



These *Liturgy Lessons* were edited and designed to be shared with the St. Joseph (Strongsville) Parish Community. All permission was obtained to use these lessons. During the National Eucharistic Revival, our community's Parish Pastoral Council, its Liturgy Commission, and the Parish Pastoral Staff desired to help all continue to learn and deepen the understanding of the liturgy that we celebrate.

With that in mind, these are presented here as they have and will be shared in the parish bulletin, online, and during Mass through the months of April-October 2023.

**May 2023**

## **LITURGY LESSON 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES**

Nearly twelve years ago, on the First Sunday of Advent of 2011, the Catholics of our country began using a new edition of the *Roman Missal*, which is the book of prayers and responses that we use at Mass. In the midst of the country-wide Eucharistic Revival, it seems an opportune time to renew and refresh our personal understanding and appreciation of the liturgy so that we might give God better and fitting praise.

Over the course of the next few months, each Sunday, you will find a *Liturgy Lesson* in the bulletin. We'll have one a week and each lesson will explore some facet of our worship at Mass. And occasionally, we will post some on social media. For those who have attended a Teaching Mass with Fr. Joe, this will seem similar to some of the things that he has shared. It is also an opportunity to share this material with the wider parish community. Since liturgy is everyone's act of worship, the hope of the Parish Pastoral Council, its Liturgy Commission and our Parish Pastoral Staff is to help us all better understand the various aspects of the liturgy so that it will be easier to actively participate in this sacred action of the Universal Church.

If you happen to miss a weekend, you'll be able to find these lessons on the parish website. This is an opportunity for us to deepen our understanding of the liturgy we weekly celebrate.

## LITURGY LESSON 2: PRINCIPAL PARTS OF THE MASS

As we begin our exploration of the Mass, it is important to recall that some of us were raised with the *Baltimore Catechism*, first written in 1842. It said that the Mass was composed of three principal parts: Offertory, Consecration and Communion. Many of us remember that if you missed one of those principal parts of the Mass you had, in effect, missed all of the Mass and had to come to another Mass! Suddenly that definition of the parts of the Mass disappeared after the Second Vatican Council. Why?

The main reason for the change was to restore the Scriptures to their proper role. Christ is as present when the Word is broken as he is when the Eucharist is shared! If the Baltimore Catechism were to be written today, it would say that there are two principal parts, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. A 21<sup>st</sup> century edition of the Baltimore Catechism would also likely say that:

- it's important to be prepared for Mass. It would encourage us to arrive a few minutes early so the tensions of the world have a chance to subside; the prelude before Mass seeks to enable this so that, when Mass begins, we're ready to celebrate, to listen attentively, and participate fully.
- Mass begins with the first note of the opening hymn and ends with the final note of the closing hymn.
- That throughout Mass, Christ might be found in many ways, particularly, in the assembly gathered at prayer, in the Scriptures proclaimed, in the person of the priest presiding, and most uniquely, in the Eucharist – Christ's body and blood!
- it's appropriate, after Mass, to quietly ponder our experience of the Lord at Mass – and to identify how God is calling each one of us to take His message out into the world.

For the golfers among us, there are many similarities between Mass and a round of golf – if it's important to arrive before Tee-time to warm up, and if it's encouraged to visit the 19<sup>th</sup> hole for some refreshment afterwards – shouldn't the same be true of our praise of God. Preparing ourselves for the celebration, and reflecting upon the celebration, will make the actual celebration more meaningful, more prayerful, and more enjoyable!

**LITURGY LESSON 3:**

**ENTRANCE PROCESSION AND VENERATION OF ALTAR**

We recall that those of us over sixty years old may remember when there was no opening procession to begin Mass. The priest and a couple of servers simply walked out into the sanctuary. Then, along came Vatican II, and what many of us might not be aware, most of the changes instituted by Vatican II were *not* new but rather were attempts to reintroduce many very old ways of celebrating Mass, including the opening procession. For instance, as long ago as the year 701 A.D. there is record of a procession to begin Mass in Rome.

The entrance procession is not just a way to get the priest to the altar; its purpose is to gather everyone together – to begin with something unifying – a procession and song – setting the theme for the celebration. Because the Entrance Antiphon or the Processional Hymn is meant to unite us in one common voice of praise to God, we try to sing it to some thematic conclusion, not simply an arrival at the altar.

As we sing, after all the ministers bow to the altar, the priest and deacon reverence the altar with a kiss. Why? First, a word about the altar: Historically, the altar has had a central place in any religion that had sacrifice as a principal practice. Also, in religions where a meal was very important, such as the Jewish faith, the table was considered sacred. By the Fourth Century our altar was called “the Table of the Lord.” The Catholic altar is a symbol of both actions: it is the place for the reenactment of the sacrifice of Calvary; and; it is the table from which we receive the Body and Blood of Life.

With all of that history and meaning, the altar is regarded as sacred because of what takes place upon it and what it symbolizes – Christ present in our midst. And as such, the altar stands in the center of our sanctuary.

## LITURGY LESSON 4: SIGN OF THE CROSS AND GREETING

We begin each Mass with the Sign of the Cross. Some may recall that the Latin Mass used to begin with a dialogue: “Dominus Vobiscum.” The congregation would respond with: “Et cum spiritu tuo.”

For those who have don’t remember Latin, the dialogue was: “The Lord be with you,” and the response was, “And with your spirit.” Many times during the old liturgy the priest would say “Dominus vobiscum,” and the server would respond, “Et cum spiritu tuo.” Since Vatican II, our response to anytime *the Lord be with you* was said, has been “and also with you”, but since 2011, our response – every time we use it – has been “and with your spirit”. It is a prayer that the Lord **be** with the priest’s spirit...his whole being – not just him as a person – but the priest as a body, spirit, and soul. As a part of the Mass, this dialogue response it is older than the Sign of the Cross.

