

A TEACHING MASS ST. JOHN OF ROCHESTER

Read before the beginning of the procession

INTRODUCTION

When we come together for Eucharist whether daily or Sunday we come as a community of the faithful to join in an act of worship. Sunday Mass is an act of worship. We come to praise and thank God for all God has done and is doing in our lives and our world. Mass is a ritual action. We all live by ritual, doing familiar actions in the same way each time, either often such as meals or daily washing and dressing or less frequent like holiday meals. Ritual actions often express meaning deeper and more profound than what appears on the surface. More importantly ritual gives stability to our lives which is why the disturbance of our rituals shakes us so deeply.

Ritual is important to our worship it allows us to easily enter into the worship experience without needing to think about what we will say or do. Our standing, sitting, kneeling and speaking are quite familiar. Ritual gives us structure, security and familiarity as we come to God at Mass to give thanks for all that God has done for us and our world.

Additionally the Mass is an experience of mystery. Worship in the Catholic Church unlike other churches intends to do more than offer an immediate experience. The Mass strives to enable our engaging with the mystery of God. Of its very nature a mystery cannot be understood. So the Mass of its essence is not instructional. It is worship. It is worship of God. It is a ritual (set or series of familiar actions) by which we open ourselves to the presence of God. The liturgy of the Catholic Church presumes the divine presence in three places at Mass, the assembly (God's people baptized and gathered), the Word (the scripture proclaimed and broken open) and the Sacrament (the Body and Blood of Christ) made present through the prayer of the priest and people gathered at the table. Our role in the ritual is to participate through song, word and action. By doing so the familiarity of the ritual and the action of the liturgy enables us to enter into the mystery of God present to us. Experiencing God's presence comforts, challenges and enables us to go out from here and transform the world.

Let us Pray!

Read following the Opening Hymn and before the beginning of the Gathering Rite

I. THE GATHERING RITE

The gathering begins on the way and as we make our way from car to pew. The Church hopes that we will be able to take time to prepare for what we are about to do. Admittedly this is difficult, particularly for families where

just the effort of getting up, eating, dressing and getting to the car can shake one's faith. But, it may help to remind ourselves that this time can be profitably used for prayer, reflection and getting ready to give worship and praise to our God.

Opening Hymn

The Opening Hymn is meant to draw the gathered community together in a common prayer through song. It is selected with the intent of reflecting the themes that will emerge in the readings.

Sign of the Cross

We begin as we always do: In the name of the Father... . We have come to worship God and begin by naming our God a community of persons Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Greeting

Here we use 'ritual words' to say hi, welcome and bless you. Think about it: The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you. What an awesome wish or welcome that the fullness of God's grace in Father Son and Spirit be yours now and always.

Penitential Rite

We have come together to worship God. However both among ourselves and in our relationship with God all manner of stuff can be in our way. We are human and we have sinned. So that nothing would keep us from entering fully into the mystery of God's Love present to us in Eucharist we first ask forgiveness. This part of the mass has three options each of which ends with a prayer of forgiveness, 'May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins...'. We have begun. First greeted, now forgiven and freed of sin and guilt and now we let loose with praise for our God.

Glory to God

The Gloria is a hymn of praise. In the mass we are entering into the mystery of God, the mystery of God's love for us and its full expression in the mystery of Jesus death on the cross for us. "The Gloria" is an ancient expression of our awe at all God has done for us. I said previously it is a letting loose and it should be. How amazing is it that God is ready to forgive our sins and in fact does forgive them whenever we ask here at Mass or in the Sacrament of Penance. *Glory to God in the Highest and on earth Peace to people of good will*, think about what we are singing or saying.

The Opening Prayer

The traditional title of this prayer is 'the Collect.' That is helpful in understanding what is happening here. The presider her collects all the prayers of the people and gives voice to them in one prayer. The prayers are prescribed for each Sunday, Feast and Holyday. They are found in the Roman Missal (the large red book used at the altar) and many date to the earliest centuries of the church.

