

Preparing the Gifts and our Hearts

The *Liturgy of the Eucharist* follows immediately after the Liturgy of the Word. It begins with its own introductory rite whose purpose is to prepare the Altar / Table and gifts, as well as the faithful.

"At the beginning of the liturgy of the Eucharist the gifts, which will become Christ's Body and Blood, are brought to the altar. First the altar, *the Lord's table*, which is the center of the whole liturgy of the Eucharist, is prepared: ... It is praiseworthy for the faithful to present the bread and wine," (GIRM 73)

The elements needed to make the altar ready are – the corporal, chalice, purificator, the Roman Missal, gifts of bread and wine.

It is good for us to recall that, when a church is dedicated, the Altar is consecrated with an abundance of Sacred Chrism, the same oil used to confirm Christians. Since the Altar has been anointed, it symbolizes Christ, "the Anointed One."

The *General Instruction* sets forth the following norms regarding the Altar / Table:

The Altar should be approachable from every side, not fixed against a wall. (GIRM 299)

Candles (two are required) should be placed on or next to it. (GIRM 117, 307)

Also on, or close to the Altar / Table, there is to be a cross with a figure of Christ crucified (It may also be carried in the Entrance Procession. GIRM 117, 308).

Finally, the new directions also require the top Altar cloth to be white.

If the Book of Gospels is placed on the Altar at the conclusion of the entrance procession, some would say that the cloth to be used at the Liturgy of the Eucharist should *not* be laid on the Altar until the Preparation Rite.

The Preparation of the Gifts

The offering actually occurs during the Eucharistic Prayer.

"*At the Last Supper* Christ instituted the paschal sacrifice and meal. Through this meal, the sacrifice of the cross is continuously made present in the Church... (GIRM 72)

Therefore, during this rite of preparation, the Church begins to do what Christ did at the Last Supper: 'he took bread, said the blessing, broke the bread and gave it to them.' Here, in the Preparatory Rite, we "take bread and wine..."

The Presentation and Preparation of the Gifts

God has first blessed us with the gift of creation. The gifts of wheat and grapes are taken and using our creativity, they are made into bread and wine. Then, we bring those gifts we have received and labored over to present them at the Altar that they might be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. Finally, we receive them back in communion. The procession of the gifts says, in essence, "Behold the gifts God has given us!"

Ideally, the hymn sung is a processional one. The priest says the proper prayers as per the formula aloud for the assembly to join in with the appropriate response. The rite closes with the Prayer over the Offerings.

Assembly Stands at *Prayer Over the Offerings*

The GIRM instructs the assembly to stand *at the beginning* of the priest's invitation. It is appropriate to stand here, for every dialogue between presider and faithful in the liturgy, being one of mutuality and reciprocity, occurs while both stand. (GIRM 146)

This is also the time to receive money or other gifts for the poor or the Church brought by the faithful or collected in the church. (GIRM 73)

Points to Reflect upon - the Preparation Rite

This part of the Mass was formerly called *the Offertory*, was changed to signify that the offering takes place in the Eucharistic Prayer.

The "Altar" focuses our attention on the sacrificial aspect of the Mass; "Table" highlights Jesus table fellowship with sinners *then*, and points to the great and final banquet with God in heaven *now*. (GIRM 296)

The bread for celebrating the Eucharist must be made only from wheat, *recently baked*, and, according to the ancient tradition of the Latin Church, *be unleavened*. (GIRM 320)

The action of the breaking of the bread, ...the Eucharist in apostolic times, will more clearly bring out the force and importance of the sign of unity of all in the one bread and of the sign of charity, in that the one bread is distributed among brothers and sisters. (GIRM 321)

The Eucharistic Prayer - Center and Summit

"*Now the center and summit of the entire celebration begins: the Eucharistic Prayer, a prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification.* The priest invites the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord in prayer and thanksgiving..." (GIRM 78)

It is suggested that liturgical catechesis on the Eucharistic Prayer needs to be done, so as to enhance the participation in the Mass. The presence of Christ needs to be experienced by the assembly in a deeper manner.

In the Eucharistic Prayer the priest presider prays a narrative of the great deeds God has done for us, especially holding up Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. In the Eucharistic Prayer, praise and thanksgiving forms our most basic way of praying.

The *Preface*, the prayer that comes just before the *Holy, Holy, Holy*, serves that function of narrating specific deeds of God that the Church remembers and give thanks.