The late Cardinal Bernadin of Chicago, in his *Guide for the Assembly*, said something interesting about the Sign of the Cross:

“The sign of the cross should be made with reverence and attention. By this simple gesture we identify ourselves as Christians. This sign marked us even before baptism and will mark us even after death.”

The Cardinal might have added that the sign of the cross is unique to Catholics. The only other Christians who make this sign are the Orthodox, who make it differently. Consider whether you consciously make the Sign of the Cross or do you just take it for granted? The same can be asked about the Greeting, which is repeated soon in Mass, right before the proclamation of the Gospel!

## **LITURGY LESSON 5: PENITENTIAL AND SPRINKLING RITE**

Prior to the liturgical reforms of the Vatican Council, the server had to memorize prayers in the Latin language, one of which, and reportedly, one of the most difficult, was the “*Confiteor*.” This prayer, which the server said quietly on behalf of the entire congregation, was a confession of sins.

When the experts discussed the reforms of the liturgy after the Second Vatican Council, they considered not having a penitential rite because there was evidence of only one occurrence of it prior to the 8th Century! After much discussion, however, they decided that a simple rite at the beginning of Mass was appropriate.

As Mass begins, the celebrant greets the congregation in words similar to: “*My brothers and sisters, to prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries, let us call to mind our sins*”. During the silence it is not the intention of the Church that we make a long, personal examination of conscience, but instead, we should focus on that sinfulness that prevents us from becoming what God wants us to be. As a member of this community, we each make an act of faith that with God’s help we can change.

Sometimes, especially during the Easter Season, a sprinkling rite may be used because it reminds us of the new life we share through our Baptism. This rite began in some early monasteries and by the Middle Ages, it began to be celebrated in parish churches. Through the blessed and sprinkled water, we are reminded of the life-giving waters of baptism. The appropriate response to being sprinkled is a bow and make the sign of the cross – for it was in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit that you were baptized. And, since it was through the water of baptism that we received the possibility of eternal life – we ought be honored to be drenched with that which once cleansed us of our sins.

## **LITURGY LESSON 6: GLORIA AND THE COLLECT**

In the very early Church, the *Gloria* was a hymn, composed by someone unknown, which incorporated many lines from the Bible. The first lines are taken from St. Luke and are a variation of the words spoken by the angels to the shepherds at the birth of Christ, “Glory to God in the Highest, and peace to His people on earth.”

We know that the *Gloria* is not sung or said at Mass during Advent or Lent. This is not to imply that the church does not give glory to God these liturgical seasons. The church, rather, uses our senses to create a different atmosphere during different seasons. In Lent the purple vestments, the austere environment, and the simpler music convey a penitential setting; while in Easter, the bright vestment, festive environment, and the return of the *Gloria* convey a more celebratory attitude.

Historically, the *Gloria* was probably first sung at an Easter sunrise Mass in a Church in Syria or Greece. By the sixth century it was part of the Pope’s Christmas Mass. By the eleventh century, it was sung on all Sundays and Feast Days in the western church.

Immediately following the *Gloria*, the priest addresses the assembly and says, “Let us pray.” There is a moment of silence – for us to silently pray – and then the priest offers a prayer. Sounds simple, doesn’t it? However, this prayer is one of the most ancient and most important in our liturgy. It was lost in the pre-Vatican Council celebrations of Mass, but the post-conciliar liturgy has restored this prayer to its importance. There is a different prayer for every Sunday, and the Church has incorporated prayers from many ancient traditions, including the Eastern Church.

This prayer, commonly called the Opening Prayer, is officially called “the Collect”, which takes its name from the country of Gaul, which Julius Caesar conquered in the Gallic Wars. Gaul was a very strong area for the Catholic faith, and by the fifth century in Gaul this prayer became known as “*Collecta*” and was subsequently adopted by the rest of the Church.

When we’re invited to pray next, let’s remember we have a time to identify the personal needs and/or petitions that you bring to Mass. When the celebrant prays the Collect, he is “collecting” or “gathering together” everyone’s personal needs and/or petitions.

## LITURGY LESSON 7: THE LECTIONARY

Having completed our study of the Opening Rites of the Mass, we now turn to the Liturgy of the Word. But, before embarking upon this aspect of the Liturgy, we'll spend this week learning about the books from which the Scriptures are proclaimed.

The Lectionary is the book from which the lector proclaims the scriptures. In every liturgical season except the Easter Season, the first reading at Mass is taken from the Hebrew Scriptures (commonly called the Old Testament) and the second reading is taken from the Christian Scriptures (commonly called the New Testament). Using the terms Hebrew and Christian Scriptures shows greater respect to the Jewish people, who are our older brothers and sisters in the faith.

The Book of the Gospels is a book separate and distinct from the Lectionary. The Book of the Gospels contains only the Gospels. It is this book that is processed into the church during the Entrance Procession. Although every text of scripture is God's Word, the Book of the Gospels is given heightened respect because it is the Word of Father shared with us by Jesus Christ.

The Sunday readings are chosen on a three-year cycle; today's readings won't be repeated until 2026. On Feasts, such as Pentecost, the readings are selected by the church to fit a particular feast. However, during Ordinary Time, we often read somewhat continuously from the same book – the case of this year, the Gospel of Matthew. If you were to attend weekday and Sunday Mass every day from now until 2026, you would have heard approximately 90% of the Bible.

As I mentioned, we processed the Gospel book into the church, why don't we process it out? Once the Gospel is proclaimed, we become the bearers of the Word. At the end of Mass, the Book of the Gospels remains in church as a reminder to us that we must carry into the world what has been proclaimed to us.