Read at the conclusion of the Opening Prayer and before the Readings begin

II. THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

The Lectionary

The Lectionary is the book of readings used whenever we celebrate the Mass. It is kept at the 'ambo' the place where the readings are proclaimed. In the opening procession the 'Book of the Gospels' is carried and placed on the altar. That gives special reverence and attention to the Gospels, the good news of our Lord Jesus. The presider or deacon will process with that book to the ambo for the reading of the Gospel, following the gospel reading it is enthroned in front of the ambo again as a sign of reverence for God's word.

The Lectionary was redesigned following the Vatican Council in 1970. It is in a three year cycle based on the Gospel. Year A, Matthew, B, Mark, C, Luke. The Gospel of John is read during Lent and Easter each year with another portion coming during the summer of Year B. The Old Testament readings were chosen to complement the theme of the gospel each week. The New Testament readings, most often from Paul's Letters are read continuously, eg. The Letter to the Romans is read each week until complete then another follows. The result is that this arrangement of readings allows us to hear nearly 60% of the New Testament during Sunday Mass and 4% of the Old Testament. The Lectionary in use before the Council contained less than half that amount. The arrangement of the Lectionary was so appealing that nearly every mainline Protestant Church uses the same order of readings each Sunday.

The Church hopes that at this point in the Mass the people would attentively listen to the readings proclaimed. Listening is a challenge as each of us knows. It requires effort and concentration, but at this moment it is God's Word that we listen to with attention.

The Readings

Old Testament

Psalm

New Testament

Gospel

Homily

The homily is meant to break open the Word proclaimed. It is meant to explore the themes presented by the scripture of the day and the ways these apply to our daily lives and the living of our faith.

The Profession of Faith

In the praying of the Profession of Faith the gathered community joins itself with centuries of ancestors who have spoken this affirmation of what we believe. There are many creedal statements used by the church. The two most familiar to us are the Apostles Creed an option for use on Sunday and used in praying the rosary, and the Nicene Creed. Its title comes for the

Council of Nicaea (Nicaea was a city in ancient Turkey). The council held in 325 settled disputes within the church around our basic faith. The result of the council was this creed now used in the liturgy of the Catholic Church and many Protestant churches too.

Prayer of the Faithful

These prayers gather together all the prayers of the assembly. They are lifted up just before the gifts are brought forward. They become part of the offerings the assembly makes to God as it prays the Eucharist.

Read at the conclusion of the Prayer of the Faithful and while the collection is beginning to be taken

III. THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

The Preparation of the Gifts

The altar is prepared for the Mass by placing the Corporal (large square white cloth, usually made of linen, on which the gifts will sit during the mass. Also the missal is put in place along with the gifts brought forward by the people. The liturgy is the work of the people (that is the historic root of the word ‘liturgia’). In the offertory procession the people bring forward what they provide for the sacrifice. The priest prepares the gifts and makes the offering prayer to God. During the preparation a drop of water is mixed into the chalice of wine. This joining of water with the wine symbolizes the union between Christ and the people, Jesus represented by the wine, His blood and we by this drop of water. It is important to note that the church understands the mass to be the living out of the sacrifice of the cross. The priest standing in the place of Christ and speaking in the name of the people gathered joins himself and the assembly in the action of Jesus sacrifice securing our redemption. This is the mystery of our faith. God so loved the world that He sent His only Son. The entire mass, but especially this part of the rite joins the assembly to this central moment of our redemption. Here we are meant to listen to the prayer, join our hearts and minds to not only what is being said but what is being symbolized by these words and actions. Jesus sacrifices himself for our salvation. He gives his body, indeed his very blood that we may have life here and for all eternity.

The Prayer over the Gifts

This prayer taken from the missal asks God to receive these gifts we have offered. We unite ourselves with the priest as he speaks this prayer asking God to receive us too.

The Eucharistic Prayer

The church says that now the center and summit of the entire celebration begins: namely, the Eucharistic Prayer, which is the prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. The priest begins by inviting the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord in prayer and thanksgiving. He unites the assembly to himself and together we pray as one thanking God for God’s great works on

our behalf, calling the Spirit upon the gifts and transforming them into the Body and Blood of Christ.

