



MEANING OF MASS

STUDY GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION TO THE MEANING OF THE MASS STUDY GUIDE

As Qoheleth tells us, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9) and this is doubly true when it comes to scholarship and study. As such, I begin by recognizing the efforts of Abbot Jeremy Driscoll. This study guide is indebted to his book *What Happens at Mass*, which is a remarkable and succinct discussion of the Most Sacred Mystery of the Church. This book truly is an invaluable resource to the Church, especially in the United States as we begin our 3-year Eucharistic Revival. The vast majority of insights contained in this study guide were taken from *What Happens at Mass* and I encourage you to read Abbot Driscoll’s work for a more complete presentation of the Mass.

The Eucharistic Revival is the impetus behind this brief study guide. As Catholics, it is all too easy to let the ritual slip into routine. When this happens, we can miss out on the life transforming mystery that is present to us at every Mass: Jesus Himself. To revitalize the Church in the United States and to reawaken our awe and love of Jesus present in the Eucharist, the USCCB has instituted a three-year Eucharistic Revival. Adding my own effort to this initiative, I have written this study guide to aid us here in the Diocese of Reno. Each section of the study guide deals with a different part of the Mass, but it all leads us back to the Eucharist. During this time, it is my prayer that every person will have an encounter with the Risen Savior in and through the Mass.

As a final note, Pope Francis recently published *Desiderio Desideravi*, an Apostolic Letter which emphasizes an incredibly profound point: the Mass makes us who we are. The Church unites around the one altar of sacrifice, and in doing so we ourselves become one as members of the Mystical Body of Christ. As such, Pope Francis has been calling for a renewed attention and devotion to the Mass, following the ancient dictum: “lex orandi, lex credendi” (the law of praying is the law of believing). The Holy Father specifically requested that formation be offered to all members of the Church (clergy and laity) so that they, in turn, can be more effectively formed by the liturgy itself. It is my hope that this study guide can assist in the liturgical formation advocated by Pope Francis.

May the Lord abundantly bless you, and ever bring you closer to Himself in the Eucharist.

In Christ,
Most Rev. Daniel Mueggenborg
Bishop of Reno



PART 1

OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTORY RITES



As part of our three-year Eucharistic Renewal process, we will begin a seven-week series of reflections on the meaning of the Mass. Each week, we will take a different part of the Mass and examine it closely so that we can correctly understand what the Church intends by the various prayers, gestures, symbols, and actions. By correctly understanding the Mass, we can enter more deeply and intentionally into the experience of God that we celebrate. It's easy to presume that we know what it means to be Catholic and Christian. That presumption can lead us down the wrong path to a misunderstanding of the Mass – which can cause us to be frustrated, disengaged, bored, and miss out on the life-transforming experience God wants to offer us.

We don't make the liturgy; the liturgy makes US.

First things first: The Mass is a Mystery - a reality in which the presence of Jesus Christ and the Glory of God is hidden, but in which we experience Christ in various ways. We also refer to the Mass as a 'Liturgy,' which comes from two Greek words meaning "the work that is done for the people." A Liturgy is something that Christ does for us - the ultimate Liturgy of Jesus is His Death and Resurrection on the Cross. In the Mass, we celebrate this great work of Jesus done for our salvation, and we participate in it through the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The Liturgy of Jesus on Calvary is rendered present through the Liturgy of the Mass. We don't make the liturgy; the liturgy makes us. It's important to remember that the Mass is actually a spiritual conversation between God the Father and Jesus the Son. The Church participates in this conversation as the Body of Christ and so the Father speaks to us in His Son and speaks to the world through us. We bring the world to the Father through the Son. In this conversation, which takes place in the Holy Spirit, we and God listen and speak. We must know what's happening in every part of this conversation to participate fully and intentionally.



OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTORY RITES

PART I

In this first part, we'll look at the Introductory Rites of the Mass. The first thing we do is to Gather, which is more than just showing up in a building at a specific time - it's a demonstration of how all creation is being drawn into Jesus Christ. We gather as representatives of the Body of Christ that spans time and space, heaven and earth, saints and sinners. We welcome others because Christ has called them just as He has called us. We also sing. The songs in Mass are a prayer addressed to God to help us focus our conversation with the Father. The one heart and one voice of the Body of Christ is demonstrated as a symphony of many voices proclaiming in communion the same praise of God and the same prayer to the Father. The importance of our song is not in the music but in the prayer that is sung; the music is there only to support and guide our prayer - never to replace or overpower it.

As we sing, we Process into the Church - a spiritual statement that we are all on a journey to God and that Jesus is leading us to the Father. The priest represents Jesus, who leads the flock to the Father - he processes into the Church and down the aisle because Christ Himself is our head and is coming to stand among the people to lead them. The procession carries the Book of the Gospels to remind us that Christ is coming with His transforming Word to speak to us. The Book of the Gospels is placed on the altar because the experience of Jesus in the Bible leads us to the experience of Jesus on the altar - an inseparable connection between Word and Sacrament.

If we are to share in His Cross and follow Him as His disciples, the sign of the Cross must become VISIBLY IMPRINTED in our lives.

Next we begin our prayer with the sign of the cross, composed of actions and words. The action of making the sign of the cross over our bodies reminds us that the crucified body of our Lord Jesus Christ desires to make its force felt in us. If we are to share in His cross and follow Him as His disciples, the sign of the cross must become visibly imprinted in our lives. We also repeat the words of our Baptism: In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit - words given to us by Jesus when He told His disciples to go out and baptize disciples.

The sign of the cross reminds us that Baptism is the door that gives us access to the living presence of Jesus in Word and Sacrament, and also that it is the means that allows us to experience Christ in any moment - that is why we begin and end each prayer and sacred moment with the sign of the cross and the words of our Baptism. After the sign of the cross, the priest greets us with the words of the Apostle Paul, such as: "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." This greeting reminds us that as a Church of apostolic faith, what we believe as well as what we now do is connected to the teaching of the Apostles themselves. To this, the congregation responds by saying **"And with your Spirit,"** which refers to the Spirit of Christ a priest received in his ordination when he was given a share in the one priesthood of Jesus Christ.

As the priest at Mass represents Christ as the head of the Body, "And with your spirit" really means "Be the priest for us now! Be Jesus Christ, the High Priest." Our conversation between the Church and God the Father can only happen through Jesus, as represented by the priest.

As we begin this conversation with the Father, we first call to mind our sins in the Penitential Rite to remind ourselves that it is only out of God's mercy that we are allowed to stand in God's presence, hear and understand His Word, and enter into communion with the sacrifice of Christ.

Finally, our last act of the introductory rites of the Mass is to praise God with the Gloria - the song of the angels. We give Glory to God - the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - by joining our voices with the angelic voices of heaven as they eternally sing the praises of God. Through the grace of God given to us in our baptism, and the Spirit of the Priest making present the high priesthood of Jesus Christ, we now can enter into the heavenly realm with the angels and saints - our brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ.

PART 1: OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTORY RITES

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Prior to Mass

- How has God called you out of the world to be with Him in the Mass?
- How is God working in your daily life?
- How has the Lord helped you in the past?
- How is the Lord calling you into a deeper relationship with Himself at this time?
- What do you do to prepare for the Mass?
- Are you able to enter into the moments of silence present in the Mass?
- Are you able to leave behind your concerns for a time to enter into the presence of God in the Mass?

Procession and Introduction

- What does the incarnation mean to you?
- What is your favorite hymn, and why?
- How is your baptism connected to your life of faith at this time?
- How do you take up your cross and follow Christ?
- What does it mean to you to be part of the Apostolic faith?

Confiteor

- Why do you think we confess to "Almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters?"
- Has there ever been a moment in which you felt called by God to do something, and you were tempted to leave it undone (e.g., an act of omission)?
- Has there been a particular besetting sin that the Lord has helped you overcome in your life?

Gloria

- For what are you most thankful in your life?
- How is your life an expression of praise of God?

Collect

- What do you find yourself praying for most often?
- Is there someone in your life right now that needs prayer?

PART 2

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD



The Old Testament prepared the world for Jesus and was fulfilled in Him; without it, we cannot understand His life, teaching, or resurrection.

The Liturgy of the Word begins with the first reading of scripture and ends with the Prayers of the Faithful. In the Liturgy of the Word, God speaks through His Son in the Holy Spirit to the Church and the Church responds. Remember Jesus Himself is the Word of God – not in the meaning of "Word" as a single vocalized expression, but rather as a saving event, a self-revelation of God, a living relationship of faith. Despite our sin and weakness, God continues to speak to us and reveals Himself in creation and the unfolding of human history. Nothing can be spoken more than what has already been said in Jesus Christ. The center and fulfillment of all of God's saving events culminate in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In the resurrection, Jesus rose with His whole life, which is active and living and present to us – that means His words, actions, and teachings rose with Him. Even all of salvation history that led to His incarnation rose with and is embodied by Him.

