was first found in the pope's Christmas Mass at the beginning of the sixth century and by the eleventh century it was sung at all Masses on Sundays and festive occasions. Today we sing the *Gloria* at all Sunday celebrations except the Sundays of Advent and Lent. We also sing this venerable hymn at all feast and solemnities except *All Souls* (even when November 2 falls on a Sunday the *Gloria* is not used on *All Souls*).

The hymn itself has four unique sections. The first sentence: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will,*" is the praise sung by the heavenly host after the angels announce to the shepherds about Christ's birth (Luke 2:14). It offers a contrast between glory given to the triune God and the people to whom God gives blessings and, because God blesses them - they have good will.

The scriptural beginning is followed by five statements of praise and one of thanksgiving; "*We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father.*" Unlike the scriptural beginning this section is specifically addressed to God the Father. This expanded translation offers us a broader expression of our praise to God the Father.

The hymn now turns to the Son: "*Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us.*" Just as we have five statements of praise for the Father, we have five epithets (short descriptive titles) for God's Son. All five are in the present tense. These are not historical

statements about Christ, they describe who Christ is today. These epithets are followed by three requests; *have mercy, receive our prayer, and have mercy.*

The hymn concludes with: "*For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in the Glory of the God the Father. Amen.*" At first it looks to be a continuation of the previous section of the hymn addressed only to the Son. While it does offer additional epithets for Christ, it is truly a trinitarian statement. The last line brings all the statements together into the trinity - *Son, Spirit, and Father.*

This hymn offers patterns of speech we don't use in our everyday vocabulary. It is a heightened style that should be more prayerful and focus our thoughts on our celebration. It is almost like a pledge that we make within these initial rites of the Mass that we will continue to give praise throughout the celebration and throughout this, the Lord's day.

(Summarized from a presentation: "Mystagogical Musical Musings" by Fr. Jan Michael Joncus, presented on the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy.)

Reflections:

The article outlines the structure on the "Gloria," showing how the distinct parts finally form one very full expression of praise for the Holy Trinity. How can you use this information to pray more consciously this ancient hymn of praise?

The new translation is fuller and richer, closer to the original Latin. How is this relevant to what we are doing in this hymn?

The Collect

In our current *Sacramentary* (the book containing the prayers used by the presider at Mass) the prayer following the *Gloria* is called the "Opening Prayer." This title does not truly reflect what has happened so far in our celebration. From the time we stood at the first sounds of the organ and began to sing the opening hymn, we have been praying. The *sign-of-the-cross*, the *penitential rite*, and the *Gloria* are all forms of prayer. The new Roman Missal will again call this prayer by its Latin name; the *Collect*. This is the same word and meaning we have in our English language.

The *Collect* has four parts. The *Collect* begins with the presider saying: "Let us pray." This is not an instruction for the server to bring him the *Sacramentary* so the presider can pray the "Opening Prayer," the server should have already been there with the *Sacramentary*. This statement is an instruction for all of us to pray. The statement is followed with a period of silence (no singing, instrumentation, nor movement). It is a time for us to mentally bring to mind reflections from our preparation before Mass began and to remember the prayer requests from friends and family. This period of silence is followed by a prayer that "collects" all of our individual prayers into one prayer of the community which is offered to God by the presider. The *Collect* concludes with our verification and assent as we respond; "Amen!"

There are other non-verbal elements of the *Collect*, besides our silence and standing posture. When the presider says: "Let us pray," he puts his hands together calling for the silence and our reflection. Following this period of silence, he opens his hands in the *orantes* position to offer our prayer to God and with our acclamation at the end of the prayer, brings his hands together. These gestures give us both non-verbal instructions to what is happening and directs our thoughts and engages our very being in the celebration. This completes the "Introductory Rites" of the Mass.

This first part of the Mass, the “Introductory Rites”, brings us to an awareness that we are in God’s presence. There is a richness and a special experience we may miss throughout the remainder of the Mass if we continue to celebrate without this awareness. Our preparation, reflection and prayer, is key to the Sunday celebration of the Mass from one week to the next. We cannot just “drop” into church as the Introductory Rites begin (or have begun) and expect to benefit from the activities of the whole community’s preparation, gestures, prayers, and postures. Especially when they have prepared to celebrate the Mass from their first waking moments of the day.

The Sunday celebration of Mass is not just a choice between Mass and other activities. It is an encounter with God, with a community that gathers in Christ’s name, through the priest who celebrates in the person of Christ, through the scriptures proclaimed that are the voice of our Lord, and especially through the Eucharist that comes through our celebration and reception at communion. No other commitment of our time and energy can offer the richness of this encounter with God.

Reflections:

Why is it more appropriate to call the prayer following the “Gloria,” the “Collect,” rather than “The Opening Prayer”?

What do the presider’s gestures intend to communicate to us?

Why/how are the “Introductory Rites” of the Mass important, even essential, to the rest of the celebration?

Liturgy of the Word

The Liturgy of the Word

The Liturgy of the Word is comprised of the readings from Sacred Scripture together with the chants occurring between them and the Homily, Profession of Faith, and General Intercessions which develop and conclude this part of the Mass. There is also the opportunity for a monetary collection for the poor and support of the parish. While scripture has always been part of the Church's celebrations, its current form of a scripture reading, psalm, another scripture passage and a Gospel proclamation was fixed for our Sunday celebrations following the Second Vatican Council.

The Scriptures offers many riches that are brought out in our liturgical celebrations when they are proclaimed. The liturgical year arranges these various passages in an order which unfolds for us the economy of salvation, which achieves its fullest expression in the celebration of the liturgy. The liturgy is then the continuing, complete, and effective presentation of God's word. When the word of God is repeatedly proclaimed in the Liturgy, it expresses the Father's love that never fails in its effectiveness.

In our continual reception of these scripture passages and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we are formed and reformed; shaping our lives and allowing us to be Christ's disciples, to bring his message to all we meet. Therefore, it is important that, "In the celebration of Mass the biblical readings with their accompanying chants from the sacred scriptures may not be omitted, shortened, or, worse still, replaced by non-biblical readings." (General Introduction to the Lectionary 12) Songs, poems, and other texts cannot reach our hearts as the word of God does. Remember that after the two disciples heard Christ explain the scriptures, their hearts were burning within them. (Lk 24:32)

The proclamation of the scriptures does not belong to the presider. This role in our liturgy belongs to the laity - women and men who have the skills needed to proclaim the passage. The proclamation of the Gospel belongs to the deacon. The presider exercises a presidential role and oversees the proclamation of scripture. He might make brief introductory comments to assist in our reception of the message of the Spirit. It is then his role to break open the readings through the homily (sometimes delegated to a deacon or another con-celebrating priest).

