

Understanding the Mass

Part 16 in a series

Presentation of the gifts

While I can't be 100% sure, I am pretty confident that this part of the Mass is probably one of the things that you might pay the least attention to. A beautiful hymn is being sung, the monetary gifts have been collected and now some folks, usually a family, will bring the gifts of bread and wine to the altar. This is such an automatic thing that we don't even give it much thought. But did you know that this is one of the most symbolic parts of the Mass as far as the congregation is concerned?

In the earliest days of the church the bread and wine used in the Mass were brought to the celebration by the congregation. Over time, as the churches grew larger, this was no longer feasible and so the church started providing the bread and wine that was to be used. However, the idea is still the same. We, as a church family, bring forward the bread in a ciboria (the vessel holding the bread) and the wine in a small cruet. These gifts will be transformed into his body and blood. This of course harks back to the bread and wine of the Last Supper. This bread and wine does not just magically appear. It is the result of the hard work of many human hands and the fruit of the earth. It is our offering to God. The people who bring forth the gifts represent all of us gathered together for the Mass. It is an immense honor to be chosen to do so and we should all be sure and pause at this point (as the gifts are presented to the presider) and quietly say a quick prayer to our Lord thanking him for the ability to bring these gifts to him. At this same moment, our tithes are also placed at the foot of the Altar because they too represent our gifts of thanksgiving to our God. Remember, the priest is accepting these gifts on our behalf and will be presenting them to God for us.

The Eucharistic Prayer – the most solemn part of the Mass (*Eucharist – Greek for to “give thanks”*)

We have praised our Lord in song, we have asked for forgiveness of our sins, we have heard our Lord speak to us in scripture, we have had the scriptures opened up to us in the homily, we have declared our beliefs by reciting the creed and have brought our prayers before the Lord. Now we reach the pinnacle of the Mass when the bread and wine become the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. At this point in the Mass we should give our absolute attention to the altar and the proceedings that are unfolding there. We should let nothing distract us. There should be no movement or activity in the church, no walking up or down the aisles. A miracle is about to occur in our midst and we should be in absolute awe and humbled by what is about to occur. So again, we should make sure that we participate and not just observe! We should give our spoken responses with heartfelt thought and enthusiasm and we should all sing when it is time.

There are several different Eucharistic Prayers that can be used by our priest at the Mass. All of the different types of prayers used have a common format to them that can be recognized. The following elements are part of each set of Eucharistic Prayers used by the priest:

- The Preface
- The Epiclesis
- The Institution Narrative
- The Remembrance (Anamnesis)
- Intercessions/ Doxology

We will take a brief look at each of these parts so that you can be prepared to identify them during the Mass.