In the Old Testament, the central event of salvation is the exodus, which prefigures Jesus' death and resurrection - seen in the Gospels when Moses and Elijah speak to Jesus about the "Exodus" He was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Prefigurement means that what occurred in the Old Testament was a preparation for the New Testament. Thus, the Old Testament meaning is fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and we cannot understand the New Testament unless we know the Old Testament stories and background that prepared for our Lord's ministry. Saint Jerome spoke well about the importance of knowing the scriptures when he said, "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." We can't learn all we need to know about Jesus in the New Testament. The Old Testament prepared the world for Jesus and was fulfilled in Him; without it, we cannot understand His life, teaching or resurrection

LITURGY OF THE WORD

When we hear scripture passages and the stories of God's saving works, we should be searching for patterns in our lives to connect with those biblical patterns. We are part of a larger story, one with many parts that always culminates in the victorious resurrection of Jesus. Wherever we are in life, whatever we have experienced, we can find meaning for our current circumstance through some part of the Old Testament and hope that our story hasn't ended until it is fulfilled in Christ Jesus. The scriptures console us that we are not forgotten or alone - God knows our circumstances and has a plan for our lives, which He unfolds in scripture.

After the reading from the Old Testament, the Church prays the Responsorial Psalm - the response of the church speaking to the Father with the prayers of Jesus. We know that Jesus prayed the psalms because He quoted them frequently in His life and ministry. With the voice of the Son, His Body now prays with Him in grateful response to the saving word already spoken. In the New Testament Epistle, we then hear of the Apostles' reflection on the death and resurrection of Jesus and the implications for the Christian disciple. God is again speaking to His Church through the Apostles.

The Homily, then, is our response to what God has said and our application of God's word to our lives - God's word must find a HOME in our hearts, and we must
RESPOND to it.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

We then stand for the Gospel Acclamation as the Holy Spirit intensifies and the Church sings the ancient Alleluia. The Priest or Deacon once again proclaims, "The Lord be with you," to which the congregation responds, "and with your Spirit ." That is because The Spirit of Jesus, given to the priest and deacon in their gift of ordination, now allows Jesus Himself to speak to the Church in the Gospels through that gift of the ministry of the priest or deacon. To prepare for this sacred moment, we bless ourselves three times on the head, the lips, and the chest. This threefold blessing asks the Holy Spirit to give us the grace to understand the Word of God with our minds, to profess the Word of God in our expressions – symbolized by the words that pass our lips - and to love the Word of God in our hearts. At the end of the Gospel, the Church acclaims the message by acknowledging that it truly is Jesus who has spoken to us by proclaiming, "Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ!" The Homily, then, is our response to what God has said and our application of God's word to our lives - God's word must find a home in our hearts, and we must respond to it. The homily should always lead us deeper into the meaning of the paschal mystery, Jesus' death and resurrection, which we are called to live through our Baptism and celebrate in the Eucharist.

We then profess the Creed - a summary of the Church's reading and understanding of scripture. It professes our belief in one God in three persons who acts in history and definitively in Jesus, and also through the Holy Spirit and the life of the Church. The Creed is our ultimate response of faith to God's movement toward us as expressed in the scriptures

Finally, our last action in the spiritual conversation of the Liturgy of the Word is the Universal Prayer. We call these the "Prayers of the Faithful" - another moment when the Church, as the Body of Christ, speaks to the Father. These prayers are specifically and intentionally universal and all-embracing. Our individual needs or the needs of our local community are added in the quiet of our hearts. These prayers remind us of our mission and relationship with the whole world since it is the Responsibility of the baptized to bring the needs of all people before God. The Father reaches the world through the Church and in the Prayers of the Faithful the Church now brings the world to the Father. Through our prayer Christ shares with us His priestly role of interceding for the world by making our needs His own and presenting them to the Father. The Whole Church must be pleasing to God so as to be the sacrament of salvation to world - if the World is to know the salvation offered in Christ, then hardships must be relieved and injustices addressed (1 Tim 2:4).

LITURGY OF THE WORD

With the Prayers of the Faithful, we conclude our experience of Jesus hidden in the Mystery of His Word – A word spoken by the Father to the Church and the word spoken by the Church as the Body of Christ to the Father.



PART 2: THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Old Testament

- What is your favorite Old Testament story?
- What do you think it means that "The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New"? (CCC 129)
- Where do you see Jesus prefigured in the Old Testament?
- How does your life relate to the events of the Old Testament?
- Is there a particular person in the Old Testament with whom you relate?

Responsorial Psalm

- Do you have a favorite psalm?
- When you pray, how do you approach God? (*i.e., joy, sorrow, contrition, thanksgiving, etc.*)
- Psalm 110 is the most referenced Old Testament passage. Where do you see Jesus in this psalm (*i.e., victory over sin and death, kingship, priesthood, cross, etc.*)?

New Testament

- What is your favorite New Testament book?
- What aspect of a life of faith do you find most difficult to live?
- Is there an event in the life of one of the Apostles that really speaks to you?

Alleluia

- How do you praise God in word?
- How do you praise God in action?

Gospel

- Do you have a favorite Gospel story?
- What is Jesus saying to you in your life right now?
- When did you fall in love with Jesus?
- Is there one of the Apostles that you most relate to? Why?

Creed

- Is there any aspect of the faith that you struggle with?
- What does "belief" mean to you?

Universal Prayers

- Is there someone in your life who needs your prayers right now?
- Is there anyone you have promised to pray for?

PART 3

THE OFFERTORY RITES



God only makes holy what we offer Him.

The central event in the Offertory Rites, which comprise the very first actions of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, is the Offering of the Gifts. The gifts are brought forward as a representation of the whole assembly. They are your gifts being offered to the Lord. The gifts I am speaking of are first and foremost, the bread and wine that will be used in the Eucharistic sacrifice. We use the word "Sacrifice" a lot during the Mass, so it is important for us to understand it correctly. The term "sacrifice" doesn't mean giving up or throwing away. Rather, it literally means to "Make Holy". Only God can make something holy; we can't. And so a sacrifice is something we offer to God to be made holy by the Lord. Remember this meaning of sacrifice as we reflect on the Offertory Rites of the Mass because God only makes holy what we offer Him.

The primary sacrifice we are intended to offer during this time of the Mass is the gift of our lives. St. Paul tells us in Romans 12:1 that we are to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing, to God as the perfection of our spiritual worship.

That means we offer the Lord our whole lives to be made holy by Him. That's more than just a check or a donation in the basket or a 10% tithe. It's everything. Our whole life is being given to God and placed on the altar. Jesus gave Himself to us on the cross, and now He is inviting us to give ourselves to the Lord so we can unite our lives with the one perfect sacrifice of Jesus Himself. We are not perfect ... but Jesus is. And the Lord invites us to join our sacrifice to His sacrifice. One perfect, holy and pleasing offering to the Father. Wow – that's so much more than a few bucks in the collection.

We get OUT of Mass what we put INTO IT.

Think about this – if God makes holy what we offer Him then that also means that what we hold back and refuse to offer God isn't made holy. How much of our lives do we hold back each week? We wonder why we aren't moved by God's grace when we attend Mass - we get out of Mass what we put into it.

THE OFFERTORY RITES

The bread and wine symbolize our individual lives we bring forth to be received by the priest as the representative of Christ Himself. This sacrifice of our lives is secondarily, but necessarily, represented by donations of money. This collection is actually an important symbol of our practical willingness to share our lives both in the love of God and also in the love of our neighbor in need. As early as the 2nd century, St. Justin Martyr described the Mass and noted that the collection was to take place as a necessary and appropriate symbol of the spiritual offering of people's lives to God at the same time the bread and wine were being presented as an offering.

Returning to the primary gifts of God's people, bread and wine. Each of these has a profound significance. We have bread as the final product of a process that includes planting, harvesting, and baking. We have wine as the final product of a process that includes growing, harvesting, and fermenting. Think of how many people are involved and how many years pass for these gifts. They are both the gift of God and the fruit of human work. They represent nature and human ingenuity cooperating. They symbolize what good things can happen when humans cooperate with the Creator. The procession of the bread and wine further demonstrates the relationship between the Church and Jesus symbolized by the congregation and the priest. The Church bringing to the hands of Christ the fruits of creation crafted by the effort of human hands demonstrates the priesthood of the faithful, which Christ shares with us in our Baptism.

The offering of the people is then united with the offering of Jesus, who perfects all things when He presents it to the Father.



Christ takes our gifts and transforms them into His Body and Blood to become a continual offering in heaven -- the eternal Paschal Sacrifice. Jesus can make our lives an expression of Himself - but it's up to us to offer ourselves to the Lord and beg that our offering be received.

If we haven't offered our lives then there is nothing of us to be joined to Christ's divinity.