The *Profession of Faith* (the Creed) follows the homily. It is the expression of our faith. It is expressed before we are baptized. On Sundays and solemnities, we again express our faith before we continue our celebration. When we implement the new Roman Missal we will have some adjustments in the words we use to express our faith. Our beliefs will not change, only a few of the words we use.

The *General Intercessions*, also called the *Prayer of the Faithful*, completes the section of the Mass called the *Liturgy of the Word*. This part of our Sunday celebration nourishes us in a way that only Sacred Scripture can. Breaking open the word through the homily helps us integrate the messages found in scripture. Through our preparation, Introductory Rites and the Liturgy of the Word, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we now hunger for the Eucharist - Christ's body and blood - that which sustains us in this life.

Reflections:

What does it mean to you, to say that Christ is as present to us in the Liturgy of the Word as he is in the Liturgy of the Eucharist?

How is "proclaiming the Word of God" different from "reading scripture aloud?"

How are we “formed and transformed” with the help of the Holy Spirit by receiving God’s Word?

How is our “Profession of Faith” a response to the Word of God?

The First Reading, the *Responsorial* Psalm, and the Second Reading

The Liturgy of the Word (comprised of the readings from Sacred Scripture together with the chants occurring between them and the Homily, Profession of Faith, and General Intercessions which develop and conclude this part of the Mass) takes on a new posture and demands a different response than did the *Introductory Rites*. During the first reading, the singing of the responsorial Psalm, and the second reading we are seated. Our response to this change of posture is not one of passiveness but one of reception. We are to be receptive to the words of the scripture passages. Although they were given to the Israelites and to the first and second century Christians, the lessons contained in these passages are still meaningful to each of us as we live our lives today. They are the Word from God and with our openness to them and with the help of our prayer and the help of the Holy Spirit, they will have a profound affect on us.

Lectors, members of the community, proclaim these passages to us not the presider. These liturgical ministers come from the assembly to enter the sanctuary. Upon entering the sanctuary they make a profound bow to the altar then proceed to the ambo. They should make no other gestures to the crucifix, ambo, *Lectionary*, or even to the tabernacle other than to the Bishop when he is present, then a simple head bow is given to him. The scripture passages are not just read as one would be reading the newspaper - it is proclaimed with the meaning of the words, as they are proclaimed, carry a message to those who hear them. Upon completing the proclamation of the

scripture passage, the lector makes the statement: "The Word of the Lord," thus reminding us of the true source of what we have just heard. We give our acceptance of God's Word by replaying: "Thanks be to God." The lector then makes the same gestures leaving the sanctuary as he or she did upon entering.

The *Responsorial Psalm* (also called the *gradual*) is sung between the first and second readings. Because it is to be sung, there is a liturgical ministry for a psalmist who will lead the assembly in the response to the Psalm passages and to sing the Psalm passages between the responses. He or she makes the same gestures as the lector when entering the sanctuary and moving to the ambo. This ministry is often filled by a cantor and sometimes by the choir. From the earliest times, Christian communities have always incorporated the Psalms as part of their formal prayer. The Psalms are the core of the *Liturgy of the Hours* constantly prayed by the Church. It is not appropriate to replace this form of scripture with a song, even one that is a paraphrased version of the Psalm.

The scripture passages chosen for individual Sundays are laid out over a three-year cycle that both reflects the seasons of the liturgical year and provides the community with a knowledge of the whole of God's Word. These passages, over the liturgical year, will identify the history of salvation and how it continues here and now in the representation of Christ's paschal mystery celebrated through the Eucharist.

Since the ambo is the place from which the word of God is proclaimed, it must by its nature be reserved for the readings, the responsorial psalm, and the Easter Proclamation (the *Exsultet*). The ambo may be used for the homily and the prayer of the faithful. The ambo should not be the place for other uses that need a microphone. We should provide another place where the a call-to-prayer can be made, for the use by the cantor, or any

announcements may be made. The Word of God deserves a unique place both in our worship space and in our hearts.

Reflections:

What is the meaning of the various postures we take during the Liturgy of the Word, e.g. sitting for the first/second readings, standing for the gospel, sitting for the homily, standing for the Creed and the Prayers of the Faithful.

Why does the Church give us a three-year cycle for the Sunday readings?

How can you consciously make "Thanks be to God" a real prayer of gratitude?

The Gospel

The Liturgy of the Word begins with a change in posture, from standing, to a seated position of reception and meditation during the periods of silence that follow each of the scripture passages. We change postures again with the *Gospel Acclamation*. The *Gospel Acclamation* is a "rite or act standing by itself." It serves as the greeting of welcome from the assembled faithful to the Lord who is about to speak to us. It is an expression of their faith through song. The *Gospel Acclamation* must be sung not just by the cantor or the choir but by the entire assembled community and during this short rite we stand awaiting the Gospel proclamation.

The liturgy, through frequent repetition and admonition, teaches and impresses upon us the great reverence to be shown the reading of the Gospel. It is set off from the other readings by marks of honor. It is read by a special minister appointed to proclaim it - the deacon. (Only when no deacon is present does the honor of

proclaiming the gospel fall to a priest.) The deacon prepares himself through prayer and a special blessing given by the presider. At the ambo, he greets the assembly with his hands together with the same liturgical greeting given by the priest as Mass began: "*The Lord be with you.*" We respond: "*And with your spirit*" which does not refer to the personal spirit of the deacon but to the Spirit he received at ordination, the Holy Spirit who is present as we hear the words of the Gospel.

The deacon announces the reading while making the sign-of-the-cross with his thumb, first on the book at the beginning of the Gospel passage he is about to proclaim, then on his forehead, lips and breast. Together, with the deacon who proclaims the Gospel, the faithful sign themselves similarly *that the Word may enlighten their minds, cleanse their hearts and open their lips to proclaim the praise of the Lord.* The community replies with the words: "*Glory to you, Lord.*" The deacon may then incense the book three times, to the center, left and right. The deacon then proclaims the Gospel in a clear voice. At the end of the Gospel the deacon proclaims "*The Gospel of the Lord*" without raising the book from the stand. We respond: "*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ*" thus acknowledging Christ's presence to us in the words that were proclaimed. The deacon then kisses the book, saying in a low voice: "*May the words of the Gospel wipe away our sins.*"

There are other marks of reverence given to *The Book of the Gospels* itself. The book is highly decorated compared to our other liturgical books; every attempt is made to emphasize that this book is worthy, dignified and beautiful. It is the only liturgical book held high and carried in processions for the community to look upon and reflect on the Gospels that form their lives. Before it is proclaimed during Mass, it is carried to the ambo accompanied with candles along with incense. So clearly is *The Book of the Gospels* a sign of Christ's present in the liturgy, that it is revered with the same holy kiss given to the altar after it is proclaimed.