Eucharistic Prayer

What is the purpose of this prayer for the Church today? What is going on during this prayer? The *General Instruction* can help us all pray it better by appreciating the purposes of the prayer:

"The priest invites the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord in prayer and thanksgiving...

The prayer begins with a dialogue whose purpose is to unite the presider with the people in prayer and thanksgiving. ... he unites them with himself in the prayer which, in the name of the entire community, he addresses to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit..." (GIRM 78)

In the Eucharistic Prayer, we need to work on how we might exercise our various roles effectively, so that, we *all* experience the Eucharistic Prayer as *one* prayer prayed.

The Bishops of Vatican II understood that, as Christ unites the Church to himself to offer praise and thanksgiving to the Father, so, too, the priest unites the faithful to himself in the Eucharistic Prayer. CSL 7

Most presiders seem to race through the Eucharistic prayer. There could be several reasons: some seem to try to make up time after giving a long homily, others seem to hurry in order to avoid parishioners' criticism for Mass going too long, a lack of understanding of the Theology of the prayer itself etc.

The combination of a slow pace, with intelligent pauses, can be a start for the presider and congregation. The presider's own prayerful comprehension will also play an important role along with the attentive and receptive hearing by the People of God.

The first purpose of the Eucharistic Prayer is to "confess the great things God has done." It asks us to focus the reason for our gratitude on the *magnalia dei* more so than on the daily good things we have experienced. "...the entire congregation of the faithful should join itself with Christ in confessing the great things God has done and in offering the sacrifice..." (GIRM 78)

It also serves as a very strong invitation to the priest and congregation to create the conditions that this prayer might actually be experienced as the one prayer of the Church.

Parts of the Eucharistic Prayer as per the GIRM

The *Preface* - Thanksgiving

The *Preface* is the part of this prayer that changes from Sunday to Sunday, or from season to season. Observe that the prayer serves as the prayer of the whole Church that stands to praise of the *magnalia dei*: (GIRM 79a)

The Holy, Holy, Holy

This acclamation is based upon the song of the angels, "Holy, Holy, Holy" found in the prophet Isaiah's vision of God's throne (ch. 6). ... the "Holy" to be sung "by all the people with the priest." (GIRM 79b)

Epiclesis

There are two *Epicleses* in our Eucharistic Prayers. The first invocation of the Spirit is over the gifts. This shows that the Church relies on the power of God to transform these gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. It is not a human 'work'; we rely on God's graciousness to accomplish this for the Church. The second part of the prayer implores God's Spirit to make the Church one body.

The Institution Narrative

In fidelity to the Lord's command, "Do this in memory of me," the priest recites the institution narrative of the Last Supper.

The *Anamnesis* (Memorial)

Anamnesis is best translated as *memorial* or *remembrance*. That is, the Church, through its ritual remembering, acknowledges that it is responding to Christ's command to "do this in memory of me." "*In memory of his death and resurrection...*" (Eucharistic Prayer II) & "*Father, calling to mind the death your Son endured for our salvation, his glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven, ...*" (Eucharistic Prayer III)

The Offering

Finally, we arrive at the Offertory, the offering of "this holy and living sacrifice..." Besides the offering of the "life giving bread and saving cup," the Church summons the whole People of God to 'learn to offer ourselves', pouring ourselves outward with Christ, toward God in praise, and toward our world in compassionate service. (GIRM 79f)

The Intercessions

These intercessions we petition God for the Church, the Pope, and Bishop, for the members of the Church living and dead, but we also intercede for our final union with Christ in the communion of the saints. The Intercessions manifest the priestly nature of the prayer as the whole Church expresses its baptismal office of praying for the renewal of the Church and restoration of the whole world in Christ. (GIRM 79g)

The Doxology and Amen

The Eucharistic Prayer concludes with the doxology and Amen. Its purpose is to 'express and confirm the glorification of God in this prayer.' (GIRM 79h)

The Memorial Acclamation

This acclamation offers an opportunity for the congregation to actively participate in the Eucharistic Prayer through its acclamation.

The Communion Rite: The Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer is the first part of the Faithfull's preparation for Communion. After praising God in the Our Father, the assembled Church asks for our daily bread and for the grace of forgiveness - not only for our sins and omissions, but also for the grace to forgive one another. (GIRM 81)

The Communion Rite:

The Rite of Peace follows immediately after the Lord's Prayer. It has an additional purpose of manifesting communal reconciliation by "ecclesial communion and mutual charity."

The Rite of Peace follows, by which the Church *asks* for peace and unity for herself and for the whole human family... (GIRM 82)