There are some additional "Little Mysteries" included in the Offertory Rites. One of those occurs when the priest or deacon mixes water with the wine. This was a common practice in the ancient world which illustrates our communion with the sacrifice of Christ as our humanity is joined to the divinity of Christ in the Eucharistic offering. For this reason, St. Cyprian said that we should never offer wine without water since that would be like offering Christ without His people. The deacon or priest prays while the water and wine are mixed, saying, "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." If we haven't offered our lives, then there is nothing of us to be joined to Christ's divinity. Another is the washing of the hands - although this had practical origins, it quickly became something of deep spiritual significance as part of the priest's preparation to offer the holiest sacrifice of all - the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. The priest prays a prayer at this time, which everyone should pray with the priest so they can share in that sacrifice - "Wash me O Lord from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." We believe that Christ will now make the hands of the priest His own hands since there is only one priest, Jesus Christ, who acts through the ministry of each ordained priest. The hands that take these gifts, transform them, and offer them to the Father are the hands of Christ Himself.





Finally, The Prayers of Presentation over the gifts states what the collection and offertory have expressed in action. The bread and wine are more than just elements of food and drink; as the priest reminds us, they are our very lives being offered to God.

"My sacrifice and yours ." Our sacrifice is offered and accepted only through Christ

This prayer always mentions the gifts we have brought and prays for their transformation and ours. Saying "Amen" to this prayer means saying amen to all that has happened from collecting the gifts until this moment! It means saying "Amen" to the decision to give our lives to God 100%. It means saying "Amen" to the decision to love God and neighbor without holding back. It means saying "Amen" to being made holy and transformed by the Father to become the living presence of the Son. **And all that happens not by accident, but because we make a decision, a petition, to offer our lives to God. The rest of the Mass, especially communion, will mean very little if we are not active participants in the offertory.** What we hold back from God, we hold back from His transforming grace. If Mass isn't changing us every time we attend, then maybe we are holding back what we should be offering to God.

PART 3: THE OFFERTORY RITES

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Offertory

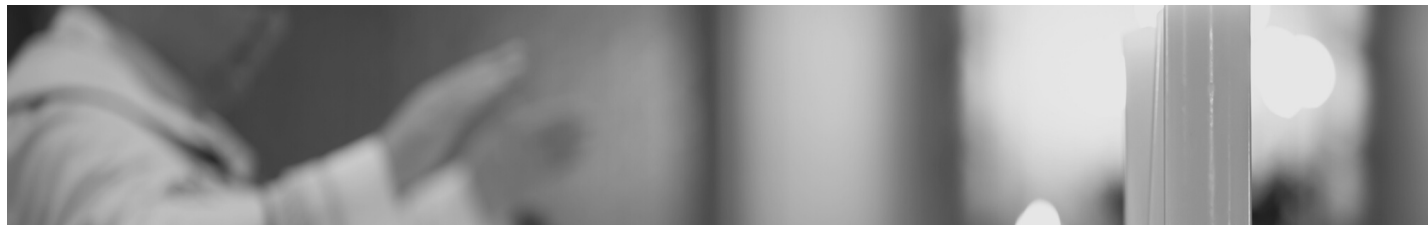
- Are you able to enter into the moment of the offertory and present your life to the Lord?
- Is there anything you are holding back from the Lord?
- The bread and the wine themselves contain a profound amount of symbolism. Do you see in them any significance beyond what was mentioned above?
- How have you used the gifts the Lord has given you to sanctify the world?
- What is the gift from God that you appreciate the most?

Little Mysteries

- When have you experienced a moment of profound union with Jesus?
- How has the sacrament of confession assisted you in preparing for the Mass?
- What do you think about St. Cyprian's comment that the church must always be offered with Christ, symbolized by the mixing of the water and wine?
- Why do you think the priest says "my sacrifice and yours" instead of "our sacrifice?"
- How are you cooperating in the plan of God?
- What does it mean to you to say that Christ was fully God and fully human?

PART 4

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER



The Eucharistic Prayer starts with what is known as the Preface Dialogue and ends with the Great Amen. If you have placed your life on the altar as a sacrificial offering during the Offertory, then put on your seat belt for the most transforming adventure that will happen in the Eucharistic Prayer.

We give thanks that our hearts are on high – something that is only possible with the grace of God.

The Preface Dialogue is the set of three short exchanges between the priest and the people, indicating a shift to a new level of spiritual intensity. This dialogue has been part of the Preface ever since the 2nd century. As we begin praying with greater intensity, the priest says for the 3rd time in the course of the Mass, "The Lord be with you" to which the people respond, "and with your spirit." Just as before, this exchange is necessary because we cannot enter more intensely into prayer unless Jesus Himself leads us – the congregation is really saying, "Be the priest (Jesus) for us now!" Christ is the head who leads His body before the Father; the priest acts in the person of Christ in this role.

The next exchange is to "lift up your hearts" – Christ is telling His body where we are going, and we're going there fast! Right up to heaven to join in the heavenly banquet of the Lamb.


The people respond by acknowledging that they want to be where Christ calls them to - on higher realms where Christ is seated at God's right hand (Col 3:1-3). Saint Paul tells us that our life is "hidden with Christ in God". That is MYSTERY! We are lifting up our hearts to heaven to see that our lives are hidden with Christ in God.

Finally, the third exchange tells us the purpose of our being in heaven – "let us give thanks to the Lord our God".



THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

PART 4



We give thanks that our hearts are on high – something that is only possible with the grace of God. The prayer of the Preface always has the same structure. First, it continues the theme of right and just thanksgiving to the Father – this Prayer is from the Church to the Father. Second, it develops "through Christ our Lord" into a profound recognition of, and gratitude for, what God has actually done for us; God already knows – we're the ones who need to remember it. Finally, we ask that our voices blend with the voices of angels and saints (heavenly court) in singing God's praises – ***our response to remembering what God has done in Jesus!***

Then we reach the Sanctus, or the Holy, Holy, Holy, composed of scriptural texts that let us know we are in the heavenly realm with the angels (from Isaiah and Rev 22:4). We also recall the earthly cross by singing "Hosanna in the highest" – the hymn that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem (Mk 11:9) before He celebrated the Last Supper. Indeed, blessed is he who comes, especially the Lord Jesus in the Eucharist, about to be celebrated on the throne of the altar in this church!

Past, present, and
future all lie on the
altar now in one great
mystery of faith –
Jesus in the Eucharist.

We then start the Eucharistic Prayer itself. The priest addresses God the Father while the people kneel, as we are now in the heavenly court, and there is "one coming in the name of the Lord" – Christ in the Eucharist. The community is actively participating, at this moment, in what Christ is accomplishing on our behalf. Next, the priest calls down the Holy Spirit on the bread and wine to become the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ - ***this is the bread and wine that WE BROUGHT to be changed into the Body and Blood of Christ by God's own plan! It's His idea. Not ours. This is the pure sacrifice offered to His name.*** Then we come to the Institution Narrative and Consecration. Note that the ***priest is still addressing God the Father and NOT the people. So it's for the Father to hear and see!*** God doesn't need to learn what He has done from us; as we remember Jesus' actions before God, God sees that we know how much the Lord has done for us in His Son. The priest then acts out what Jesus did and said at the last supper. He quotes the words of Jesus. ***Until now the story has been in the past tense; now it is in the present tense because God is acting now in this bread and wine to make present the body and blood of His Son.***



Genuflection is the act of adoration to the Presence of Jesus now in the Eucharist. The plea for the Spirit to come and transform the gifts has been answered with the saying of the words of Jesus - ***and it all happens with the bread and wine that we brought.*** This is our communion in the one sacrifice of Christ – ***our lives taken up into the one and only story in which the history of the world finds its meaning and fulfillment – the Death and Resurrection of Jesus.*** St. Leo the Great said in the 4th century, "Sharing the Body and Blood of Christ causes nothing less than our passing over into what we receive, and then in spirit and in flesh we carry Him everywhere, the one in whom we were dead, buried and rose again." We then proclaim the Mystery of Faith – ***the ultimate "mystery" we celebrate in the Mass. Hidden in THIS bread and wine is the presence of Jesus.*** The people respond by acclaiming ***Jesus present in the Eucharist on the Altar*** – His death, resurrection, and return. This is the center of our salvation. Past, present, and future all lie on the altar now in one great mystery of faith – Jesus in the Eucharist.

Then we continue with the second half of the Eucharistic Prayer. The priest now presumes that Jesus has united our lives with His sacrifice. In this prayer, the Church now offers to the Father the Body and Blood of Jesus to which we have been united. There are not two sacrifices (Jesus' and then the Church's) but only one perfect offering. As we have taken our place inside the saving events of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, we can now say to the Father "we offer you in thanksgiving this holy and living sacrifice." We can offer it because of our communion in the sacrifice of Christ, our share in His priesthood.