Thus the *Book of the Gospels* as a sign of the presence of Christ in his word proclaimed is always accorded a place of honor in the Church's liturgy. Enshrining the *Book of the Gospels*, especially on the altar when Mass begins, is a sign of the presence of Christ himself as teacher and guide.

Once the Gospel has been proclaimed, we become the bearers of the Gospel message and the *Book of the Gospels* is put in a place of honor and not carried in procession at the end of Mass. Instead it is our responsibility to go forth carrying the Gospel in our hearts at the end of Mass and announce the Gospel of the Lord through the way we live our lives.

Reflection:

Why is the reading of the Gospel marked with special signs of honor?

What are some of the qualities, actions, words, gestures used to remind us of the importance of the gospel in our midst?

The Book of the Gospels is carried into the assembly in the opening procession. Why is it not carried out in the closing procession?

What could help me to be more conscious of the prayer (signing one's forehead, lips and heart) said as the gospel is announced?

Breaking Open the Word

Our faith is born of the Word and is nourished by it. Therefore, breaking open the Word through the homily is an essential part of the celebration of the sacraments. It is the primary duty of priests to proclamation the Gospel of God. A key moment in the

proclamation of the Gospel is preaching, proclamation of God's wonderful words in the history of salvation.

The three major elements of liturgical preaching are: the preacher, the word drawn from the Scriptures and the gathered community. There are occasions when the homily may be preached by someone other than the presider, by a deacon serving in the parish or a guest priest. However, the preaching of the homily belongs to the presiding minister. The unity of Word and Sacrament is thus symbolized in the person of the presiding minister of the Eucharist. The one who gives the homily is the mediator of meaning between the Scriptures just proclaimed and the assembly. The homily offers what the assembly needs to hear, a daunting task when we consider our diversity.

The homily should display a sensitive knowledge of the struggles, doubts, concerns, and joys of the assembly. In order to make such connections between the lives of the people and Gospel, the homilist will have to be a listener before he is a speaker. Interpreting the scriptures requires time and energy to understand the complex social, political, and economic forces that are shaping our world. The homilist may not know everything. The homilist offers the assembly the Word which was proclaimed and invites the assembly to think about and ponder that Word so that it might speak to their lives.

Like all preaching, the homily is directed to faith. The homily is preaching of a special kind. The very meaning and function of the homily is determined by its relation to the liturgical action of which it is a part. As Paul writes, "But how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe unless they have heard of him? And how can they hear unless there is someone to preach?" (Romans 10:14) The homily flows from the scriptures which are read at the liturgical celebration, or more broadly, from the Scriptures which undergird its prayers and actions, and it enables the assembly to participate in the celebration with faith. A

homily presupposes faith, its purpose is not conversion, nor is it an explanation of a systematic theological understanding of the faith. The homily is given that the community may celebrate more deeply and more fully, more faithfully, and thus be formed for Christian witness in the world. The homily creates a Christian vision of the world as the creation of a loving God.

Faith requires a response. We come to break bread in the hope that we will be able to do so with hearts burning. The homily then must come from the scriptures and be delivered to the community in such a way that we will be able to worship God in spirit and truth, and then go forth to love and serve the Lord. The homily is not so much *on* the scriptures as *from* and *through* them. The homily must be faithful to the Scriptures for it to be the living Word of God, it must also be faithful to those to whom it is addressed.

There is no one form for the homily. Its function is to enable people to lift up their hearts, to praise and thank the Lord for his presence in their lives. We must not forget that the proclamation of the Word of God is the responsibility of the entire Christian community by virtue of the sacrament of baptism. St. Francis of Assisi often said that we are to preach the Gospel always, and when necessary use words.

Taken in part from
The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Document:
Fulfilled in Your Hearing, The Homily in the Sunday Assembly

Reflections:

Why do we say that "liturgical preaching" includes not only the presider, but also the Word drawn from the scriptures and the persons gathered in the assembly?

How do you understand this sentence: "The homily is not so much on the scriptures as from and through them."?

Formal preaching, using words, is a central element of our liturgical celebration. What do you think of the reminder that all of us, as baptized Christians, are to "preach the gospel always and, when necessary, use words"?

The Creed

Some of the most significant changes to the assembly's responses in the Order of Mass are found in the Profession of Faith (the Nicene Creed). Changes to this text fall into two categories: 1) a more faithful translation of the original Latin text and 2) the preservation of expressions of faith which contain Catholic doctrine. The first change is the translation of *Credo* as "I" instead of "We" in the opening phrase in order to maintain the person and number indicated in the original Latin text. The second change concerns the translation of particular theological terminologies used to express our faith.

The Nicene Creed was formulated at the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea (AD 325) to combat the heresy of Arianism, and it was expanded at the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople (AD 381) to balance its coverage of the Trinity by including the Holy Spirit. Arianism was the teaching of Arius, a priest in the Alexandrian church, that denied the divinity of Christ, that Jesus was not the eternal Son of God and was not equal to the Father. This heresy caused the council fathers to formulate a creed that identified the basic truths that are to be held by all members of the Church.

This creed is an expression for each member to state these truths. Each individual declares: "I believe . . ." then, together, all who

professed their beliefs in the same truths, constitute the Church. It is one Church, "holy catholic and apostolic," that celebrates together joined in the same profession of truths. This change from "We believe . . ." to "I believe . . ." will again ask each of us to restate our personal beliefs before we join with one another to celebrate the *Liturgy of the Eucharist*.

The second category of change concerns the choice of translation for a few of the Latin terms. This is in keeping with *Liturgiam Authenticam*, which states: "Certain expressions that belong to the heritage of the whole or of a great part of the ancient Church, as well as others that have become part of the general human patrimony, are to be respected by a translation that is as literal as possible" (no. 56). This change effects the translation of the Latin theological terms: *unigenitus*, *consubstantialis*, and *incarnatus*. The preservation of the historical understanding of these theological terms is best preserved, in the translation to English with the following: "Only Begotten," "consubstantial," and "incarnate."

The word *begotten* was not included in the version we use currently. It's not new to the Creed, it was not included in the original translation, and it needs to be expressed in our belief statement. *Consubstantial* replaces *one in being* which is a better theological expression and a term used by the Church to express that Jesus was truly God and that there is no difference - the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are eternally one and the same. The word *incarnate* expresses the fact that Jesus took on human flesh at conception and not at his birth. Again a more correct theological statement. There is another change that makes our statement of faith more precise: *seen and unseen* becomes *visible and invisible*. Many physical things may remain unseen to us but they physically exist. While by faith we believe in angels, pure spirits that we cannot physically see, they do exist.