**LITURGY LESSON 8:**  
**THE READINGS AND RESPONSORIAL PSALM**

Our lesson focuses upon the readings we hear at Mass and the Responsorial Psalm that occurs between them. Later, we'll focus on the Gospel.

We begin with the First Reading. Jewish synagogue services had as their primary part the reading from what the Jews called Torah and *Nevi'irn*. The *Torah* is the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. *Torah* is the Hebrew word for *The Law*. *Nevi'irn* is a less well-known word that means *The Prophets*, and applies to much of the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures. This tradition was continued into the Christian Church, as the earliest celebrations of the Eucharist always included a reading from the Hebrew Scriptures. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has restored the Hebrew Scriptures to prominence because, as St. Augustine said, "In the Old Testament the New is hidden, in the New Testament the Old appears." On most of the Sundays of the year the first reading is from the Hebrew Scriptures, although on a few occasions, such as during the Easter season, it is a Christian Scriptures reading.

Turning our attention to the Responsorial Psalm, we are reminded that early Christians traditionally sang a psalm after the first reading. That is now our Psalm Response. Those who remember the Latin Missals might remember that this is what used to be called *The Gradual*. It was usually just recited quietly by the priest, yet today the psalm response has been restored to a place of special importance. The Church wants us to appreciate these ancient hymns, which were really the liturgical songs of the Jewish people. Preferably the Response is always sung, although occasionally we recite it – such as at weekday Mass.

Lastly, we look at the Second Reading. These New Testament letters became so important to the various communities that selections from them began to be read every Sunday. We know that these letters were read in the churches of the early Christian communities because in the last verses of Paul's letter to the Colossians, he says "After this letter has been read to you, have it read in the assembly in Laodicea." Now we, in Strongsville at St. Joseph Parish as with Christians throughout the world, hear these same letters read two thousand years later. It takes us back to the First Century, to our roots as Christians.

## **LITURGY LESSON 9: THE GOSPEL AND ITS PROCLAMATION**

As you may recall, at Sunday Masses, the Book of the Gospels is placed on the altar. The Book of the Gospels is appropriately placed there because of what the Altar and the Eucharist proclaim: the Good News of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. During all liturgical seasons, except Lent, the Gospel is then processed from the altar to the ambo during a sung *Alleluia*; a Hebrew word that means “praise God.” The sung *Alleluia* is an expression of the joy with which we are to anticipate the reading of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ.

At the conclusion of this procession, the priest or deacon places the Book of the Gospels on the ambo. He gives the usual greeting, yet again, our response will be changing to “and with your spirit” and then says, “A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew,” to which we respond, “Glory to you, **O Lord**.” Notice that we address the Lord because it is He (**Jesus**) who is speaking to us through the Gospel. Immediately, the priest or deacon does something unique. Using his thumb he makes the sign of the cross on the book, and then he makes small signs of the cross on his forehead, his lips, and over his heart. If you look around, many in the assembly do the same. Why? While there are no words that accompany this gesture, but the traditional meaning of this triple Sign of the Cross is this: “May the Word of the Lord, be in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart”

But, what about the Gospel itself? We know that Gospel means “good news” and that there are four Gospels, each written by an Evangelist, a Greek word which means “bringer of good news.” We know that those evangelists were Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We know that these men gathered the stories and sayings of Jesus and each arranged them in a book to present a particular point of view about this Man in whom they had great faith as Savior of the World.

From earliest times the primacy of the Gospel has been emphasized by special signs of respect and honor surrounding its liturgical proclamation. Notice, compared to other readings, we stand for the Gospel. Standing in the early church was the ultimate sign of respect – such as men once did when a woman entered the room. Also, incense and candles are sometimes used. Another sign of importance is that the Gospel is to be proclaimed by an ordained minister: a priest or deacon. At the end of the proclamation, the priest or deacon says, “The Gospel of the Lord,” and we respond “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.” We are speaking to the Word of God, Jesus, when we say that!

Finally, the priest or deacon reverences the Book with a kiss. He says quietly to himself, “May the words of the Gospel wipe away our sins.” The Power of the Gospel is profound: it gives us faith and has the power to turn us from sin.

## LITURGY LESSON 10: THE HOMILY

Those who were raised in pre-Vatican II times speak of the instruction after the Gospel as the “sermon;” those born after 1965 have seldom heard that same instruction referred to as anything but a “homily.” What is the difference? Neither “homily” nor “sermon” appears in the three editions of the *Baltimore Catechism*. As a matter of fact, in explaining the Mass, the old Catechism went right from the Gospel to the Creed, not even mentioning a sermon or homily.

But there was a sermon every Sunday, and a sermon in the pre-Vatican church was usually an explanation of a doctrine or law of the Church with no reference to the scripture readings. Often the bishop sent pastors a list of sermon-topics to preach about during the year. That is no longer the case...

In the revision of the liturgy, the Church said, “There must be a homily on Sundays ... it should not be omitted without a serious reason.” But what is the homily?

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, in reference to the homily, says: The treasures of the bible are to be opened up more lavishly so that a richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God’s word... By means of the homily, the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of the Christian life are expounded from the sacred texts.

A homily, then, is usually to be based on the readings of the Mass, and the priest or deacon is to draw a lesson for us about what we believe or how we are to live what we believe. A homily may also be based on a particular celebration, such as Pentecost, All Saints Day, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, or Christmas.

As a result of Vatican II, and its instruction about the homily, we have learned much more about the Bible than ever before. It was the hope of the Church Fathers who gathered for the Second Vatican Council, that such emphasis on the Word would bring us to a deeper faith!