Next, the priest calls down the Holy Spirit again, but this time it is on the Church rather than the bread and wine. The Holy Spirit is needed to transform the Church that receives the body and blood of Jesus so that we become His Body. So we ask the Holy Spirit to transform two things – the bread and wine, and then those who receive it. The transformation of the bread and the wine is FOR us and our transformation. Because we are transformed into Christ's Body and united with His sacrifice, we ask the Father that our communion with Christ may be extended. These intercessions are all praying for our communion with the whole Church worldwide and across the centuries.

We name the saints in Heaven – through our baptism, we are united with them in the Body of Christ, and so we pray for eternal communion with them. We name the Pope and Bishop, who represent the universal Church and the local Church in our time; all members of the Church throughout the world are present by naming these heads of the church. Then we name everyone in the world, even those who do not know Christ, with phrases like "advance the peace and salvation of all the world ." We also name the dead because we want to be one body in Christ with all of them – the saints, the dead, those who don't believe, and the Church everywhere.

In the Mass, the WHOLE WORLD is coming to the Father through the Son.

Now we come to the climax and conclusion of the prayer. The climax occurs when we pray: "We hope to enjoy forever the fullness of your glory." The "we" is everyone we have just prayed for - communion with the Father means communion with them. St. Augustine said in the 4th century, "The true peace of rational creatures, which is the only peace of the heavenly city, consists in a perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God and of one another in God." Our Eucharistic Prayer always concludes by glorifying God and the Great Amen.

The priest lifts the Eucharist as the Pure Sacrifice to God. He does not raise the Host and Chalice for the church to see – it is for the Father to see.



This is our communion in the sacrifice of Christ. Our only course to the Father is "through Him," "with Him," and "in Him ." The whole world is coming to the Father through the Son in the Mass. The father is overwhelmed by what He sees coming toward Him! He sees Jesus and the whole world reconciled to Him in the Body and Blood of His Son. The Father sees the Son clothed in our flesh by the incarnation. The great "Amen" is now proclaimed as the community gathered professes its full participation in this sacrifice and offering.

When we say "Amen", we are not spectators but participants who stand before the throne of God as members of Christ's Body.

PART 4: THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Preface

- What does it mean to you to say that your heart is in Heaven?
- What does it mean to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God? How is this connected to the Eucharist?
- What does it mean to you to approach the Father through the Son?
- What is the moment in your life for which you praise God the most?

Sanctus

- Why does the Church repeat the words of the angels in the Temple, as well as the words of the crowds in Jerusalem?
- How does our outward expression of prayer match our inward disposition as we enter the Eucharistic Prayer?

Epiclesis

- What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharistic prayer?
- How are you changed in the Mass?
- In the Mass, the bread is taken, blessed, broken and given. How is that paralleled in your life?
- Where do you feel the Holy Spirit is leading you?

Institution Narrative

- Where do you see each member of the Trinity active in the Eucharistic prayer?
- Why is it significant that the verbs all change to the present tense during the Institution Narrative?

Prayers in the Eucharistic prayer

- For whom do we pray in the Eucharistic prayer, and why is that significant?
- To whom does the priest speak throughout the Eucharistic prayer? Why does that matter?
- How does God establish peace in the world?
- Do you have a specific person you pray for while participating in the Mass?

Doxology

- How does the Doxology complete the idea of sacrifice?
- Why does the priest say, "Through Him, with Him, and in Him?"

PART 5

THE LORD'S PRAYER



To understand what the Lord's Prayer means when we pray it at Mass, we need to remember the context - why for nearly 2,000 years, the Church has prayed the Lord's Prayer immediately after the Eucharistic Prayer.

We need to remember what just happened in the Eucharistic Prayer: Our lives have been drawn into the one perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ and offered to the Father as the one perfect and eternal sacrifice of the Son. The bread and wine have been transformed to become the Body and Blood of our Lord. Heaven and earth have been united, and the Church prayed that this communion of all the world with the Son and the Holy Spirit continue forever in eternity.

We have offered all to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. Through Him, With Him, and In Him.



The Lord's Prayer is the first part of the Communion Rites of the Mass. But Communion is more than just receiving the Host – ***we are celebrating the communion of love that was just established in the Eucharistic Prayer now as we, the Church, stand within the love of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*** – and it all begins with the Lord's Prayer.

Christ invites His body to address the words of this prayer to His Father – through Him, with Him, and in Him – the consummation of the sacrifice just offered on the altar in the Eucharistic prayer. The rite begins with the words "Our Father," and Christ's sacrifice in the Eucharistic Prayer climaxes with the words "O God, almighty Father..." – ***this tells us that by the sacrifice of Christ, we have been thrust into the very heart of the Father and our definitive future with God.***

We pray out of our new identity, our new incorporation into the life of God – that is the context in which we look at the Lord's Prayer.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

"*Father*" is a name we can only use because of our communion with the sacrifice of Christ. It is the title Jesus used in His own prayer and was used by the Lord on the cross when He said, "Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit" – a name that never ceases to sound from the cross – while the Father says in response, "You are my beloved son."

"Father" makes present the cross while "Son" makes present the resurrection - that's the Paschal Mystery.

In John 20:17, Jesus shares with us His relationship with the Father in the resurrection when He said, "go tell my disciples that I am going to my Father and their Father ." The term Father is a statement of intimacy. We can say this name only through Jesus, with Jesus, and in Jesus – this is a title of communion and love.

"Our" refers not only to all of us, but can be understood more deeply to refer also to the Son and the Spirit since they are always turned toward the Father as a source; and we now pray in the Son and in the Spirit. This is a personal address to God, as we become God's people, and He is our God. It is the one prayer of the Church eternally and universally -- our prayer of communion of Saints and Sinners.

People must know us as
children of a loving Father
who honor the Lord's
name and presence in our
lives ALWAYS.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

"Who art in heaven" – Jesus is the one who always prays this within us. Heaven is not so much a place as it is a way of being; our future where we will share God's way of being. God's being is Father, Son, and Spirit, which is loving Communion itself. In the Mass, we are already where we hope to be forever – in love's eternal flow. **Heaven, then, is within us but not because of our own doing or part of our nature; it is placed within us when the Father hands us the Body and Blood of His Son.** In Christ, Heaven and earth are joined together forever.

"Hallowed be thy name" means that the name "Father" be uttered and known with reverence everywhere and at all time. God's name unfolds in our lives as part of the "hallowing" process. People must know us as children of a loving Father who honor the Lord's name and presence in our lives always. **"Thy kingdom come"** – We pray that God's definitive rule be established and the Lord draws near to us to save us from sin; Jesus' victory over sin and death, accomplished on the Cross at Calvary to be firmly established in Christ's second coming. The Father will answer this petition when we receive the Lord's Body and Blood and the grace of our Lord's sacrifice, through which He initiated the Kingdom, is offered to us. Indeed, we are praying for the Kingdom, established on Calvary, to now govern our lives and our world. **"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"**



In the Eucharist, God's will has been done on earth perfectly just as in heaven; only the sacrifice of Jesus is perfect and acceptable to the Father. When we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus, our own bodies become the place on earth where the will of the Father is done because we are joined to the one body of Christ. As Jesus said, "I always do what is pleasing to the Father" John 8:29.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Now the prayer shifts, and we move to request what we need to live in the present. **"Give us this day our daily bread"** – On the surface, this can mean a request for what we need to stay alive; as such, it expresses dependence on a loving Father who is the source of all good things. On a deeper level, though, it refers to our desire for the Word of God because Man does not live by bread alone. The Word of God is a Person -- the Son as real food in the Body and Blood of Christ. This expresses our need for the Eucharist as the supernatural bread which transforms us into the Body of Christ.

While in English, we pray for our "daily" bread, the Greek term, *epiousios*, actually means something more like "supernatural" bread. So this petition is a prayer for the ongoing gift of the Body and Blood of Jesus that has just been realized in the Eucharistic Prayer so that we can be transformed to become His Body. **"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"** – Our request for forgiveness from God now has a condition: that we be forgiven as we forgive. This would be dangerous if it were not prayed through and with and in Jesus. Do we really want God to forgive us as we forgive others? Only if it is Christ who is forgiving in us because only Jesus forgives perfectly and completely.

In Christ's sacrifice on the cross, present on the altar, we can say with Jesus "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Only by being in communion with His sacrifice can we love as He loved and forgive as He forgave.



Forgiveness is not based on our human ability to forgive others but on the generous mercy of Christ Himself, who will forgive in us and through us. Our only deliverance from the evil one lies in our communion with God, whom we are about to receive in the Eucharist.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

"And lead us not into temptation" –We are praying that our Communion with Jesus will never be broken and that God will not allow us to take the path that leads to sin. When Mass is over, we will return to the sinful and wounded world in which we live, and we will continue to face the daily battle of good and evil; we must face this with the heavenly Father, and so we beg Him to save us from stumbling away from Him. By this request, we are praying that we might always remain in the communion we now enjoy. **"But deliver us from evil"** – this really means Satan.

