



SESSION FOUR

The Liturgy of the Eucharist: Preparation of the Gifts and Eucharistic Prayer

Elements of the Liturgy of the Eucharist

A. Preparation of the Gifts

- Preparation of the Altar and Presentation of the Gifts
- Prayers at the Preparation of the Gifts
- Mixing of the Water and Wine
- Washing of Hands
- Prayer over the Offerings

B. Eucharistic Prayer

- Preface
- *Sanctus*: “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord”
- *Epiclesis*
- Words of Institution and Consecration
- Mystery of Faith
- *Anamnesis*, Offering, Intercessions, and Final Doxology

Review the Context

In the Liturgy of the Word, we encountered God’s Word spoken personally to each of us through the readings from Scripture. As the Second Vatican Council taught, in Scripture “the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them.” After hearing the Word of God proclaimed and then explained in the homily, we responded by professing our faith in the Creed and by presenting our petitions to God. Nourished by God’s Word, we now prepare to be fed by Jesus’ Body and Blood in the next main section of the Mass, which is called the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist consists of three principal parts: (1) In the Preparation of the Gifts, representatives of the people present bread and wine to the priest, who blesses these gifts to be used in the Mass. (2) In the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest celebrates what Jesus did at the Last Supper. Christ’s sacrifice is made present sacramentally, and the gifts of bread and wine are changed into his very Body and Blood. And (3) in the Communion Rite, we receive Jesus’ Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, in Holy Communion.

In this session, we will focus on the Preparation of the Gifts and the Eucharistic Prayer, while the Communion Rite will be treated in the next session.

Read

Read the prayers for the next two parts of the Liturgy of the Eucharist: the Preparation of the Gifts and the Eucharistic Prayer. This will take you from the preparation of the altar and the priest’s washing of his hands to the “Holy, Holy, Holy” (the *Sanctus*) and the Eucharistic Prayer, which culminates with the closing doxology.

In the section titled “The Liturgy of the Eucharist” in the *Biblical Walk Through the Mass* book, read Chapters 14 and 15 (“The Preparation of the Gifts”) and Chapters 16 through 21 (“The Eucharistic Prayer”).

Take a Deeper Look

Answering the following questions will help you understand the scriptural roots of the Preparation of the Gifts and the Eucharistic Prayer in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. If you do not understand something, make a note to bring it up in your small group discussion.

PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS

In this section of the Mass, the priest and people prepare for the Eucharistic Prayer, which makes present Christ’s Body and Blood and his redeeming sacrifice. In anticipation of those sacred rites, the altar is prepared, the gifts of bread and wine are presented, and the priest recites various prayers over the gifts and performs rituals such as the washing of hands and the mixing of water and wine. Our study will now look into the biblical background of a few of these rites.

Presentation of the Gifts

1. One of the earliest traditions in the Mass is that of Christians providing the bread and wine for the Eucharist. This comes in a rite called the Presentation of the Gifts.

- a. Several Old Testament verses speak of “the staff of bread” (see Leviticus 26:26; Psalm 105:16). What is a staff? In what way is bread like a staff?
- b. Wine was viewed as a great gift of creation. Read Psalm 104:15 and Sirach 31:27 and 39:26-27. How do these verses depict wine as a symbol of life and joy?
- c. **Think About It:** We have seen how the Scriptures present bread and wine as great gifts to man—basic necessities that nourish and sustain life and bring joy. In light of this biblical background, what would be the meaning of the people at Mass offering bread and wine back to God?

Washing of Hands

- 2. In preparation for the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest washes his hands. The washing of hands reflects an ancient biblical practice that signified the interior, spiritual cleansing necessary before the priest entered a sacred place and performed a sacred duty.
 - a. Read Psalms 24:3-4 and 26:6-8. Where do these psalms describe the ritual washing of hands as taking place?
 - b. Read Exodus 30:17-20. According to these verses, who was supposed to wash their hands, and when?
 - c. **Think About It:** In light of this biblical background, what do you think the priest’s washing of his hands at Mass signifies?