## LITURGY LESSON 11: THE PROFESSION OF FAITH

The Act of Faith that we profess right after the homily every Sunday was first developed at the Council of Nicea in 325AD and then expanded and finalized at the Council of Constantinople a few years later. The early leaders were trying to capture the essential truths of our faith in one statement of belief. The Creed reached its final form in the middle of the Fifth Century. By the end of the sixth century, it was part of the Mass in most places. Just think the act of faith we profess has been part of the Mass for well over a thousand years!

As some of you may remember, an earlier English version of this Creed used to begin, “I believe.”, but since the Vatican Council, we have become accustomed to beginning the Creed with “We believe.” Since 2011, we returned to the existing practice of saying “I believe”...together, making a communal profession of our individual beliefs!

You may recall the addition of a new word – *consubstantial*. This is not part of our average English, yet its meaning bears a great deal of weight within our faith. We will use this word to describe Jesus. It comes from the Latin words that mean “with” (con-) and “substance” (substantia). Instead of saying that Jesus is “one in being with the Father”, we will say that he consubstantial with the Father, means Jesus is composed of the same substance of which God is composed. It’s a more succinct way of reminding us that Jesus is truly God and truly human.

A bit later in the Creed, you may notice that people bow. We do this in order to emphasize a key element of this Nicene Creed. We are asked to bow at the words: *by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man*. Bowing is a special honor paid to the mystery of the Incarnation – when Christ became man. Though God is always present to us, it was by the mystery of the Incarnation, that we were able to see, to talk with, and to experience the love of our God.

While we use the Nicene Creed throughout most of the year, during Lent and Easter, the Church gives us another option to make the profession of our faith. We are invited to use the Apostles’ Creed in place of the Nicene Creed. We have done this before here at St. Joseph. We do this as a way of preparing for our renewal of Baptismal Promises on Easter Sunday. Lent, long ago just as it is today, was a time for those becoming Catholic to prepare for baptism. It is also a time for those who are already baptized Catholics to renew their faith of baptism. To this end, we use the words that are used to make a profession of faith at baptism – during the season of Lent and perhaps Easter – to remind us of our baptismal faith.

## **LITURGY LESSON 12: GENERAL INTERCESSIONS**

So far, in these *Liturgy Lessons*, we have talked about many aspects of the Mass that are different since the Vatican Council. Some of these aspects involved changes or modifications of an existing tradition, while others were totally new. Our topic now is an element that is totally new to us since Vatican II – the General Intercessions or Prayer of the Faithful. Yet these types of prayers are some of the most ancient in the Catholic liturgy. Found first in the Jewish Synagogue, they were part of the Christian liturgy by the Second Century. However, over the centuries, and especially when as the Mass appeared to become an action only of the priest, these prayers disappeared.

After having heard the Word of God, we place before God the needs of our world, the Church, and our community. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal encourages us to pray for the Church, public authorities, those who are sick, the oppressed, the local community, and the dead. Whether at weekday or Sunday Mass, the nature of these prayers is meant to be petitionary. This means that our prayers at this time should only be of a nature that expresses our dependence upon God's providential care. While it might seem like a great place for prayers of thanksgiving, such prayers of thanksgiving are really inappropriate at this time; as they rightly belong after communion, when after we have received our Lord in the Eucharist and we are given the opportunity to give thanks!

The Vatican Council restored this ancient prayer. As much as possible, our weekly intercessions are written using various sources to reflect the real needs of our world, locality, and parish.

## **LITURGY LESSON 13: LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST**

Having completed our discussion of the Liturgy of the Word, we turn toward the second major part of Mass, the Liturgy of the Eucharist. As we begin on this part of our Liturgy, it's interesting to note that Catholics celebrated the Eucharist before the New Testament was written. This is important because:

- First, it simply demonstrates that what we will celebrate today was celebrated by the very earliest of the Christian communities. What we do today has been celebrated for nearly two thousand years. Think how much pride Italians, or Polish, or any nationality takes in its unique family celebrations – and those celebrations may be only a few generations old. For Catholics, the Eucharist is a celebration that is more than 900 generations old.
- Secondly, it explains why the narratives of the Last Supper, which appear in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, have differences. They recount the experiences of different celebrations by different early Christian communities. Celebrations of the Eucharist have never been identical. Eucharistic celebrations have always incorporated the beliefs and lived experiences of each community, much in the same way that Eucharist at St. Joseph reflects local nuances – while always being united with Rome.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with a very simple act, the preparation of the altar. The server will place a chalice and a purificator on the altar, and now again, since our restoration of receiving the Precious Blood after COVID-19, a cup containing wine. The purificator is a white cloth (similar to a napkin) used to cleanse, or purify, the vessels that are used during Mass. Also placed is the Roman Missal, the book that contains prayers appropriate for each liturgical celebration throughout the year.

## **LITURGY LESSON 14: PRESENTATION OF THE GIFTS**

One of the most ancient customs of the church is that of the people themselves provided the bread and wine for the Eucharist. As the Roman liturgy spread to other lands, this rite became a true procession of all the congregation who brought forth not only bread and wine but at times also oil, candles, wheat, grapes, and other items of precious value.”

In the transition from a farm-based society toward the end of the Middle Ages, the presentation of the actual bread and wine was generally replaced by the giving of money. Because bread and wine were no longer provided by the congregation, the Presentation of the Gifts was abandoned. It was not until after the Second Vatican Council that the Presentation of the Gifts was restored.

The Presentation of the Gifts is more than just a way of getting the bread and wine to the altar, nor is the Presentation of the bread and wine unrelated to the collection. The Bread, Wine and collection that are brought forward symbolize:

- Our commitment to the Church through the sharing of wages, salaries & allowances, and;
- Our ongoing commitment to the poor, the oppressed, the widowed, the orphaned, and the homeless.