Our only deliverance from the evil one lies in our communion with God, whom we are about to receive in the Eucharist. We are helpless on our own. "...we know that anyone begotten of God does not sin, but he who was begotten of God protects him" (1 John 5:18).

In the Eucharistic Prayer, the Church has just been begotten by God in the one Sacrifice of Jesus, and now we pray to be protected in light of our incorporation in Christ Jesus. This is a prayer for the whole world and not just the assembly gathered! It is a prayer that the whole world be freed from all evils, past, present, and future. That is the power of the Lord's Prayer in the context of the Mass.



PART 5: THE LORD'S PRAYER

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Our Father

- Is there any part of the Lord's prayer that particularly stands out to you?
- Why do you think the priest uses the phrase "...we dare to say?"
- Why is it important to pray the Lord's Prayer in the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist?
- Why is it appropriate to call the Lord's Prayer the prayer of Jesus? Why is it also appropriate to call the Lord's Prayer the prayer of the Church?

Who art in Heaven

- What did Christ mean when He said, "the kingdom of God is within you (Luke 17:21)?"
- How is Heaven derived from our identity in Christ? How do we participate in that identity while still on Earth?

Hallowed be thy Name

- What does it mean to hold God's name as holy?
- How is this reflected in the way you live?

Thy Kingdom come

- In what ways are you contributing to the kingdom of God?
- Wherever the king is, there is the kingdom. Where do you see the kingship of the Father?

Thy will be done

- How is the Eucharist the fulfillment of the divine will?
- Are you able to pray this prayer with sincerity?

Give us this day our daily bread

- What are the things you need from God?
- How is the Eucharist the fulfillment of the desires of the human heart?
- Why is it appropriate to call the Eucharist both our "daily" and "supernatural" bread?

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us

- Why do you think this petition follows the request for our daily bread?
- Why is forgiveness contingent on our decision to forgive others?
- How is our willingness to forgive tied to the earlier petitions in the Lord's Prayer?
- Is there anyone you feel you need to forgive? Is there anyone of whom you need to ask forgiveness?
- How is this all ultimately God's action?



PART 5: THE LORD'S PRAYER

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (CONTINUED)

Lead us not into temptation

- How has the Lord helped you to overcome temptation in the past?
- How do you plan to overcome temptation in the future?
- How does this petition aid us in growing in humility?

But deliver us from evil

- How does our communion with God protect us from the evil one?
- How has the sacrament of Confession aided you in the past in your growth in sanctity?
- Do you have a favorite Scripture passage you turn to when things become difficult?

PART 6

THE COMMUNION RITES

(AFTER THE LORD'S PRAYER)



After the Lord's Prayer, which is the first action in our Communion Rite, we then proceed into what is known as the Rite of Peace and the Reception of the Eucharist. It's important to know that all of these actions and prayers are part of the Communion Rite, and so all of them tell us something about how we express communion, how we foster communion, and how we enter into communion.


We can think of "peace" then, in terms of communion without division – through Jesus, who is in communion without division with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The first action after the Lord's Prayer is the Rite of Peace. As the priest prays for the gift of peace, he now addresses Jesus present in the Eucharist – the peace we are praying for is a gift of Jesus Christ Himself and springs from the communion of life and love Jesus enjoys with the Father and the Holy Spirit. **This is the FIRST TIME in the liturgy that the priest addresses Jesus directly present in our midst in the Eucharist rather than the Father in Heaven.**

Peace in the Old Testament was a consequence, an effect, of right relationship. Therefore, we can think of "peace" in terms of communion without division – through Jesus, who is in communion without division with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus said at the Last Supper, ***"Peace I leave you, my peace I give you"*** (John 14:27).

Peace, then, is part of the meaning of our Lord's Death - in His Body and Blood, He is giving us the gift of peace itself. Saint Paul speaks of this peace in his letter to the Ephesians 2:14-16 "For He is our peace ... that He might create in Himself one new person in place of two, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross...." and to the Colossians 1:20 "... through Him to reconcile all things in Himself, making peace by the blood of the cross."

THE COMMUNION RITES



Peace is brought to the world through the cross of Calvary, and we now receive the grace of Calvary through the Eucharist. At this moment in the Mass, we exchange the Sign of Peace, which begins with the fourth time the priest says to the people, "The Peace of the Lord be with you," and they respond, "and with your spirit." The mystery of Christ's peace which He accomplished on Calvary is now being passed by the priest, acting in the person of Jesus, to His body, the Church

The response "And with your spirit" acknowledges that the peace we are about to exchange is not a merely human wish for well-being; rather, it is a peace that only comes from Christ through the ministry of the priest and is now shared with the people so they can become ministers of Our Lord's peace to one another.

As the invitation to "exchange a sign of peace" is given by the priest or deacon, we offer to one another the same greeting of the Risen Lord from John 20:21 when our Lord said to the apostles, "Peace be with you" in the upper room. We have just said "Our Father," and now we can say "Brother" or "Sister;" we just prayed to forgive, and now we can offer a sign of reconciliation. Our lives have been united in the one sacrifice of Jesus and offered to the Father -we are individually in communion with Jesus and also in communion with all others who have offered their lives on the altar and who have been incorporated into the one sacrifice of Christ with us.

The sign of peace is an expression of this deep unity as The Lord actively unites the assembly in Himself as one body.

This is a sacred ritual moment – not a chat session or a time to greet our friends – when we heal any divisions or wounds in the body of Christ so that our communion with God and one another can be more perfectly realized. It's Christ's peace, not ours –and we must be aware of the respect and reverence due such a grace gained by such a price.

What appears as broken bread is nothing less than CHRIST HIMSELF, who comes as our food in the sacrifice that takes away our sins.

The priest then breaks the Host – a symbol of our Lord's body being broken on Calvary. As he does so, the assembly addresses Jesus present in the Eucharist by the title "Lamb of God...." – we are appealing for the mercy and peace Jesus brings as the Lamb of God who is offered in sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. As Revelations 5:11-12 and 19:7,9 tell us, the "Lamb of God" is surrounded by singing throngs. We are now joining their hymn of praise as heaven and earth are united around the one sacrifice of Christ.

Next is the Reception of the Eucharist, which begins with the Proclamation: "Behold the Lamb of God...." These are the words of John the Baptist from John 1:29. This, again, is a mystery. What appears as broken bread is nothing less than Christ Himself, who comes as our food in the sacrifice that takes away our sins. Then with a verse from the book of Revelation 19:9, the priest says, "Blessed are those who are called to the supper of the Lamb."

The eternal heavenly wedding banquet has now begun, and we are invited to it as the Church who is the Bride of Christ.

We are here to seal our covenant relationship with the Lord by consummating the communion already established in the sacrifice of the Eucharistic Prayer. Again the people address Christ directly in the Eucharist when they speak with the words of the Roman centurion from Matthew 8:8, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof...". And so we approach the heavenly throne of God on this altar to consummate the covenant relationship offered to us in the Blood of the Lamb.

Our Amen ratifies the exchange that has taken place and our willingness to be changed into the Body of Christ.

The community then forms a procession and sings with one voice as the Body of Christ. The Eucharistic hymn acclaims the mystery of Christ in the Eucharist that lays before them. This action of physically receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus confirms everything that has preceded it in the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Going back to the offertory, the bread and wine, which were symbols of our lives, were changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. We now receive the Eucharist, and we too are changed into the mystical body of Christ; our gift, received by the priest (as Christ Himself) and transformed to become the Body and Blood of Jesus is now handed back to us - our lives are being handed back to us but only after they have been transformed in sacrifice! That is the importance of the proclamation "The Body of Christ / The Blood of Christ ."

Our 'Amen' ratifies the exchange that has taken place and our willingness to be changed into the Body of Christ. St. Augustine said: "If then, you are the Body of Christ, your own mystery lies in the Eucharist. You must receive that which you are and become that which you receive." Receiving Communion is a huge commitment; not just a gift, but an agreement to live out that gift as one Church, one body of Christ throughout the world, by entering into a covenant that affects every part of our lives and obligates us to be an active member of the Catholic Church. This is why we caution those who are not aware of or prepared to make that commitment to refrain from the Eucharist so they do not unknowingly incur an obligation they are not prepared to meet.

As Saint Paul says in his first letter to the Corinthians 11:27-29, "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Each one must examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself."

Finally, we offer the Prayer after Communion - the diversity of many becoming one body is gathered into one heart and one voice as we pray for the enduring effect of this peace, this communion, this grace to continue its transforming power in our lives and our world.

It is a prayer that the sacrament we have received will bear fruit in us and that we remain faithful to our new identity as living tabernacles who carry Jesus Christ to others. When we say Amen to this, we are saying Amen to all that has happened in the Communion rites - to living our lives united in the one sacrifice of Jesus and to being ministers of Christ's peace won for us on Calvary to every wounded human heart and every distressed situation we encounter, and to living free from sin and the alienating influence of evil. Amen.