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

The Church has called the Eucharistic Prayer “the center and summit of the entire celebration” of the Liturgy (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 78). The Eucharistic Prayer consists of several parts: A Preface prayer of praise and thanksgiving is followed by the *Sanctus* (“Holy, Holy, Holy”), the *epiclesis* prayer (the invocation of the Holy Spirit), and the institution narrative and consecration of the bread and wine. “The mystery of faith” acclamation is then followed by the prayers of memorial (*anamnesis*), offering, intercessions, and doxology (a prayer glorifying God). We will now examine the biblical background for a few of these parts of the Eucharistic Prayer.

Preface

3. At the start of the Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest says to the people, “Lift up your hearts.” Read Colossians 3:1-4, where Paul similarly challenges us to set our minds on heaven.
 - a. According to Colossians 3:1, who is it that is above—the One upon whom we are to set our minds?
 - b. Review the quotes from St. Cyprian and St. Cyril on page 119 of the *Biblical Walk Through the Mass* book. In light of the verses from Colossians 3:1-4 and the reflections of these two saints, what do you think it means to lift up your heart? And why is it important to do so at this point in the Mass?

Holy, Holy, Holy

4. The first part of the prayer known as the *Sanctus* (the “Holy, Holy, Holy”) comes from a vision God gave the prophet Isaiah, in which Isaiah saw angels singing these words before God’s throne in the heavenly temple.
 - a. Read Isaiah 6:1-4. The angels in Isaiah’s vision are called the *seraphim*, which means “burning ones,” suggesting they are close to God and reflect his radiance. In what ways do these angels reverently respond to being in God’s presence?
 - b. Read Isaiah 6:5-8. How does Isaiah respond to hearing God’s voice and being in his presence?
 - c. **Think About It:** How does our experience of what is about to happen at the consecration at Mass (with the bread and wine becoming the Body and Blood of Jesus) parallel the experience of Isaiah and the angels in Isaiah 6?

- d. **Think About It:** How might Isaiah's and the angels' response to the divine presence serve as a model for how we should approach the Eucharistic Prayer?

Words of Institution

In the words of institution, the priest repeats Jesus' words of consecration over the bread and the wine at the Last Supper:

TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND EAT OF IT,
FOR THIS IS MY BODY,
WHICH WILL BE GIVEN UP FOR YOU. ...

TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND DRINK FROM IT,
FOR THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD,
THE BLOOD OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL COVENANT,
WHICH WILL BE POURED OUT FOR YOU AND FOR MANY
FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME.

- 5. The words of institution are profound in biblical meaning. Let us consider some of them.
 - a. First, the priest at Mass repeats Jesus' words about his Body being "given up for you." The Greek verb used here for "given up" is *didonai*, which sometimes has sacrificial overtones and which, in the Bible, can be translated as "offered" or "offered up." Read the following passages in which this verb is used. What is being given or offered up in these passages?

Luke 2:24

1 Maccabees 2:49-50

1 Maccabees 6:43-46

Mark 10:45

- b. Second, the priest at Mass repeats Jesus' words about his Blood being "poured out for the forgiveness of sins." Read Leviticus 4:7, 18, 25. For what purpose was blood poured out in these passages?
 - c. **Think About It:** With the words "given up" and "poured out" having these sacrificial overtones, Jesus is clearly referring at the Last Supper to some kind of sacrifice. According to his words at the Last Supper, what does Jesus intend to be offered up and poured out in sacrifice?
6. The priest also repeats Jesus' concluding words from the Last Supper, "Do this in memory of me."
- a. Read CCC 1363. What is the biblical meaning of "memorial"?
 - b. **Think About It:** We have seen Jesus speak of offering up his Body and Blood as a sacrifice at the Last Supper. Now, at the end of the meal, he says, "Do this in memory of me." Given the Jewish understanding of "memorial," what is the significance of Jesus' words "Do this in memory of me"? For more background, read CCC 1364–1367 and the excerpt from the book *A Biblical Walk Through the Mass*, reprinted in the boxed text on this page.

ABOUT THE LAST SUPPER AND THE CROSS

Understanding this connection between the Last Supper and the Cross sheds important light on how the Eucharist we celebrate today commemorates Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. For Jesus concludes the institution of the Eucharist by saying, "Do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19). What is the "this" that Jesus commands the apostles to do? It is to celebrate the New Passover sacrifice of his Body and Blood. And how are they to do it? As a biblical memorial. The word memory used in the Mass translates the biblical word for "memorial" (*anamnesis*), which, as we have seen, means much more than merely remembering the past. The liturgical memorial brings the past and present together, making the long-ago event mystically present for the current generation.