In other words, the Presentation of the Bread and Wine is a reminder to us that it's not enough to merely place our financial resources in the basket; we must place our lives in service to God and his will. It is like we are presenting ourselves – our very own lives – before God at the altar to be transformed.

## **LITURGY LESSON 15:** **PRAYERS AT THE PRESENTATION OF THE GIFTS**

In this segment, we consider the various prayers that occur following the Presentation of the Gifts to the priest. There are a few:

- First, we see the priest raise both the bread and chalice a little above the altar and pray a formula, modeled on a Jewish table prayer, which blesses God (the creator of the world) for the gifts of bread and wine.
- Secondly, we see the priest or deacon pour wine into the chalice, and then he does something that may appear odd. He adds a few drops of water to the wine. Originally, this had a very practical purpose as earlier wines were very thick and strong – far stronger than the 12% alcohol content that we use today. It was very common to dilute it with water. Soon this mingling came to represent the union of Christ’s humanity and divinity; as once water is mixed with wine, the two are inseparable ... the water becomes an inseparable part of the wine – just as Christ united humanity and divinity in his person. So, much so, that they are inseparable – Jesus is fully God **and** fully man. As the priest/deacon pours the water, he prays: “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”.
- Then, we see the priest wash his hands, which has always had a relationship to the gifts that were brought to the altar. In ancient Jewish celebrations animals were sacrificed and washing hands was essential, but also, in the early years of the Church the ushers didn’t collect envelopes in a basket. The people may have brought bread, wine, oil, candles, grapes, and vegetables to the celebration to help support the community and the poor. Washing hands after receiving all of these gifts made sense! Over time, the washing became very symbolic, particularly, a reminder to the priest that he is imperfect and sinful, just like the people he represents. As he washes his hands, the priest quietly prays a verse of the 51st Psalm asking that the Lord may both wash away his failings and cleanse him of his sin.
- Finally, the priest invites us all to pray as the altar has been prepared with gifts that are representative of the entire community. After we respond, “...for our good and the good of all his holy Church,” the priest prays the Prayer over the Gifts. As a part of Mass, it has an odd history. It was always said out loud until about the eighth century when in France it became a silent prayer. No one knows why. At that time the French church had great influence in the Church, and so this silence was adopted by Rome. Those among us who remember the Latin Mass might remember that the prayer was actually called the “Secret.” The Vatican Council brought it out of secrecy and back to life. It is an important prayer, and we should listen to it. Remember, nothing happens at that altar without God’s action. In this prayer we are almost begging God to act on our behalf.

All of these prayers play a special role in our Liturgy as we prepare to celebrate what comes next: the Eucharistic Prayer.



**LITURGY LESSON 16:**  
**THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: AN INTRODUCTION**

Since Vatican II, the church has sought to restore the Liturgy of the Word to its role of prominence, yet the Eucharistic Prayer remains the heart of the Catholic Liturgy. We begin our Lessons on the Eucharistic Prayer by listening again to the late Cardinal Bernadin:

“When the altar has been prepared, we stand and are invited to lift up our hearts to the Lord, to give thanks and praise. Thus begins the Eucharistic Prayer in which we do indeed give thanks to God. The priest proclaims this prayer, but the whole congregation joins Christ in acknowledging the works of God and in offering the sacrifice.”

The Eucharistic Prayer, which is so central to our celebration, is not said exclusively by the priest. It doesn't begin when the congregation kneels; it begins with a dialogue between the priest and the people, another spot that underwent changes in 2011:

The priest says:	Lift up your hearts!
You say:	We lift them up to the Lord.
The priest says:	Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
You say:	It is right and just.

It's a small change, but one focused on the praise of God. Following this dialogue, the priest prays a prayer that is appropriately named the Preface. There are more than eighty Prefaces in the Church's ritual, and each one of them gives a reason for us to thank God. You'll notice that many of them are tied to the season we're celebrating whether it be Lent, Christmas, Ordinary Time, or a saint's feast day.

At the conclusion of the Preface we all join in singing the “Holy, Holy”. This is a very ancient prayer. The first part is from Isaiah and is part of the morning prayers said by the Jews in the synagogue. The last part, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” is the acclamation by the people to greet Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. As an ancient prayer, it has been translated several times over its life and again in 2011.

**LITURGY LESSON 17:**  
**THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER – PART II: THE BODY OF THE PRAYER**

We continue today with our *Liturgy Lessons* on the Eucharistic Prayer. In the Roman (Western) Church, we had only one Eucharistic Prayer for over fourteen hundred years. Many will remember that it used to be called “the Canon of the Mass.” Now we have several Eucharistic prayers that can be chosen by the Presider.

Each prayer is different, but each contains certain essential components. One of these is the epiclesis, which is a Greek word that means, “calling upon” or “invocation.” In this prayer, the priest asks God the Father to send the Holy Spirit to make ourselves and our gifts holy. During the Eucharistic Prayer, watch the priest’s hands. The epiclesis is when he extends them over the bread and wine that he asks the Father to “make them holy by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

We know that there were no video-cameras in the Upper Room to record Jesus’ every word and action at the Last Supper, each of the synoptic Gospels contains a descriptive narrative of the Last Supper. Each of these narratives, written after Christ’s Ascension into heaven, reflects what the first century Christian communities celebrated in memory of Jesus. That each of the Gospel narratives is slightly different should not be a source of concern, but should serve to heighten our awareness of the rich diversity that is of our faith.