PART 6: THE COMMUNION RITES

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Rite of Peace

- "Have you ever had a profound experience of Christ's peace?"
- How is the fraction rite (breaking of the host) a continuation of the Rite of Peace?
- Why is it significant that the priest speaks directly to Jesus before the Sign of Peace?
- How is peace, originating in the Trinity itself, concretized in your life?

Reception of the Eucharist

- How is our reception of the Eucharist tied to the sacrifice of Christ to the Father?
- What does the title "Lamb of God" mean to you?
- Why do you think that the Church maintained the quote from the centurion, "I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof...?"
- How is receiving the Eucharist a "commitment"?
- How do you prepare to receive the Eucharist?
- How does the Prayer after Communion connect with the Reception of the Eucharist?

PART 7

THE RITE OF SENDING



We conclude our seven-part series on the Mass by reflecting on what is known as the Rite of Sending; when the priest or deacon says to the people, "Go forth, the Mass is ended," and the people respond, "Thanks be to God!". When I was kid, I used to be shocked by this part of the Mass. That's because when the priest announced the Mass was ended and the people said, "Thanks be to God!" I thought they were just happy it was finally over! Now, of course, I have a very different understanding.

The Mass is ultimately that which prepares us to be sent into the world.

Have you ever wondered what the word "Mass" actually means or where it comes from? Well, it comes from that final commission of the priest or deacon when he says, "Go Forth..." In Latin, the phrase used at the end of Mass was always "Ite, Missa est" which means, "Go! She has been sent!" The word Mass comes from the Latin word *Missa* and means "sent." So the Mass is ultimately that which prepares us to be sent into the world. The very reason we come to Church is not to flee the world but to be transformed so we can go out and change the world

As Jesus said to His disciples, "What you hear spoken in whispers, you must now proclaim from rooftops." And in John chapter 20, our Lord commissioned the apostles to carry on His mission on the Lord's Day when He said, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." During these final rites of the Mass, we celebrate and accept our mission to be sent into the world. We have been prepared, informed, forgiven, reconciled, transformed, and drawn into the one perfect sacrifice of Jesus. Now, we are sent to continue the work of the Son as His Body.



THE RITE OF SENDING

And at the end of the blessing and commission, we are then actually led to go out on mission as the priest and the other ministers process from the sanctuary to the front doors of the church. That is not a ceremonial exit; that is actually a procession leading all of us from the confines of the sacred world of the church and into the challenging secular world that awaits us.

Let's look back in a little more detail at how this all happens...

The Sending or Concluding Rites begin with the greeting of the priest when he says, "The Lord be with you ." This is the 5th time the priest has given this greeting to the congregation, and it indicates that we are starting something new. The people respond to remind the priest to be conscious of the priestly grace within him for what he is about to do. The sign of the cross is then traced over the assembly, and the people respond, "Amen."

The cross and the name of God are the seal of the whole Eucharistic rite. All of the Mass has been about sharing in our very bodies the mystery of the Cross, which reveals the mystery of the Trinity. ***We receive that mystery in the Eucharist. At the beginning of the Mass, the sign of the Cross and the name of God reminded us of our entry into the mystery; now at the end of Mass, the sign of the Cross and the name of God become a task to be lived out.***

THE RITE OF SENDING

It is Christ Himself that the Church brings to the world.

The people are then dismissed. Now we need to understand this carefully and clearly. **The congregation is NOT just being sent away, as though we were saying, "Ok, we're done. You can go home now." NO!** Rather, the congregation is being **commissioned**.

We are actually saying, **"You are now ready to take on the great mission Jesus entrusted to the Church and to you as a member of His Body. You have an active responsibility, a mandate, to bring the presence of Christ to others so let's get started." Ite, Missa Est – Go, you are sent!** That is the commission of this moment. The assembly comes forth with the Risen Lord and is sent into the world. The Church would have nothing to offer the world unless she herself has first been transformed and made into the Body of Christ in whom she partakes of Trinitarian life. It is Christ Himself that the Church brings to the world.

The Church must now show, as Jesus showed, the love that lays down its life for a friend. That's our mission – to be Eucharist for others. All that has happened in here, we are to take out there. If you are not leaving church with an awareness of mission and an eagerness to bring Christ to others, then you still are not understanding what the Mass is all about.

ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED
IN HERE, WE ARE TO TAKE
OUT THERE.

PART 7: THE RITE OF SENDING

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Rite of Sending

- What is your primary vocation in the world?
- Do you feel a call to some apostolate or ministry?
- To whom are you sent?
- What particular grace of God do you need to be able to live the reality of the Eucharist?
- Where do you see God's blessings in your life?

APPENDIX

Initially, the Meaning of the Mass resource was meant to assist small groups discuss the heart of our Catholic Faith: the great mystery of the Mass. However, as the resource was being developed, I realized that this could also be a great opportunity for catechesis and personal faith formation for individuals. As such, though not part of the Study Guide itself, I thought it would be useful to include a few specific questions into which we could delve more deeply. In the following pages, I included as an appendix six additional questions I answered while I was the auxiliary bishop of Seattle. It is my hope that my answers to these specific questions will be useful to you on your own faith journey. The Lord's peace to you all.

Q: In a recent column you commented on Pope Francis' suggestion that the text of the Lord's Prayer be clarified. Are there other parts of the Lord's Prayer that should be clarified?

A: I would like to preface my answer by saying that the following thoughts have not been publicly advocated by Pope Francis. Rather, they reflect my personal belief as a Catholic Christian and biblical theologian. With that qualifying comment stated, I will now address your question. Yes, I do believe there are other sections of the Lord's Prayer that one day might be clarified so as to more accurately communicate the divinely intended truth.

The most important clarification concerns the phrase "Give us this day our daily bread." The problem involves the use of the word 'daily.' The Greek term used in Luke 11:3 and Matthew 6:11 is *epiousion*, which doesn't really mean daily. It's difficult to know what this Greek term means because it is only used in this one line of the Lord's Prayer and no other place in the entire New Testament. In fact, *epiousion* isn't used anywhere in ancient Greek literature. It is almost as if this word was created specifically for this one line in the Lord's Prayer. That uniqueness should make us wonder why such a singular term would be used.

Before going on, let me first explain how it came to be translated as daily. It happened around the year 387 when St. Jerome was given the task of translating the Bible into the language of the people, which by then was Latin and no longer Greek. Jerome studied Hebrew and Greek for nearly 20 years before translating the texts into Latin. When he came to the word *epiousion* in the Lord's Prayer, he was perplexed and didn't quite know what it meant, so he seems to have translated it in a limited way using the Latin term *quotidiano*, which means each day.

Other early church fathers had a very different understanding of what the term meant, as Pope Benedict XVI pointed out in his 2007 book *Jesus of Nazareth*: “The fact is that the Fathers of the Church were practically unanimous in understanding the fourth petition of the Our Father as a Eucharistic petition.” They came to this conclusion because of *epiousion’s* very composition. The Greek term *epi* means above, higher, from above and even super. *Ousion* means essence, substance, being and nature. For this reason, the church fathers — including saints Ambrose, Augustine and Peter Chrysologus — commonly understood the phrase to refer to the supernatural bread of the Eucharist and not just the ordinary bread of daily sustenance.

This ancient belief has always been part of the Catholic Church’s deeper reflection on the meaning of the Lord’s Prayer. Even the Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly states that while there are several possible ways of understanding the term *epiousion*, including the traditional daily, the most probable and most literal translation is really super-substantial or super-essential. (CCC 2837) That’s the Eucharist! When we pray this petition of the Lord’s Prayer, we are really begging God to “Give us today our supernatural (eucharistic) bread.” That’s a prayer for daily reception of the Eucharist. When we understand the petition in this way, we can grasp the meaning of the remaining petitions:

- It is through our sharing in the body of Christ, the very life of Jesus in the Eucharist, that we receive the forgiveness which flows from our Lord’s cross (“forgive us our trespasses”).
- It is only in Christ Jesus that we dare to pray for forgiveness “as we forgive those who trespass against us,” because who can forgive perfectly, completely and eternally except Jesus himself? We can only forgive others through Jesus, with Jesus and in Jesus. We experience this communion with Jesus in a distinctive and extraordinarily graced way through the Eucharist.
- Jesus is the one who shows us how to overcome temptation, and he alone is the one who has perfectly lived in obedience to the Father, so it is only in our communion with him that we can truly say “lead us not into temptation.”
- Finally, Jesus is the only one who has triumphed over every force of sin and death through his cross and resurrection. He alone can protect us from the power of the Evil One if we remain in the palm of his hand. (see John 10:28-29) He alone can “deliver us from evil” in every sense.
- That is the power of the Eucharist to nourish our soul on a daily basis. Jesus wants us to desire that nourishment, to pray for that nourishment, and to make time to receive that nourishment.

