

Understanding the Mass

Part 15 in a series

The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins

The Church has arranged the entire celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist in parts corresponding to the words and actions of Christ.

There are four fundamental actions to the Eucharistic Liturgy

1. *Taking* – In the preparation of the gifts the priest takes the bread, water and wine as Jesus took bread and took the cup.
2. *Blessing* – The prayer of praise and thanksgiving, from the Preface to the Great Amen corresponds to the second action of Christ: a blessing when He gave thanks and praise over the bread and the cup
3. *Breaking* – The breaking of the bread signifies the unity among Christians
4. *Giving* – The action of Christ giving himself to His Apostles is replicated by the priest giving the Body and Blood of Christ to the faithful

Over the next several weeks we will take a closer look at each of these actions as they occur in the Mass. But first, let's take a closer look at the things that take place in preparation for this most sacred event.

Fulfilling our Stewardship responsibility – The Collection

As the altar is prepared (which we will discuss next) a collection is taken up from among the faithful. This is our opportunity to fulfill our tithing commitment to the Church. Tithing is mentioned 46 times in the Scriptures. The practice goes back to the time of Abraham and beyond. In the New Testament, we have the approval of Christ on the practice. We simply cannot pass up the material and spiritual rewards God promised those who tithe. All reasonable persons know that we cannot outdo God in generosity!

Preparation of the Altar

While the collection is taking place the altar is prepared. Just as the ambo was the focus during the Liturgy of the Word, the altar is the focus during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. If a deacon is present, he will step up to the altar while various items are brought to him by the altar servers.

- *Corporal* – this is a large square piece of linen cloth, embroidered with a small cross, which is spread out by the deacon on top of the existing altar cloth. All of the vessels used during the Liturgy of the Eucharist will be placed on this cloth.
- *Chalice* – this is a sacred cup that is used to hold the wine that is consecrated
- *Purificator* – a linen cloth, embroidered with a small cross that is used to purify (clean) the chalice
- *Paten* – a small plate used to hold the bread that will be consecrated
- *Pall* – A small square of linen, stiffened by wrapping around a square of plastic, which is set on the chalice to prevent dirt or insects from falling into it
- *Cups* – Additional cups, filled with wine which sit on a separate tray or area that is lined with a Corporal.
- *The Roman Missal* – The book which contains all of the prayers and words used during the Mass. This was formally known as the *Sacramentary*

The Deacon will arrange all of the items appropriately on the altar while the altar servers will move to assist the Priest with the acceptance of the gifts that will be brought forward.