There are several Eucharistic Prayers which the priest may choose from at any given mass. They follow a similar pattern. They begin acknowledging God's goodness, "Lord you are Holy indeed, the fountain of all holiness..." This leads us into the consecration also called the prayers of Institution. Following the consecration the Eucharistic prayers offer petitions for the church, those in leadership the pope and bishops and all the people of God. The prayers speaks our own desire to pray for sisters and brothers gone before us to God and for all of the people of God, "those here present and all your people" (*Eucharistic Prayer IV*). The great prayer of the church ends with a "Great Amen" which is most often sung and is both the peoples acclamation and their assent to the prayer which prayed by the priest is their prayer too.

Read following the Great Amen and before the Lord's Prayer

IV. THE COMMUNION RITE

The Liturgy of the Eucharist has joined us to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. It recalls the mystery of God's love lived out in Jesus life and made present by the elements of the Eucharist in His Body and His Blood. Now we make an immediate preparation to receive Jesus in Communion first by praying as He taught us, then representing that prayer in the Exchange of Peace, and finally by our reception of communion itself.

The Lord's Prayer

Now we pray as Jesus taught us to pray

The Sign of Peace

Some suggest The Peace can be a distraction at this moment leading up to receiving communion. However, it can also be a powerful expression both of what we have just prayed in the Lord's Prayer and more fully in the Mass itself. Forgive us our trespasses we pray and we turn to those near us and offer the Peace of Christ which is made real in our hearts and our lives.

The Lamb of God and Fraction Rite

In the ancient church the community used loafs of bread perhaps something like our pita bread. The immediate preparation for communion required that the presider and ministers break the bread. They did this just as Jesus had broken the loaves on the mountainside during the great feeding of the five thousand. They also wanted to symbol the "One Bread" "the one body, Jesus body" broken and given. The Lamb of God developed as a litany the assembly would chant during the fraction rite. The first verse would be repeated as many times as needed as the bread was being broken. The chant offered a moment of prayer for the assembly preparing to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Then the community would complete the litany with "Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace."

The Communion Rite

Now the presider, the deacon and then the ministers of communion receive and go to the assembly bringing the Body and Blood of Christ. The assembly comes forward in procession. This is important. We come to the altar. We do so in procession as if on pilgrimage. We come as one body to receive the one bread and one cup. We pray in song or silence making our way forward preparing ourselves for the moment of reception. We reverence (the church recommends a profound bow) the presence of Christ in His Body and we reverence again before the Blood of Christ then receiving from the minister. Here the twin purposes of the Mass are joined. I said at the start that Mass is an act of worship. We come each week to worship God and thank God for all we have. We come to be fed by God's Word, by the assembled faithful and the Eucharist. We are fed by the presence of fellow believers and the Word spoken and broken open for us. Most importantly we are fed by the Body and Blood of Jesus given in communion. We cannot reflect long and hard enough on the amazing gift or Jesus in the Eucharist we receive here at Mass. When we return to our pew we do just that give thanks for all God has given us in this celebration indeed everything we have received.

The Prayer after Communion

This prayer brings to completion the entire prayer of the people of God gathered for Mass. The people make the prayer their own by the acclamation Amen.

Read following Communion and before the Final Blessing and Dismissal

V. THE SENDING FORTH

The Mass concludes with any necessary announcements and most importantly the Final Blessing and Sending. The entire experience has been a blessing by God. It has been a prayer of blessing and praise by those assembled for all that God does in our lives. Now we are sent forth. As said above we have been fed by the experience of those with us, the assembly, by the Word proclaimed and broken open and by the Eucharist both prayed and received. Now it is time to do something with this. The Eucharist is not a static reality. It is a dynamic and living presence of Christ in our hearts and our lives. So go now and transform these words and actions into the actions of your lives. We are each of us disciples called to change the world. We are disciples of the Good News of Jesus which we have proclaimed and been fed by around the table. Now we take it into Monday, Tuesday and the week through until we gather again around the table.

Announcements

The Final Blessing

The Final Hymn

The Sending Forth

We cannot stay here. Like the apostles on the mountain of the Transfiguration we may want to stay. It is as human a feeling as you can get wanting to hold onto times and places that bring blessing and peace. But, we must go. We must go out of this place but not empty handed rather with the Word of God we have heard and reflected on, with the encouragement of one another with whom we have worshiped and prayed and most importantly we go with the Body and Blood of Jesus that has fed us in Communion. We go into the world to continue to transform it in Christ.

Go in the Peace of Christ!