Q: I've never read the Bible very much, but I'd like to. What's the best way to get started?

A: Your desire to read the Bible is a graced invitation from God! I urge you not to ignore that invitation but to start immersing yourself in the stories of the Bible today. As St. Jerome is credited with saying, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." Your study of the Bible, then, will inevitably open your mind and heart to Jesus himself.

Here's some suggestions that might help you to get the most out of your experience. It's always important to remember that the Bible is not so much a single book as it is a collection of books. In fact, the Greek term for the Bible is *ton biblon*, which really means "the books." So the Bible is a library and needs to be approached like a library. Some books relate history while others communicate through poetry. Even the prophets used specific styles of speaking in order to get their message across. With all these different literary genres, it is important to know something about the style of a particular writing so we don't misread the message. Think of a newspaper: We don't read the front-page news the same way we read the comics; nor do we read the opinion page the same way we read a recipe or the classified ads. You might want to use a study Bible that has an introductory section before each book to help you better understand the method of communication for that particular text.

Speaking of background, it's also important to know the historical and cultural world in which the text came to life. That's because each biblical author was trying to communicate a message to people experiencing particular situations and challenges. If we don't understand the historical circumstances in which a biblical book was composed then we are missing half of the conversation. Remember — the Bible wasn't born in a vacuum. To help you better understand some of the historical and cultural background to each biblical text, I would recommend using a one-volume Bible study tool like HarperCollins Study Bible or The New Interpreter's Study Bible to help you enter more deeply into the biblical story. In addition to the above two recommended approaches, I would also encourage you to always remember that Jesus himself is the Word of God come among us in the flesh. Jesus is the unique expression, in words and deeds, of God. For this reason, I recommend that a person read first those books of the Bible called the Gospels since they most clearly introduce us to the person of Jesus who is the revelation of the Father.

One last piece of advice would be to take time when reading a Scripture text to pray over its meaning. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind so you can let God reveal the meaning of the text to you. It is better to read one sentence and understand it deeply and personally than to plow through a whole chapter without personal understanding and application.

This process of prayerfully reading the Scriptures is called *lectio divina*. One very good resource I would recommend to help you experience *lectio divina* is entitled *Too Deep for Words* by Thelma Hall. Most importantly, don't be afraid of reading the Bible. When you have questions about particular passages, I encourage you to seek consultation with some more experienced reader to help guide your understanding. The church has been reading and praying over the Scriptures for nearly 2,000 years. There is a collective wisdom in the living tradition of our Catholic faith and I encourage you to access that sacred treasure as often as you need it. As you begin to dive deeply into the biblical texts, remember the teaching from Hebrews 4:12-13: "The word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword." Also, recall 2 Timothy 3:16: "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness." The great saints certainly experienced the sacred Scriptures in this way, and I hope you do as well.

Q: What is the right way to give the sign of peace at Mass?

A: The exchange of peace can be given in different ways; the meaning behind it is far more important than the manner in which it is expressed. When we better understand the meaning of what we are doing, we better appreciate why we do it immediately before receiving Communion.

Let's start with the meaning of peace, which is a word that we use a lot, but not always with the same understanding. Most of our thoughts about peace probably have to do with situations of distress — nations at war or people suffering turmoil, hostile exchanges in our civic discourse or individuals distressed with anxieties. In response to these troubling situations, people of all faiths and cultural backgrounds often wish and pray for "peace." This type of peace really just means the absence of violence and turmoil. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to be instruments of God's justice and healing for all who suffer violence.

This, however, is not the real peace we celebrate and pray for at Mass. This is the peace the world seeks; but as Jesus told us, he has come to bring peace "not as the world gives" it, but as God gives it. (John 14:27) The peace that Christ brings is not merely the absence of violence; it is the fruit of justice and love (see *Gaudium et Spes* 78), or as Pope St. Paul VI put it, "If you want peace, work for justice." In the Jewish world of Jesus, people believed that peace was the result of living in right relationship with God, self, others and the world around us. To be in right relationship was to be in a state of justice by treating others with respect for their God-given dignity. Such a state of justice brought harmony to individuals and nations. While the world may have hoped for this peace born of right relationship, such justice was not possible due to the alienating effects of sin. It was only with the birth of Jesus that angelic choirs could finally proclaim "peace on earth."

Jesus is the only one who can overcome the alienating effects of sin that divide us from God and one another. Our Lord accomplished this great reconciliation through his death on the cross in which he conquered once and for all the power of sin and death. It is this great reconciliation that restores the lost friendship between God and humanity.

That is why the cross of Christ is the source of our peace — because it is the source of our restored right relationship, our justification, with God. St. Paul echoes this truth: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace ... and in one body he reconciled us to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.” (Ephesians 2:13-16) This great grace Jesus accomplished for us through the cross of Calvary is one we must choose to accept and live.

After our Lord’s death and resurrection, he appeared to the disciples who were gathered in hiding. (see John 20:19-23) His first words to them were not of reprimand for denying and abandoning him, but of healing, mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation: “Peace be with you.” In that moment, they knew that our Lord’s mercy is always greater than their sin. Jesus then shared the gift of the Holy Spirit with them and empowered them to continue his mission of forgiveness and reconciliation in the world.

We can experience the peace of Christ even in the most distressful situations of life. It is a peace that comes from knowing and experiencing the presence of God with us, forgiving us and loving us. It is the peace that allowed the great martyrs to go to their deaths with confident trust and praying for their persecutors. It is the peace that guided the great saints to faithful perseverance even when they faced great resistance and rejection. Dante expressed this truth well in the Divine Comedy: “In his will is our peace.”

When we exchange the sign of peace at Mass, we do so with the same words Jesus spoke to the disciples, “Peace be with you,” because in our baptism we became members of the body of Christ and in the Eucharist we are formed even more so into his mystical body in the church. The exchange of peace, then, is more than wishing people to be free of violence and distress. It is even more than wishing them right relationship. Our exchange of peace is our willing response as members of the body of Christ to become ministers to one another of the reconciliation Jesus won for us on the cross. We are literally being Christ to Christ. It is also a time when we encourage one another to know and trust God’s presence, love and mercy, and to persevere in doing the Lord’s will. This is a sacred moment when the divisions in the body of Christ are healed through the grace of God passing through us. This healing is meant to bring about a real communion among us as we prepare to receive and share our deepest communion with God in the Eucharist.

The exchange of peace is not intermission; it is inter-ministry within the body of Christ to unite us as the body of Christ so as to prepare us to fully receive the body of Christ. How we exchange this sign of peace should always help others experience this deep and profound saving grace in their lives.

Q: What's the most important moment of the Mass?

A: I got this question during a Lenten mission at St. Monica Parish on Mercer Island. We had been reflecting on the profound meaning of various parts of the Mass and how they are meant to impact our lives as disciples. There are so many beautiful and meaningful moments: the consecration, Communion, the readings of Scripture and so forth. But I caught many off-guard when I said, "The most important moment of the Mass, the climax toward which the whole Mass is focused, is the final blessing and sending forth."

The very word Mass most likely comes from the Latin form of the final blessing, when the priest or deacon would proclaim, "Ite, missa est" ("Go, you are sent!"). They aren't telling us "Go home" or "Go away" or "Go to coffee and doughnuts." Rather, they are telling us that we are now prepared through our participation in the Mass and our reception of the Blessed Sacrament to be living tabernacles of Jesus' presence in the world. It really changes our understanding and experience of the Mass to realize that it is all for the sake of our being sent to be living members of Christ's body in our homes, offices, neighborhoods and every other place we find ourselves. That is why we are instructed by the Scriptures. That is why we are joined to Jesus in his one perfect eternal offering to the Father. That is why the Lord shares with us his body and blood. Everything we do and everything we experience is for the sake of being sent forth.

We see this great commissioning happen also in John 20:21, when Jesus said to the disciples in the Upper Room, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." At the end of Mass we are sent, not to do as we want, but to continue the mission of Jesus. Of course, that presumes we correctly understand the mission of Jesus so we can actively participate in it. The ultimate purpose for which the Father sent Jesus is to make God known so that the world might believe and be saved (John 3:16). This is the great work of God (6:29). To make God known, Jesus had to make love known, since God is love. Our Lord perfected his mission of revealing God to the world as he was lifted up on the cross of Calvary (3:14, 19:30). We are not to be passive witnesses in the face of this great revelation of love, which we celebrate and receive in the Eucharist. Rather, we are invited to become active instruments and conduits of that love so that the world may come to believe in God through us (17:23).