By reciting the *Creed* we make a personal statement of our core beliefs. We cannot speak for those around us but only for ourselves. When we are sure that each of us share the same beliefs, we know that we are one - the body of Christ. This is the faith of the Church the faith we declared at our baptism. It is the faith that has been handed on from father to son, from mother to daughter, from generation to generation. These few new words will encourage us take a new look at what we individually declare to be our faith. These upcoming changes to our Creed should cause us to seek a new understanding of the faith we declare.

Reflections

In the "Pledge of Allegiance," we Americans stand together and say, "I pledge allegiance to the flag . . ." Each of us makes our own promise of loyalty, but we say it in union with each other. How is that an analogy to what we will do in the creed with the changes from "We believe . . ." to "I believe . . ."?

In our families and circles of friends, we know people who practice various professions. Each professional field requires us to learn the particular and specific "professional language" of that field, e.g. the languages of law, medicine, cuisine, education, etc. Our "profession of faith" requires us to learn the language of faith. How do I feel about some of the "new" words in the Creed?

General Intercessions

The "General Intercessions" are often called the "Prayer of the Faithful." Catechumens are dismissed from the assembly before the Creed and the General Intercessions. Having prayed the Creed, the assembly has assured one another that they are the gathered faithful, gathered to celebrate the Eucharist as one body. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, says, "In the

Prayer of the Faithful, the people respond in a certain way to the word of God which they have welcomed in faith and, exercising the office of their baptismal priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all". Only the baptized can genuinely pray the Prayer of the Faithful, and it is their right and responsibility to offer these prayers.

There are four basic things for which we pray, and these are outlined in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*: 1) the needs of the Church; 2) public authorities and the salvation of the whole world; 3) those burdened by any kind of difficulty; 4) the local community. We should always pray for these needs in one form or another. We should continually pray for vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, and religious life. Our intercessions should reflect what's going on in our local and global communities. It is our responsibility and duty as baptized people to pray for these very needs and concerns.

The form of these prayers needs to be petitionary – asking God, not thanking God. All the prayers in the liturgy are meant to be poetic. That is, the words need to stir our hearts, engage our imagination, and cause us to desire the very thing we think is impossible or unimaginable – the reign of God on earth. Jesus used poetry to describe this reign: "The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field..." (Mt 13:24), or "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed..." (Mt 13:21). Jesus used these metaphors and images to move people's hearts (because moving a person's heart is the first step toward conversion). The images, phrases, and moods from the scriptures of the day (or the liturgical season) could be used to inspire the wording of our intercessions.

"General" does not mean "generic." The "pre-packaged" petitions found in intercession books, homily services, or liturgical calendars should not be used word for word, but only as

examples. Our prayers must be capable of being owned and assented to by the whole assembly. The assembly must be able to fully, consciously, and actively want to pray for the petitions. If they cannot honestly do this, it cannot genuinely be their petition. It might be a portion of the assembly's or it might be one person's petition, but it cannot be claimed by everyone, thus it cannot be the "Prayer of the Faithful."

Our petitions should have rhythm and meter, flow and gracefulness. Shorter sentences and phrases have a movement and pace that makes the prayer almost like breathing, impelling us to reply: "Lord, hear our prayer." Longer sentences also have the tendency to become "preachy," narrowing the "generalness" of the intercession and the ability of the whole assembly to assent to it. The structure of the intercessions should be consistent among all the petitions.

The deacon is the primary reader of the petitions. If there is no deacon, the lector or cantor may read them. Singing prayer well is usually preferred to simply speaking a prayer. Many parishes already use a seasonal sung response for the intercessions. Consider having the deacon or cantor chant the petitions as well.

Reflections:

What aspect of our baptism makes our participation in the "Prayers of the Faithful" both our right and our responsibility?

What are the four basic petitions in the "Prayers of the Faithful"?

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Now We Are Prepared to Celebrate the Eucharist

A lot has happened since the alarm rang early Sunday Morning. We began the day, realizing that this is not like the other days of the week. It is a special day that requires our special preparation. We do the normal things we do every morning as we prepare to leave our homes and go out into the world to work, to shop, to attend school.

But today is Sunday, that first day of the week when we gather with others who have awakened with that same special need to gather and celebrate. We began our Sunday with our normal preparation and we added a special preparation for Sunday – we read the scripture readings for the day and looked at a commentary or two to help us begin to understand the message. We reflected upon them and upon the past week looking at both the good and the not so good things we did during the week. We also tried to remember all the special intentions for which our friends and family have asked us to pray.

After arriving at the parish church, we were greeted by others who arrived earlier and we began to greet others as they arrived. After making our way to a pew, we continued our reflections and prayers. As the music began to play, we stood and joined our voices with those around us. We were greeted with a special liturgical greeting: “The Lord be with you.” A greeting unlike “hello.” This greeting meant that there is something very special, something *holy*, will happen. After being asked to remember our failings or hearing the praises for our Lord and asking for his mercy, we are asked to pray - to pull together our thoughts and reflections of the morning and offer them as those around us are doing the same. Our presider then gathers all our prayers into one prayer.

We are seated and we listen to the scriptures proclaimed, the same passages we read during our morning preparation. We stand for the Gospel and reflect on the homily that breaks open the Word. We begin to see our own story in the scriptures we hear.

Those catechumens seeking to become members of the community were dismissed and we stood together and individually professed the same faith. As a single body we offer our prayers for the needs of the Church, public authorities and the salvation of the whole world, those burdened by any kind of difficulty, the local community and any other special need -- like an increase in vocations.

Through this process, we began as individuals, each making our way to the parish Sunday celebration. We experienced our greeting of those who also came as individuals, we sang together, made our gestures together (standing and seating), we listened to the scriptures and to the homily, we declared our same faith, and prayed together as a single body for the needs of the community gathered and throughout the world. This process has moved us from individuals who came to the same place to a single body that moves and prays as one. It is this single body who is now ready to celebrate the Eucharist.

This process must happen each time we gather. During our time away from one another our closeness lessens and we again must be drawn back together into the one body that celebrates the Eucharist.

Reflections:

What is the process by which we move from a gathering of individual persons to being united in faith as the one body of Christ?

Why is this process of becoming one Body of Christ so important to our worship?

The Celebration of the Eucharist

We put a lot of personal effort into our individual preparation for the Sunday Liturgy. Through this process, we began as individuals, each making our way to the parish Sunday celebration. We experienced our greeting of those who also came as individuals, we sang together, made our gestures together (standing and seating), we listened to the scriptures and to the homily, we declared our same faith, and prayed together as a single body for the needs of the community gathered and throughout the world. This process has moved us from individuals who came to the same place to a single body that moves and prays as one.