Hence, when Jesus commands the apostles, "Do this in memory of me," he is not telling them to perform a simple ritual meal that will help people remember him. He is instructing them to celebrate the Last Supper as a liturgical memorial. All that was involved in the Last Supper—most particularly, the sacrificial offering of Christ's Body and Blood—would be made present to worshippers in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Therefore, as the memorial of the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist makes the events of the Upper Room and Calvary sacramentally present to us today. Just as the ancient Jews participated in the Exodus year after year through the memorial of Passover, so do we Christians participate in the new Exodus of Jesus' triumphant death on the Cross every time we celebrate the new Passover of the Eucharist.

It is in this sense that the Mass is to be understood as a sacrifice. As the *Catechism* explains, "In the New Testament, the memorial takes on new meaning. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ's Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the Cross remains ever present" (CCC 1364). And this sacrifice is made present for a salvific purpose: so that its power may be applied to our lives for the daily sins we commit and so that we can unite ourselves more deeply to Christ in his act of total self-giving love (see CCC 1366).

—Edward Sri, *A Biblical Walk Through the Mass*, 136–137

The Doxology

At the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest holds up the Eucharistic Body and Blood of Christ and praises the Father, saying, “All glory and honor is yours, for ever and ever.” To this, the people respond, saying “Amen”—a Hebrew word that means “so be it,” which is used to affirm the validity of what has just been said. In the Bible, it is often used in liturgical settings.

7. Read the following passages. What declaration is being affirmed by the response “Amen”?

1 Chronicles 16:36

Nehemiah 8:1-6

Revelation 5:13-14

8. **Think About It:** In light of this biblical background, what do you think is being affirmed by the people’s amen at the culmination of the Eucharistic Prayer?

Application

This exercise will help you apply one of the key themes of the session to your life. After meditating on it, respond to God with a brief written prayer if you choose.

Read CCC 1368. Here the *Catechism* explains that in the Eucharistic sacrifice, the faithful unite their entire lives to Christ’s total offering. What is a specific area of your life—a joy, work, fear, or suffering—that you can unite to Jesus’ sacrifice at your next Mass? If you like, write a short prayer about your desire to join this area of your life with Christ’s offering on the Cross at Mass.

Dear Lord ...

**After the small group discussion, watch Dr. Sri’s video presentation for Session Four.
The talk notes that begin on the following page provide an outline of the video presentation.**

SESSION FOUR TALK NOTES

The Liturgy of the Eucharist: Preparation of the Gifts and Eucharistic Prayer

I. Preparation of the Gifts

A. Presentation of the Gifts

1. Bread: the staff of life—offered for sacrifice: Exodus 29:2
2. Wine (see Exodus 29:38-41; Numbers 15:2-15)
3. Our lives sacramentally joined to Jesus' sacrifice

B. Washing of Hands—Old Testament tradition: Exodus 30:17-21

1. Ritual purification before approaching God's holy presence
2. Preparing to enter a new Holy of Holies

II. Eucharistic Prayer

A. Preface ("The Lord be with you ... Lift up your hearts")

1. Lamentations 3:41
2. Colossians 3:1-2
3. The heart: center of all our thoughts, attentions, desires
4. Lifting hearts to heaven. See Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catecheses* 5.4.

B. The *Sanctus* ("Holy, Holy, Holy") – ends the Preface

1. Threefold repetition: reflects Hebrew superlative
2. Source in the heavenly Liturgy
 - a. Isaiah 6
 - b. Revelation 4
3. Echoes "Palm Sunday": welcoming the King

- C. *Epiclesis* (“invocation upon”): Holy Spirit invoked to come upon the bread and wine
- D. Words of consecration: “This is my body ... this is my blood”
 - 1. Original context for the Mass as sacrifice: the Last Supper/Passover
 - a. Celebrated as a memorial (Hebrew, *zikaron*; Greek, *anamnesis*)—making the past present
 - b. Sacrificial language: “Body and Blood,” “offering up”
 - c. “Do this in memory of me”
 - 2. In the Eucharist, Christ’s sacrifice is made present for us
 - 3. Sacrificial love: We unite our entire lives with Christ’s gift of self to the Father made present at every Mass (see CCC 1368)
- E. The Great Amen (conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer)

A BIBLICAL WALK THROUGH
THE MASS