The Father so loved the world that he both sent and gave his only Son. Jesus gave himself to us on the cross, and he continues to give himself to us in the Eucharist. This great cascade of self-giving life and love is meant to pass through us every day. We should never bury this great grace lest God's hope be frustrated by our self-exemption from mission. When you hear those final words, "Go forth, the Mass is ended," think of it not as a conclusion but as a beginning — the fulfillment of the very purpose for which you came to church in the first place: so you could become the body of Christ you receive and grow the body of Christ by leading others to Jesus, who has made you his missionary and minister.

Q: Why do we say the Creed at every Sunday Mass?

The Creed can feel ordinary due to the frequency with which we recite it. But for early Christians, the Creed was anything but ordinary. It was a profession of the faith for which they were willing to die – and many did. Perhaps we can deepen our faith by remembering their witness every time we profess the Creed.

To answer your question, let's consider some historical and liturgical developments. Although the Creed developed over a few centuries – from the Apostles' (first century) to the Nicene (325), then the NicenoConstantinopolitan (381) and finally the Chalcedonian (451) – the basic content remained the same while clarifications and distinctions were added. Before any form of the Creed was used in a liturgical context, simple professions of faith were common in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles (e.g., Matthew 9:28, Acts 16:31). Eventually, Creeds were used in the Rite of Baptism. The catechumens were usually adults. The Creed served as a personal profession of faith (which is why it begins with "I" rather than "We") and was called the "Symbol of Faith."

The Greek word *symbolon* (meaning "put together") originally referred to an object broken in two, whose parts were given to different people. When the two people met and put together their individual pieces, the perfect fit served to ensure the identity of the persons. The Creed served this function, since the person to be baptized professed a faith that conformed to the faith of the Church. Thus, their identity was verified as a disciple of Jesus who embraced the fullness of faith passed on through the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Only someone who believed what the Church believed could make such a profession.

When the age of persecution ended with the Edict of Milan in 313, the Church began to celebrate publicly and openly the faith they previously had to keep hidden and secret. This triumphant proclamation of the faith quickly led to its incorporation into the liturgy. As early as the sixth century, the Creed was being openly and publicly professed at Masses in some parts of Europe. In 1014, the Creed was officially accepted by Rome as an appropriate part of the Mass. Today we continue this ancient tradition of professing the Symbol of Faith by which we personally acknowledge our communion in one faith, one baptism and one Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:5).

We should also consider where the Creed is placed in the Mass. Why not begin our liturgy with the Creed to verify the communion of faith we are about to celebrate? Or profess it at the end to remind us of the faith we are to carry into the world? The Creed's place immediately after the homily gives it particular significance.

Q: Why do we say the Creed at every Sunday Mass?

The liturgy is a conversation between God and God's people in which the priest serves as representative of both, and so speaks on behalf of both at different times. It is important to remember who is speaking and what is being proclaimed. In the biblical readings, God is speaking to the people. This conversation reaches a climax in the proclamation of the Gospel in which Jesus is proclaimed as the Word of God incarnate who now speaks to his body, the Church. For this reason, we stand for the Gospel and show other appropriate signs of reverence. Following the Gospel, the priest or deacon proclaims the homily which continues the Word of God as it is applied to our daily lives, leading us more deeply into the Paschal Mystery we are called to live and the memorial of which we are about to celebrate in the Eucharist. What a conversation God is having with us! The Profession of Faith is our opportunity as God's people to respond to the Lord's self-revelation and salvation. The word of God must be understood and accepted, lest we be passive spectators rather than active listeners (James 1:22). The Creed is how we say to God: We have heard you and we believe you!

The Creed is a summary of Scripture. It expresses our faith in God who is a Trinity of Persons that has acted in historical events and is revealed definitively in the person of Jesus. This revelation continues to mature and grow through the Holy Spirit present in the Church. We are proclaiming that we believe all this revelation, not just part of it, and that God offers it to us as an effective testament of his saving and redeeming love for us. What a conversation! What a gift! What a privilege to speak to God who has just spoken to us! What an active way to prepare ourselves to celebrate the Eucharist, which is opened to us through our baptism in which the Creed first united us to the Body of Christ, the Church.

The next time you profess the Creed at Mass, remember to whom you are speaking. Think about what God has just said to you in the Scriptures and in the homily. Reflect on what it means to be a member of Christ's people accepting the fullness of what God has revealed and eager to witness Christ to the world — even when it means shedding our blood for Jesus who shed his blood for us.

Q: At Mass, why does the priest break the consecrated host, and why is it done so subtly? Surely there's a meaning there, but if so, why is the congregation not engaged when it is broken?

You are correct that there's a meaning there. The breaking of the consecrated host is arguably one of the most important parts of the Mass. It is from this action that early Christians developed the first name for the eucharistic prayer of the church. Centuries before we referred to the eucharistic liturgy as "The Mass," we called it the "Breaking of the Bread." (see Luke 24:30, 24:35; Acts 2:42, 2:46, 20:7, 27:35; 1 Corinthians 10:16) The ritual of the "breaking of the bread", that is breaking of the consecrated host before communion, receives its significance primarily from Jesus' action at the Last Supper during Passover where he took, blessed, broke and gave the bread to the disciples while identifying that gift as his very body. (see Mark 14:22, Matthew 26:26, Luke 22:19) The Lord Jesus further stressed the reality of his flesh and blood as true food and true drink in the "Bread of Life discourse" in Chapter 6 of John's Gospel. (see John 6:51-57)

When Jesus broke the bread at the Last Supper, he was enacting a powerful prophetic sign — he was declaring that his very body would be broken and his very blood would be poured out. He was also stating that those who share in this sacred meal are participants in his very passion and paschal mystery. By breaking the bread, Jesus rendered present his crucifixion on Calvary in the very meal they were sharing. For that reason, St. Paul taught the early Christians of Corinth that their sharing in the Eucharist is actually a proclamation of the Lord's death until he comes again. (see 1 Corinthians 11:26)

Today we affirm this same truth when we proclaim the Mystery of Faith after the consecration in the Eucharistic Prayer as we say, "We proclaim your death, O Lord, and profess your resurrection until you come again." For this reason, we have traditionally referred to the Mass as the "un-bloody sacrifice of Calvary" in which we participate in and receive the grace of our Lord's death and resurrection. The ritual of the breaking of the bread also reveals the presence of the Risen Lord. The disciples on the road to Emmaus recognized the Risen Jesus in this action when Christ stayed with them. The Risen Lord took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them, and it was in this action that Christ's presence was revealed to them. (see Luke 24:29-35)

The congregation participates in this sacred action of breaking bread by proclaiming the title of Jesus as "Lamb of God." This is the title John the Baptist used when he pointed out the Lord in John 1:29: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." This title is one of the most profound statements of Jesus' identity and mission in the fourth Gospel.

It is on the cross of Calvary that Jesus becomes the true Lamb of God and accomplishes the world's salvation through the forgiveness of sins and the establishment of the new covenant in his blood. Indeed, that is why John goes out of his way to include multiple references to Jesus as the Passover lamb in connection with our Lord's crucifixion (see John 19:14, 31 — Jesus dies on the "Day of Preparation" as the Passover lambs are being slain in the Temple; John 19:29 — a hyssop branch is associated with Jesus as it was associated with the blood of the Passover lamb in Exodus 12:22; and in John 19:36, they are instructed to break none of his bones, a reference to the Passover lamb in Exodus 12:46). The title "Lamb of God" captures Jesus' deepest identity and mission in John's Gospel. The congregation proclaims this great title three times as the body of Christ (in the consecrated host) is being broken on the altar. Indeed, Jesus is our Lamb of God — the perfect and acceptable sacrifice who takes away our sins and brings ultimate peace for everyone who believes in him.

This great proclamation of the congregation should be a moment of profound reverence as we call upon the Lord's mercy and acknowledge the Lord's power to take away the sins of the world. In the "Breaking of the Bread," we actually become participants in the Lord's death and resurrection, his paschal mystery. The Book of Revelation continues to teach us about the victory Jesus accomplishes for us in his death and resurrection. The author refers to Jesus as the "Lamb once slain." (Revelation 5:6, 12) The Mass is sometimes described as the "Wedding Feast of the Lamb of God" for this reason. (see Revelation 19:9) In the Mass we celebrate and receive our Lord's definitive victory over the forces of sin and death.

This is the triumph of the Lamb of God. For this reason, many medieval architects of the ninth century began to include a prominent "triumphal arch" immediately over the altar to honor the victory of Jesus as the Lamb of God who offers himself for us in the sacrament of the altar. Examples of this architectural feature can still be found in traditional churches throughout the world. As you pray with the church this year, pay attention to the breaking of the bread and profess your faith in Jesus as the great Lamb of God who offers the grace of his death and resurrection to each of us in his body and blood. Thank the Lord for what he has done for us. As you receive his real presence (body, blood, soul and divinity) at Communion, pray that you may become that which you receive so that it is Christ who lives in us and no longer we who live for ourselves. (see Galatians 2:20)



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