Now that we are about to celebrate the Eucharist, where the priest says most of the prayers and makes most of the gestures, while we are mostly silent kneeling or seated. It would be easy to think that our role is not as important as that of the presiding priest. However, Christ's Paschal mystery celebrated in the Eucharist has been entrusted to his beloved spouse, the Church. And we, with the presider, are the Church.

This mystery is not easily understood. After all, the Eucharist is the summit of our faith, our greatest expression lived in our celebration which we do in loving obedience in remembrance of him. Even though we have become one body that moves and prays together, we cannot give up our actualized participation, that is, we must continue to accept and try to understand the mystery we are celebrating where bread and wine is taken, blessed, broken and given.

The next several articles will take a look at the many elements that make up the portion of the Mass called: *The Liturgy of the Eucharist*. This part of the Mass begins with the preparation of the altar and gifts, where we collect the gifts and present our offerings. There are, of course, prayers over these offerings along with some little mysteries and a concluding prayer.

The *Eucharistic Prayer* begins with a *preface*. The *preface* starts with a dialogue which is followed with a unique prayer for the particular Sunday and the preface ends with the "Holy, Holy, Holy" which we should always sing. The Eucharistic prayer follows with several elements that appear differently depending of the Eucharistic prayer used. These elements of *thanksgiving, acclamation, epiclesis, institution narrative and consecration, anamnesis, offering, intercession, and final doxology* are where we must really focus as we celebrate the Eucharist.

The Communion Rite: "The Lord's Prayer," the "Sign of Peace," the "Fraction Rite," reception of Communion, and the "Prayer after Communion" complete *The Liturgy of the Eucharist*.

Throughout *The Liturgy of the Eucharist* we will not only express our faith in spoken and silent prayer but in gestures that include standing, greeting, sitting, kneeling, processing, bowing, taking,

eating, and drinking. Therefore, our knowledge of what we are doing is monumentally important in order to be fully active in our celebration, conscious of our actions and of those of the presider, and to participate with our best understanding in what is beyond all understanding.

Reflections:

The Liturgy of the Eucharist has two main parts: The Eucharistic prayer and the Communion Rite. Each of these 2 parts has several components. List those components (below) in the right order under the proper headings of "Eucharistic Prayer" and "Communion Rite".

Offering
Fraction Rite
Anamnesis
The Lord's Prayer
Institution Narrative and Consecration
Sign of Peace
Thanksgiving
Intercession
Epiclesis
Acclamation
Communion
Final Doxology
Prayer after Communion

How aware am I of the many parts of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the flow of their movement? How can I be more aware, and take part more actively?

The Preparation of the Gifts

There are many things happening at this point of the Mass that make it obvious that there is a transition from our gradual coming together to becoming one body that prays and worships our triune God. It is at this point that the candles at the altar are lit, if they had not been lit before Mass began. The deacon(s) and servers place items on the altar: the corporal - the white cloth upon the gifts will be placed, the *Sacramentary* - open to the prayers for today's Mass, the chalice - and other communion cups to hold the wine that will become the *precious blood* of our Lord, and purificators that will be used to wipe the rim of the chalice and communion cups between communicants.

While this is taking place, ushers are passing collection baskets to hold our financial offerings that will not only maintain the *house for the Church* where we gather but will support our collective work to feed and cloth the poor, give aid to the disadvantaged, and to evangelize - "making disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). Our financial offering is only a portion of our true offering that we bring to the celebration of the Eucharist; we bring the good deeds of the week which we did in Christ's name, all our failings, and all our hopes are all brought forth and with the bread and wine are placed on the altar and offered to God. We offer our very selves. We offer our "bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, [our] spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1).

The prayer over these offerings is said inaudibly when a song is sung during the preparation of the gifts. Through these prayers: "Blessed are you Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer which earth has given and

human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life” and the second: “Blessed are you Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink,” we see Christ begin his action of leading our prayer. Into his hands we have placed our gifts which will be offered to the Father and be transformed for us.

There are three little mysteries that are part of the preparation of the gifts: water mixed with wine, incensing the gifts, and the washing of presider’s hands. The deacon or priest pours a little water into the wine in the chalice while saying a short prayer. The words themselves speak to the mystery: “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.” When incense is used, the gifts are first incensed marking them as holy - not just the bread and wine but our other offerings that are placed with them on the altar. Next the altar itself is incensed, then the presider, and finally the assembly - all are marked as holy. They are marked as holy, for we are about to participate in the mystery that will follow as we pray the Eucharistic prayer. The washing of the hands is the third little mystery that takes place. As the presider’s hands are washed, we are to also ask that our iniquities be washed away and that we will be cleansed of our sins. The hands of the priest are now set to a new purpose; Christ will make the hands of the priests his own hands, for he is the one high priest that will take the gifts and transform them and offer them to the Father.

The concluding prayer over the gifts begins by the presider asking us to pray that his sacrifice (Christ’s sacrifice) and ours may be acceptable to God. We rise to our feet and respond asking that the sacrifice we offer through Christ’s hands be accepted by the Father.

Reflections:

What are some of the ministries of the Church that are made possible by our financial offerings?

Consider the prayer over the water and wine: "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." What does this say to you as a baptized member of the Church about your relationship with Christ?

The Preface Dialogue

The *Eucharistic Prayer* begins with a *preface*. We start with a dialogue which is followed with a unique prayer for the particular Sunday and the preface ends with the "Holy, Holy, Holy" which should always be sung. The dialogue is always the same, three statements and three replies. This dialogue is key to the entire *Eucharistic Prayer*. This dialogue asked us to place ourselves beyond the present, beyond the here and now, to place ourselves in the presence of the angels and saints where we will sing with them.

The first of the three statements we have heard twice before, at the greeting at the beginning of Mass and before the reading of the Sunday Gospel passage. Each time our response is: "and with your spirit." At the greeting, we addressed this response to the presider remembering that it is the presence of the Holy Spirit who empowers the presider to lead us in our worship. At the Gospel, we gave the same response knowing that the words we hear are the words of Christ himself. This third experience of the same statement and our response is a reminder that we, with the presider, are about to offer the Church's greatest prayer. We need divine help to accomplish this prayer and the presider too

needs our prayers and the same divine help to fulfill his central and unique role in this prayer. His focus is on the gestures, the way he handles the gifts, and pronounces the words the power of which it is impossible entirely to grasp. It is only through Christ that the Church can address itself to the Father, thus the presider, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is *persona Christi*.