As the Eucharistic Prayer continues, we arrive at something relatively new in our Church’s Liturgy, the Memorial Acclamation. It has no precedent in history. This is when the priest says, “Let us proclaim the mystery of faith”, and we respond, usually in song, with various forms of acclamations directed to Jesus himself. Soon, the priest will invite you to take your part with different words, just saying, “the mystery of faith!” The Church inserted this acclamation in the Roman Liturgy in 1967 so that the entire community could participate in the memorial. Jesus said, “Do this in memory of me,” and we are remembering the Mystery of our Faith, which is, as Larry Johnson in his book *The Mystery of Faith* says:

The mystery of faith is the mystery of Christ dying, rising and being present among His people. It is the **whole** plan of God, realized in Christ’s saving love.

Since 2011, a common acclamation was removed from the Roman Missal, one that said, “Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again!” After Vatican II, this was added, but it was unlike the other three remaining acclamations as it spoke about Jesus as opposed to addressing him. We know always address Jesus directly in our praise, not simply talk about him.

**LITURGY LESSON 18:**  
**THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER – PART III: THE GREAT ENDING**

Last week, we spoke about some of the components of the Eucharistic Prayer, particularly, the epiclesis. Now, we use another Greek word, “anamnesis,” to describe a further essential component of our Prayer. Anamnesis means ‘memory.’

Scripture scholars tell us that the Last Supper was probably a Passover Meal, a “seder.” At Passover, even today, a part of the ritual is that a young Jewish boy will ask, “Why is this night different from all other nights?” The rest of the Passover Meal is remembering their deliverance from Egypt and the journey to the Promised Land. This remembering was their “anamnesis.”

The priest reminds us of the “death (Jesus) endured for our salvation,” and “his glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven.” This is our “anamnesis.” We call that the Paschal Mystery. “Paschal” is Greek for “Passover.” As we remember what Jesus did for us, we also enter into, celebrate again, this Paschal Mystery. The suffering, death and resurrection is celebrated again by this community. it is, in a way, a living ‘anamnesis.’

All of this leads us to the great ending of the Eucharistic Prayer. Its ending might be summed up best as St. Justin Martyr wrote long ago, ‘When the prayer of thanksgiving is ended, all the people present give their assent with an Amen.’ So this is a very ancient acclamation! The priest raises the Body and Blood of Christ in a gesture of offering, lifting them up as if to the Father. We then are to respond, “Amen.” Of course, it should be sung. It is the most important acclamation of the Mass.

But what does it mean? While it is not in the tradition of St. Joseph, nor of most Catholic parishes, there are communities, particularly of African-American descent, that spontaneously call out “Amen!” to affirm the truth of what they have just heard. “Amen” often rings throughout those churches, and they are on to something, for “Amen” is a Hebrew word which means ‘so be it,’ or “It is true,” or “I agree.”

Our priest has completed the Sacrifice, the living remembrance of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. And so, brothers and sisters, what better way to respond than with a resounding “Amen.” “So be it!”

## **LITURGY LESSON 19: OUR FATHER AND SIGN OF PEACE**

We're all very familiar with the Lord's Prayer, but let's reflect upon its place its place in the Liturgy.

The Lord's Prayer first entered the Mass in the late fourth century. With its themes of bread, forgiveness, and mutual peace, this prayer was an ideal preparation for communion. So, it is another one of those hinges of the liturgy. It comes immediately after the Great Amen and is the first prayer of the Communion Rite.

Oddly, although this is the most well-known prayer in Christianity and familiar to all of us, prior to the reforms of the Vatican Council, this prayer was said only by the priest, and the congregation simply responded 'Amen' at the end.

Some people, you may have noticed extend their hands in a prayer-posture, which others do not. As a Diocese, it was suggested way back in 2003 that we pray this prayer with the open arms of surrender before God. But, clearly, no judgment should be made by anyone of those who chooses to use a gesture or not. The important points to remember are that this is the one prayer that Jesus taught us, and it is the prayer chosen by the Church to help prepare us for Communion.

Our common prayer is then followed by another sign in our Liturgy – the Sign of Peace. In the early Church, this occurred immediately after the Liturgy of the Word. By the fifth century in Rome it came after the Our Father and by the end of the Middle Ages it had disappeared. Occasionally, at a Mass with a bishop, you would see a very ritualized sign of peace between the bishop and deacon and a sub-deacon.

It disappeared because, as we have said several times in these *Liturgy Lessons*, the Mass appeared to have become the private prayer of the priest. But after Vatican II with the Church's restoration of the Sign of Peace to its position after the Our Father. Here is what the Roman Missal says about its purpose: *before they share in the same bread, the faithful implore peace and unity for the Church and for the whole human family and offer some sign of their love for one another.*

Each of us is representative of the Body of Christ, so when we share an expression of peace with those on our right and left we have (through their representation) shared the greeting with everyone.

Remember, Jesus said, "This is how all will know you for my disciples; your love for one another." So the Church asks us to share a sign of that love. True, we may not even know the person near us, but that doesn't matter. They are a brother or sister in Christ.

**LITURGY LESSON 20:**  
**BREAKING OF THE BREAD AND THE LAMB OF GOD**

In the Acts of the Apostles St. Luke says, “They devoted themselves ... to the breaking of the bread.” And in another place, “... in their homes they broke bread.” Apparently that was one of the phrases used to describe the Eucharist in the early days of the Church. During our celebration today, I will say: “he took bread and gave you thanks. He broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said, take this all of you and eat it...”

In our liturgy the bread is actually broken after the Sign of Peace and just before Communion, during the Fraction Rite. Usually, this occurs while the Lamb of God is being sung. This simple action was never, however, just a practical necessity. It always had a special, sacramental meaning – we find it referenced both in the writings of St. Paul and the Didache, a 2<sup>nd</sup> century series of writings on Church practice.

