

Understanding the Mass

Part 21 in a series

The Rite of Communion, continued

We have prayed to Our Father with contrition and humility and have received the peace of Christ and given it to our brothers and sisters as well.

The Breaking of the Bread

This is also known liturgically as the “Fraction”. The priest takes the large host which has been consecrated and breaks it up into smaller pieces. This practice has biblical roots as it goes back to the Old Testament practice where the head of a family presiding at a meal recited a blessing and then broke and distributed the bread first, before other food. Jesus also did this at the multiplication of loaves and at the Last Supper. The *Breaking of the Bread* also became the name by which early Christians called the Mass. (Homework! Read Acts 2: 42 – 47. Read also the beautiful story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus and how they realized the presence of Jesus through the breaking of the bread. Luke: 24: 13 – 35.)

As the Fraction is taking place we sing the Lamb of God (Agnus Dei). We are addressing Jesus by this title and acknowledge that by his sacrifice he takes away the sins of the world and we ask him for his mercy. Lastly, we ask him to grant us peace. As we sing this hymn the priest will do something that we may miss if we are not looking closely. As he breaks the Host he takes a small piece and drops it into the chalice that contains the Precious Blood while saying quietly, “May this mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.” The body and blood were consecrated separately and are now joined together. This symbolizes both the resurrection of the Lord and the unity of the Church. (Homework! Google the term “Fermentum” to discover how the bishops and Popes of the early church would show unity with each other and their churches.)

The priest then raises the broken host and the chalice and using words directly from Scripture declares how blessed are we that are called to partake of the “supper of the Lamb.” (Homework! Read John 1:29 and Revelation 19: 9)

We respond with words directly from Scripture ourselves. “Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof..... This was a profound expression of faith by a Roman Centurion and was praised by Jesus. We use the same words today to express our faith in Christ in the Holy Eucharist: “...but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” (Homework! Read the story of the healing of the Centurion’s slave. Luke 7: 1-10)

The priest, facing the altar, will then quietly say, “May the Body (and Blood) of Christ keep me safe for eternal life.”

The priest and the deacon will then move to serve communion to the Extraordinary Ministers of Communion and in turn, all will move to serve the congregation.