With the second statement the presider is already and entirely within his role as *persona Christi* at the head of the community - his body. With a voice of authority, excitement, and love, we are commanded to "Lift up your hearts." The Latin, *sursum corda*, literally means "Hearts on high!" We are being commanded to place ourselves in the presence of the heavenly liturgy (see Rev. 4). Our response: "We lift them up to the Lord" is our confirmation in compliance to the command. We are obeying the apostle's injunction when he said, "since you have been raised up in company with Christ, set your heart on what pertains to higher realms where Christ is seated at God's right hand. Be intent on things above rather than on things of earth. After all, you have died! Your life is hidden now with Christ in God. When Christ our life appears, then you shall appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:1-3).

The third statement in this dialogue announces the purpose of our presence at this heavenly liturgy; "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God." Our assent to this statement is that it is right and just. Could there be any other response on our part? We came to worship God, giving our thanks and acknowledging the many powerful and mighty deeds performed for our salvation. It is now that Christ himself (the assembly with Christ the head) thanks his Father for his Resurrection, a thanksgiving which includes his joy that we can be made members of his risen body. And for this wondrous gift we also thank the Father together with him - it is fitting and right to do so.

This preface dialogue “sets the stage” for the entire *Eucharistic Prayer*. It precedes every *Eucharistic Prayer*, every Sunday. We cannot take these three statements and our responses lightly. These statements are at the heart of our worship.

Reflection:

How do you understand this statement: The three statements and three replies of the dialogue “are at the heart of our worship” and comprise the “key to the entire Eucharistic prayer.

What does it mean, to say that the priest acts *in persona Christi*?

By consciously entering into this dialogue, what are we saying about our own presence and purpose in the liturgy, i.e. Why are we here?

The Preface Prayer and the “Holy, Holy, Holy”

The “Preface Dialogue” has taken the worshipping community, now the single body of Christ that prays and worships as one, and has commanded their presence at the celestial liturgy to pray and sing with the angels and saints before the throne of the God (Rev. 4). This dialogue has set the stage for the entire *Eucharistic Prayer*. It begins every *Eucharistic Prayer*, every Sunday. These statements are at the heart of our worship.

Before we get to the *Eucharistic Prayer*, the preface has two other elements we need to study. We have now ascended beyond the present and the here and now, we are in the company of the angels and the saints. The presider directs all of his attention to the One to whom the thanksgiving prayer is addressed - to God the Father, and every gesture the presider and community perform is in His presence. We must follow with every word,

keeping our minds and *hearts on high* throughout the entire Eucharistic prayer. The voice of the presider is the voice of the entire assembly, the priest, the one and only High Priest - Jesus Christ.

The preface prayer, is not a preamble or introduction to the Eucharistic prayer. The Latin for "preface" *prae-fari* means "to proclaim in the presence of." This prayer and the entire Eucharistic prayer is said *in the presence of*, before God the Father. Therefore, keeping our *hearts on high* is essential as we pray the Eucharistic prayer with the one voice of our presider.

Each preface prayer includes a succinct expression of what Christ has done for us, phrased to express the particularity of the feast or season. This follows a biblical way of giving thanks by the profound recognition of what God has actually done in what we are thanking Him for. This form of thanks not only acknowledges our thankfulness but it also confesses our presence before God through our praise of what He has done for us. It is *Therefore* that we present our desire and our request of God that our own voices might blend now with the voices of all the angels and saints in singing God's praises. We do this by singing the song of the angels from the visions recorded in the Book of Isaiah and in the Book of Revelations.

In Isaiah, Chapter 6, we have a vision of the heavenly liturgy with the angels singing one to the other. As if one would sing, "Holy" and another would reply, "Holy, holy." Our response could only be, "Holy, holy, holy." And with the angels we sing, "Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory." The remainder of our song comes for the Book of Revelations, Chapter 4. In Revelations, there is another vision of the heavenly liturgy, again with the angels continually singing before the throne of God; "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest."

Throughout the preface we have been standing. We transformed ourselves to be in the presence of the angels and the saints giving praise to almighty God. We will now fall onto our knees as we continue to worship and as a single body with a single voice and continue to pray our Eucharistic prayer. Here, beyond all understanding, the bread and wine we offer are transformed into Christ's body and blood, becoming our spiritual food that sustains us on our journey. A journey that will lead us to that heavenly liturgy where we too will continue to sing with the angels before the throne of God.

Reflections:

Consider this statement: "The voice of the presider is the voice of the entire assembly, the priest, the one and only high Priest – Jesus Christ." What does this mean to you, as a baptized member of the assembly? What is your role?

Part of the "Holy, holy, holy" is the line, "heaven and earth are full of your glory." What is it like for you, to become aware that our prayer is joined "with all the angels and heavenly hosts"?

What is the symbolism of moving from standing to kneeling?

The Eucharistic Prayer - Part 1

The celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist places us closer to the heavenly liturgy than any other activity (short of dying). Through the preface, although physically remaining within our parish worship space, we have in our hearts and our minds placed ourselves in the presence of God at the heavenly liturgy. We even sang with the angels and now with the single voice of our mystical body we are lead in prayer before God almighty.

While there are several Eucharistic Prayers available, *Eucharistic Prayer I* is the oldest and for many centuries was the only Eucharistic prayer. It is called the *Roman Canon* of the Mass. This prayer begins right where we placed ourselves through the preface - at the foot of the heavenly throne of God. We directly address God the Father, asking that He accept our humble prayers and the gifts we offer. Not just the gift of bread (food that is the necessity of life) and the gift of wine (the drink that celebrates life) but the individual gifts we each offer. We include within our celebrations a "Commemoration of the Living." In Psalm 115 (also Ps 21, 49, 55, 60, 64, and 65) we pledge that "I will pray my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people."

Therefore, we do not offer these gifts as individuals or as a single community but with and for the entire Catholic Church with the pope, our bishops, and all who hold and profess the apostolic faith we celebrate. We also include Mary, Joseph, Peter and Paul, Andrew, and all the saints and martyrs.

The *epiclesis* is a calling upon the action of the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit will come among our offerings to make them holy. We ask that God will be pleased with our gifts, to bless, acknowledge, and approve our offerings and make them the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we ask that our gifts are made spiritual and acceptable for us. (see Romans 12:1). These are the gifts we offered and will now receive as we process each in turn to accept during communion - the Body and Blood of our Lord and to accept the gifts we each offered are given back to us, now spiritually changed and acceptable for us to carry.

Through the *institution narrative and consecration*, "by means of words and actions of Christ, the Sacrifice is carried out which Christ himself instituted at the Last Supper, when he offered his Body and Blood under the species of bread and wine, gave them to his Apostles to eat and drink, and left them the command to

perpetuate this same mystery” (GIRM 79d). We should remember that within our understanding of time (this moment vs another moment) the consecration should not be understood as happening at this very moment within our context of time. Instead, we should be thinking within the heavenly liturgy where the entire celebration is but a single moment.