As it is today, hundreds of years ago, while the bread – literally loaves of bread – was being broken – it was taking a great deal of time, Pope Sergius I, introduced the chant, *Lamb of God*, as another acclamation of praise addressing Christ.

It’s interesting to note how it’s constructed: twice we say or sing, ‘Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.’ Then we say or sing once, “Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace.” The chant is actually designed so that the first refrain can be sung as many times as necessary to fill the time needed to prepare the hosts for Holy Communion. Then the final refrain is sung to bring everything to a conclusion.

During the Middle Ages, when people often received Communion only once a year, obviously the need for the chant diminished and so it was kept in the Liturgy but in a shortened form ... and, at one point, was often just said quietly by the priest. With Vatican II, the Lamb of God was restored to its original place and its original length ... to cover the entire action which takes place during the Fraction Rite.

## **LITURGY LESSON 21: COMMINGLING & LORD, I AM NOT WORTHY**

At the conclusion of the Fraction Rite, the priest does something that most of us cannot really see very well. He takes a small piece of the host, the Body of Christ, and places it in the chalice to commingle with the Blood of Christ. That is the word used to describe it, ‘commingling.’”

The history of this ritual is not clear, and in the reform of the liturgy very little attention has been given to it. Traditionally the symbolic meaning has been that the separation of bread and wine, Body and Blood, signifies the death of Jesus, and this commingling signifies his resurrection. However, that is only symbolism and not reality since the living Christ is present with us regardless of the commingling.

Perhaps the best meaning is found in the words that the priest says when he drops the piece of the host into the chalice. “May the mingling of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.” This reminds that whether we receive only the Body of Christ or the Precious Blood, we receive the whole of Christ.

Following the conclusion of the Lamb of God, after the priest has commingled Christ’s body and blood, the priest makes a great proclamation of faith for us. While raising the host, or the host and chalice, the priest says, “Behold the Lamb of God, Behold Him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb”.

Echoing the words of St. John the Baptist, who pointed out Jesus to those who were traveling together with him, the priest invites us to look upon Jesus – who is truly present in the Eucharist. In faith, then, we make a response of faith and humility – also using again words found in the Gospels.

Our response to this Invitation to Communion, comes from the Gospel of Mark, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed”. These are the words used by the Roman centurion who came to Jesus seeking healing for his servant. As people of faith, we stand before our God – that’s humility – and faithfully proclaim the faith we have in Jesus.

So, each time we are invited to look upon Jesus, we recall the faith of the Roman centurion, and with him, ask that Jesus may indeed truly heal us!

**LITURGY LESSON 22:**  
**NORMS SURROUNDING RECEPTION OF COMMUNION**

Today, we reflect upon the reception of Communion – something most of us have been doing since second grade, yet an action worthy of reflection.

Since Vatican II, the Church offers us two ways to receive the host, either directly on the tongue or in the hand. Some people were upset by allowing reception in the hand. It seemed that we had a great reverence for the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, and not touching the Eucharist added to that reverence. Yet in 1977, the American Bishops allowed reception in the hand to begin in our country. Why? Let us look at this through three reasons:

- For a thousand years, Catholics received Communion in the hand. But, by the Middle Ages, a sense of unworthiness developed so that most Catholics received Holy Communion only once a year. Most began to kneel and receive Communion on the tongue, while other parishes even put hands under a white cloth so there was no chance the host would be touched.
- At Vatican II, the Pope and the Bishops really wanted Catholics to feel less of a separation from the Church. All the people comprise the People of God. Each Catholic has his own vocation, but no Catholic is better than another simply because of the role she or he fulfills.
- A practical Liturgical change was that new churches were being built without Communion rails. This, too, was to lessen the separation between altar and people and to gather the people around the altar as much as possible.

All three of these combined to bring about standing for the reception of Holy Communion and being able to receive Communion in the hand or on the tongue. There is no preferred way of receiving – whether in the hand or on the tongue, but standing to receive Communion is the norm for the United States. Either receiving Communion in the hand or on the tongue can and must be very reverential. Regardless of whether a Eucharistic minister, priest, or a deacon offers Communion, one receives Jesus. Who we receive, has nothing to do with who offers Him to us. When receiving Communion in the hand, please remember:

- Extend both hands out in front of you, your dominant hand cupping the other.
- After the host is placed in your hand, step to the side, and use your fingers to pick it up and to place it in your mouth. It is OK to chew it.

The question is often asked: May I receive Eucharist more than once a day?

The norm is to receive Eucharist once a day ... the reason being that, having been nourished by the Lord, we are to go into the world and embody the Lord to others. So, the norm is not to receive Eucharist multiple times on any particular day.

That having been said, there are numerous exceptions to the norm. For example:

- You participated in a Morning Mass on your way to work, and received Eucharist in the morning. Now you find that your schedule permits you to attend evening Mass. May you receive again? Yes ... the discipline is that one may receive Eucharist a second time in a day **only if** that reception is associated with mass.
- You are participating in several different celebrations on a particular day, and wish to receive Eucharist at each. Can you?
  - Provided that they are distinct celebrations, you may receive multiple times in a particular day.
  - Attending all four of our Sunday Morning Masses, as a member of the assembly isn't necessarily, in the spirit of the law, what multiple celebrations on a particular day mean. So, if you attend multiple Masses as a member of the assembly, it's probably most appropriate to receive but once.
  - But, if you were to attend a Saturday morning funeral, an afternoon wedding, and an evening vigil Mass for Sunday ... you'd be participating in three distinct celebrations and could, ideally, receive Eucharist three different times on one day.
  - If you attend a Saturday evening Vigil Mass and receive Eucharist, can you also attend Mass on Sunday morning and receive? Definitely, because although it's the same liturgy; it's celebrated on two separate days.