We are not observers during this prayer. We are part of a mystical body celebrating at the foot of God’s throne. We have but one voice, that of Christ speaking through our presider who is *in persona christi*. We have not been passive, but active through this prayer. We cannot truly understand all that is happening, it is our faith that allows us to be a part of this celebration, part of this celebrating community. A faith that ignites our desire to return from one week to the next.

Reflections

What do we believe enables us to say that “. . .we do not offer these gifts as individuals or as a single community, but with and for the entire Catholic Church . . .”?

The Hebrew word for “remember” refers not just to a mental recall of the past, but to an actual “making present now” of an event. How does this influence our Catholic belief about the consecration of the bread and wine at Mass?

How do you experience being more than an observer at Mass?
How are you an active participant in the Eucharistic prayer?

The Eucharistic Prayer - Part 2

We ended *part 1* with a reminder that we may be physically celebrating within the worship space in our own parish church, but in our hearts and minds are present at the heavenly liturgy where time does not exist. The *words of institution* were just said and we heard Jesus say to “do this in memory of me.” Now our presider declares; “The Mystery of Faith!” This is an exclamation of awe and wonder and our response is an expression of the faith that acts within our lives. We express this with one of three acclamations: “We proclaim your death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again;” or “When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim you death, O Lord, until you come again;” or “Save us, Savior of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.” Each of these expresses our faith through personal action.

The Eucharistic prayer continues with the *anamnesis*, a Greek word that means “a memorial.” Again, we express Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension into heaven – expressing in prayer our response to the request to “do this in memory of me.” As part of this *anamnesis*, the presider humbly bows as we continue to offer (*the offering*) our gifts to the Father, seeking acceptance as the gifts of Abel, Abraham, and Melchizedek were accepted. We ask that these gifts be taken by an angel to the heavenly altar in sight of all the angels and saints at the heavenly liturgy and that they “may be filled with every grace and heavenly blessing.”

We should remember that what we ask in the presence of almighty God, within the heavenly liturgy, is asked in communion with the whole Church across the world and across the centuries (in the past, now, and in the future). Therefore, we petition God (*the intercessions*) to make us – the whole Church – more perfectly the body of Christ. We do this as we mention Mary, the

Mother of God, Peter and Paul, and the other apostles, martyrs and all the saints present among us at the heavenly liturgy.

The Eucharistic prayer concludes with the *final doxology*. A doxology is a statement of glory and praise, something we have continually done from the *preface dialogue* and throughout the Eucharistic prayer. At this *final doxology*, the gifts are lifted up: the bread and wine we brought – now transformed into the body and blood of Christ in the form of his sacrifice which will never pass away, lifting them up to God the Father as the “perfect offering made to the glory of His name.” The Church is doing what Christ did and forever does; she offers his one body (to which we are all joined with these gifts being lifted) to the Father for the glory of His name and for the salvation of the world.

The “Amen” that follows is often called the “Great Amen,” for it is the *amen* that is expressed by the whole Church, and *amen* that echos around the world throughout the centuries and throughout all the halls of the heavenly kingdom. It is an *amen* that never ends. It is the Church, all of us, from our own place and time expressing our *Amen* with the eternal *Amen!*

We now have a simple view of what happens within our celebration as we pray the Eucharistic prayer. No one will ever fully understand all that happens, for what happens is beyond all understanding. It is only through faith that we participate in this wonderful and grace-filled prayer.

Reflections

In response to the Priest’s exclamation, “The mystery of faith!”, we will no longer use the proclamation: “Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.” Examine the three new acclamations in the article. How are they different from the familiar one above? (*Think: what are we doing at this point?*)

How can we say that what we do at Sunday Mass in our parish is done “in communion with the whole Church around the world and across the centuries (past, present, future)”?

Think about the statement, “The Church is doing what Christ did and forever does.” What does this mean to you?

Liturgy of the Eucharist – Communion

The Communion Rites – The Lord’s Prayer

The Eucharistic prayer ends with our voice joining with the eternal *Amen*. No longer are we kneeling. We now find ourselves standing around Christ’s altar. However, our minds and hearts are not dismissed from the presence of the heavenly liturgy. Through the voice of our presider, Christ himself commands us to pray to God the Father using his special prayer.

Within the celebration of the Mass, the Lord’s prayer takes on a special significance that we do not experience when prayed at other times. During this point in the celebration of the Mass we find ourselves physically standing in the present world while our minds and hearts are at the heavenly liturgy. We are between the ever present and the eternal future. It is with this understanding that we are commanded to pray the words Jesus gave us.

The first half of the prayer places our attention on God the Father. Where else would our attention be when we are standing in his presence? We are stating what is going on within our minds and hearts; “Our Father who art in heaven.” In a form of praise, thanksgiving, and petition we continue to pray; “thy, thy, thy.” First praising God’s name. Secondly, giving thanks for the offer of eternal life. And finally, petitioning that what we experience at the heavenly liturgy will be experienced within our present lives.

The words of our Lord’s prayer now turn our attention to the present. We now pray for “us, us, and us.” We are standing with the entire Church – now, in the past and in the future. The “us” is everyone. We pray that we will receive what we need for life – our daily bread. We pray for forgiveness. However, this forgiveness is limited by our own forgiveness of others. And we

pray for the grace to avoid being tempted in our present lives as continue to seek the heavenly kingdom.

The words of this last petition are echoed as the presider continues; "Deliver us, Lord, from every evil . . . keep us free from sin and protect us from all anxiety . . ." Then, using the words of scripture; "as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13), the presider identifies our place within the middle ground: on the one hand, the evils of this world; on the other, the coming of Christ from the future. It is from this middle ground, where in hope we see the future coming of our Savior that we conclude our dialogue with God the Father by saying, "For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and for ever."

The Lord's prayer is the beginning of the Communion Rites. It is the bridge between the Eucharistic prayer, where we physically stand within our own worship space while our minds and hearts are present at the heavenly liturgy and the rites that continue through the end of our celebration.

Reflections

How is the Lord's prayer, when prayed during Mass, a "bridge"?

In the Creed each of us states, "I believe," in the Lord's prayer, we pray together, "Our Father," How has the Eucharistic prayer transformed us?

We usually think of the Lord's prayer as a prayer of praise, thanksgiving, and petition. How do you experience it as also being a prayer of trust and hope?

Communion

The Lord's prayer began the Communion Rites. It forms a bridge between the Eucharistic prayer, where we physically stand around the altar within our own worship space while our minds and hearts are present at the heavenly liturgy, and the rites that continue through the end of our celebration. We have just asked for forgiveness, a forgiveness that is limited by our forgiveness of others. Now we are asked to share a "sign of peace" with those around us – a ritual action that expresses our forgiveness of others and our being forgiven by all who we have offended – this is not a greeting but an expression of our love for one another. We are now ready to "receive our daily bread."

The "breaking of the bread" is an ancient name for what Christians called the Mass. It is found in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:46). St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians (10:16-17) asked: "Is not the bread we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, many though we are, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf." We no longer use a single loaf of bread, for every particle is truly the body of Christ. The small individual hosts eliminate the small particles that we must be careful not to drop. (Thus the purpose of the Corporal on the altar – the white cloth that lies beneath the chalice and ciboria). The *fraction rite*, the separation of the consecrated host into multiple ciboria for distribution, is our ritual action of the "breaking of the bread." It is Christ's precious body being prepared for each of us to "receive our daily bread." While this action takes place we ask for Christ's mercy and peace while singing what is sung by the angels (Revelation 5:11-12).

Our presider now holds up the broken bread and wine commanding us to look upon this wonder; "Behold the Lamb of God! Behold him who takes away the sins of the world! Happy

are those who are called to his supper!" We use the same response of the centurion from Matthew (8:8); "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed." We now stand, each in turn, in the same place where we handed over to Christ the bread and wine and our very lives. In reverence, we bow to receive Christ's body and blood as well as our own offerings now blessed and given again for us to carry through the days to follow. As we are presented this mystery, we respond with our resounding "Amen!" acknowledging our belief in all that has transpired from the time the alarm sounded early Sunday morning until this moment.

As we return to our pews, Christ is not being separated into all who have received; instead we have been joined together in the one body of Christ never to be separated. Silence follows after the excess consecrated hosts are placed in the tabernacle for those who could not be with us and for those who are dying. The vessels are purified and placed on the credence table. This period of silence gives us time to reflect on the great mystery of our faith we have just encountered.

The Communion rites conclude when the presider asked, "Let us pray." We again stand as all our thoughts and private prayers are put into a single prayer that the sacrament we experienced will bear fruit in each of us and that we remain faithful to all that we have received. The "amen" that we give is to this prayer and to all that we shared throughout our Sunday celebration.

Reflections

We read that the "sign of peace" is "not a greeting but an expression of our love for one another." How does this effect you sharing in the sign of peace?

What is the symbolism of the fraction rite?

In our post-communion reflection, what does it mean to you that “Christ is not being separated [in the small hosts and individual reception]” but that “we have been joined together in the one body of Christ”?

The Concluding Rites

Blessing and Dismissal

Between the Liturgy of the Eucharist, which ended with the *Prayer after Communion*, and the Concluding Rites is the opportunity for brief announcements. These announcements should be necessary and the tone and character of the announcements should not negate our experience at the heavenly liturgy.

The Mass ends as it began, with the Sign of the Cross. This final blessing takes several different forms. The simple form is: "May almighty God bless you . . ." There is another form that includes a *Prayer over the People*. It includes a prayer addressed to God the Father asking for special graces, help, or protection for all those present. There is another more *Solemn Blessing* which takes on a threefold structure of petitions for which we respond to each petition with our "amen." Both the *Solemn Blessing* and the *Prayer over the People* conclude with the simple blessing and our sign of the cross.

The Concluding Rites are about our sharing our very bodies in the mystery of the cross, and this sharing reveals to us the mystery of the Trinity. At the beginning of our celebration we began with the sign of the cross and the threefold name of God. This action was our door of entry into the mystery we just celebrated. The same sign of the cross and the threefold name of God is our blessing and our command that concludes our celebration. The Latin dismissal that concludes our celebration is: *Ite missa est*. From the word *missa*, we derive our identity for our celebration that we call the "Mass." *Missa* is a word that means *mission*. Therefore, our dismissal is a command to go back to our everyday lives and to live the mission of Christ we received at Baptism and

continue to celebrate Sunday after Sunday. When we celebrate the Mass, we celebrate our mission.

The dismissal in the new translation states our mission more clearly. The first of the four dismissal options just says; "Go forth, the Mass is ended." We are dismissed with an implied understanding that we have a mission to perform. The second dismissal option is more specific, expressing what we are expected to do; "Go and announce the gospel of the Lord." This dismissal requires our attention during our celebration, especially during the Liturgy of the Word when the gospel is read and with the homily that breaks open that word for us. The third dismissal option is like the second but in a broader way; "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life." This dismissal asks that everything we do in life is to glorify the Lord. The fourth dismissal option is simply "Go in peace." The "peace" we are to "go in" is that which we continually receive from Christ and experience through our celebration with one another.

Having experienced all that has been described over these past 22 articles (including the current one) we cannot be the same person who entered into the celebration as we made the sign of the cross over our body. As we leave our celebration, again making the sign of the cross and receiving our special blessing we are changed. We came as individuals, we prayed together, and Christ spoke to us through sacred scripture and the homily. We became a single body, the mystical body of Christ. In our minds and in our hearts we stood before the throne of God at the heavenly liturgy and we were nourished by Christ's body and blood at his altar. We cannot be the same as we were before we began the celebration. We are changed, and next Sunday we will be changed again.

Reflections

The word, "Mass," is derived from the Latin term for "mission." What does this say to you, about the relationship between worship and daily life?

What is the significance of praying the Sign of the Cross at both the beginning and the end of the Mass?

"We cannot be the same as we were before we began the celebration. We are changed, and next Sunday we will be changed again." What do you think of this statement? What is your experience of being "changed" by the Eucharistic Liturgy?

Concluding Remarks and Suggested Reading

The primary source for these articles comes from *What Happens at Mass*, a book by Jeremy Driscoll, OSB, available through Liturgical Training Publications. For those who would like to go deeper into what happens at Mass, this book by Fr. Jeremy's would be of great benefit.

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Another source on the theological concept of a *celestial liturgy* can be found in the work of Cyprian Vagaggini (1909 - 1999); *Theological Dimensions on the Liturgy*. This is a much older and more academic publication translated from its original Italian.

Father Cyprian Vagaggini, Benedictine Camaldolese monk, theologian, and liturgical scholar. For 70 years he was a professed monk and for 64 years a priest. He was one of the principal movers of renewal within the Roman Catholic Church. Nominated by Pope John XXIII as *peritus* ("expert") for the Second Vatican Council, he helped draft the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. He also later made

significant contributions to the new rites of the Mass and of the other sacraments.

While many of the scripture reference were quoted, there were several that were only noted. In looking up these references, it should be noted that the scripture quotes found in the liturgical text are not taken from any specific English translation of the bible. The scriptures used in our liturgy are taken from a special Latin translation of the *Vulgate*.