Another question often asked: Why can't non-Catholics receive the Eucharist?

In short, because they do not possess the same understanding – the same common unity of belief – that we do, as Catholics, in the Real Presence. We not only receive Communion, but have communion in the unity of our belief that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist. He is present body, blood, soul, and divinity in the Eucharist. Others do not believe this to be the case and as such, the communion of belief is not shared. We pray for the day that all will be united in the belief of Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist.



## **LITURGY LESSON 23: THE COMMUNION RITE**

As we approach the Eucharistic Minister or priest to receive the Body of Christ and for those who choose, the Precious Blood, as well, we are participating in the Communion Rite.

During the entire Communion Rite, a Communion Antiphon or Communion Hymn should be sung. Rightly, this should begin as the priest receives (the start of the Communion Procession) and it shouldn't conclude until the last person has received (the end of the Procession). As explained later, after the last person receives Communion, the assembly is then seated or may kneel to begin private prayer. A common song during the Communion Rite serves several purposes:

- It symbolizes our unity ... so that, even the young child – or the spouse of another faith tradition – each of whom cannot partake of the Eucharist ... is still one with us in song and prayer!
- As a community we have partaken of the Lord, and as a community we should give thanks!

As we return to our places within the church, we ought to recall in Luke 2:19 where it speaks of how Mary: “kept all these things, reflecting upon them in her heart”. The intimacy she shared with God wasn't cursory ... she allowed the richness of the moment to touch her for long periods afterwards.

When we receive the Eucharist, we have an experience of *intimacy with God* that is nearly identical to Mary's intimacy ... and ours is a call to ponder the moment. The time to ponder is not during the Communion Rite, since that's a period of communal experience. As we prepare to receive, we are to be singing the Communion Hymn, once we have received and are able to do so, we should begin to sing the hymn again. We should not return to our seat and begin praying. Bishop Perez reminded us in 2019 that his desire was that all remaining standing and singing until the last person has received Communion, not when the Tabernacle doors are closed. Once the last person has received, the assembly begins the time of reflection. This is the time to do as did Mary: PONDER.

- PONDER the fact that it's not just you who have been ONE WITH THE LORD.
- BE AWARE that the same intimacy with God that you shared was also shared by:
  - the person sitting beside you
  - the family member with whom your upset
  - the friend with whom you haven't recently spoken.
- LISTEN to the one with whom you hope to spend eternity.
- KNOW that your experience wasn't unique ... but was shared by nearly everyone else gathered here – and be consciously aware of that.

The Communion ends with the Prayer after Communion, which serves to gather all of our prayers of Thanksgiving together and it some way, asks God to help us do something in our lives with what (the Eucharist) we have received.

## **LITURGY LESSON 24: THE CONCLUDING RITE**

Although the celebration of the Eucharist in the early Church seems to have ended immediately after Communion, Christians soon felt a psychological need to round off the liturgy with a concluding rite. Over the years, various things were added. Some of us will remember that the lengthy opening verses of the Gospel according to John were quietly said by the priest at the left side of the altar just before the final blessing.

All of that has now been simplified. Usually, we have announcements which above all are meant to draw our attention to ways in which we might be involved in the parish community throughout the week.

After the announcements, there is a blessing, which may be short or long at the discretion of the priest, and then there is the dismissal or the *Ite Missa Est*, as it was called in the old liturgy. *Ite Missa Est* simply meant, “Go, the Mass is ended.” Now there are several more meaningful dismissals, the most common of which may be ‘The Mass is ended, go in peace.’”

As a final act the priest kisses the altar, the symbol of Christ and the place of sacrifice, for the last time. The concluding procession is the least important of the processions of the Mass. It is simply a means of leaving the place of worship and may be done with or without music – with, or without, song.

As we conclude Mass today, let us be prepared to live what we have celebrated and “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by our lives.”

**LITURGY LESSON 25: SOME ISSUES:**

**Leaving Mass Early; How Long Should Mass be Anyway?**

Having discussed the liturgy, there are a few topics that might be good to discuss as these liturgy lessons conclude; one that's often pondered is: *Why do people leave Mass early?* Frankly, one of the reasons is that in previous eras of the Church, we only stressed "going to Mass" or "attending Mass" rather than **participating in** a celebration. There was even a point in time wherein we defined *how late you could be* or *how early you could leave* without doing something serious against Church law.

On the other hand, there is probably just a bit of human nature in it. Sometimes we just think that we have more important things to do and want to avoid the rush. Mass begins with the start of the opening hymn and concludes with the last word of worship ... which is often the final word of the closing hymn.

And here is another complex issue: *How long should Mass be?* Remember when you would hear a priest praised because he "*did* a twenty minute Mass." In light of what we now know about the Liturgy that would not be something of which to be proud. Our celebration of Word and Eucharist should be *as long as necessary* to enrich our lives as Catholics.

Trying to figure out answers to questions, "*Why do people leave early?*" and "*How long should Mass be?*" is really pointless. Today the whole emphasis of the Church is different. The Church is saying to us that the Mass is a *celebration of a family*. We should want to be here, and we should participate as fully as possible. So rather than emphasize the negative, we hope that the people of St. Joseph as many often do already will continue to celebrate together as a family – arriving on time, staying until the end, and see recognizing that what we celebrate is the center of our Catholic life.

Today marks the ends of our *Liturgy Lessons*. When we began this series, it was our hope to help us grow in awareness of the Eucharist we celebrate each week. We pray that these have been a source of reflection, growth, and new insight into the timeless gift of Jesus – that is – the celebration of the Eucharist that we share each week!