

## **THE PARTS OF THE MASS**

### **Part Five: *The Communion Rite and the Closing Rites***

The Communion Rite begins with the Our Father, which, as I mentioned last week, continues the Eucharistic Prayer's focus on our unity with God and with all of God's People. That is why Jesus taught us to pray "our" Father and not "my" Father. We are invited to pray the Our Father in the *orans position*, which means hands extended and palms facing upwards in a gesture of openness and surrender to God. The priest extends the Our Father with the embolism prayer, in which the priest continues the petitions from the second half of the Our Father and further asks God to free us from sin and keep us safe from all distress as we await our destiny in Christ, to which the people respond: "FOR THE KINGDOM, THE POWER AND THE GLORY ARE YOURS NOW AND FOREVER."

The Our Father leads us fittingly into the Rite of Peace. Before we can receive communion with God we pledge ourselves to building communion and peace in the church and in the world. Then we exchange peace with one another. The priest says, "THE PEACE OF THE LORD BE WITH YOU ALWAYS," you will now respond 'AND WITH YOUR SPIRIT.'

After the exchange of peace comes the Fraction Rite, when the priest breaks the consecrated bread into pieces, signifying the broken body of Christ on the Cross. It reminds us that at communion we are receiving the dying of Christ, since we receive a broken body and poured out blood. In this way, we are agreeing to die to ourselves and to give ourselves in love to God and to God's People, as Christ did completely on the Cross. During the Fraction Rite we sing the Lamb of God because Christ on the Cross is the sacrificial lamb who died for the sake of us all.

After the Lamb of God, the priest will say: 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," which is an image out of the Book of Revelation. The people will now respond: "LORD, I AM NOT WORTHY THAT YOU SHOULD ENTER UNDER MY ROOF, BUT ONLY SAY THE WORD AND MY SOUL SHALL BE HEALED." This comes from the passage in Luke's gospel when the centurion in Capernaum asks Jesus to heal his servant who was near death. The centurion recognizes his own unworthiness to receive Christ into his home, as we recognize our own unworthiness to receive Christ into our bodies and spirits at communion. The revisions in the Mass are trying not only to capture a more exact translation of the original Latin but also to make more exact use of biblical words and imagery.

When we come to communion, if we are receiving in the hand we are to place one hand underneath the other. We are not to place them side by side or cup them together. If you are right handed, place the right hand on the bottom. If you are left handed, place the left hand on the bottom. This gesture comes from St. John Chrysostom in the 4<sup>th</sup> century who said that we create a throne for the great King who is being given to us.

When the priest or Eucharistic Minister shows you the host and says, "The Body of Christ and the cup and says "The Blood of Christ", you say "Amen" and then you make a slight bow of just your head in adoration. You do not make a profound bow and you do not make the bow while still in line behind someone else. The slight bow is to the host and to the cup when they are being presented to you. Also, the response is simply "Amen," meaning "I believe" or "So be it."

At this point I would like to offer a challenge to those people still not receiving communion from the cup. The *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* states: “Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it is distributed under both kinds” [#281]. What this means is that we need to experience more fully the link between eating the Body of Christ, which is what we become, and drinking the Blood of Christ, which is how we become it. By drinking from the cup we are more fully expressing our desire to live and die like the Christ whom we are receiving in communion. We are indicating that by drinking the very life force of Christ – his blood, which is his love poured out – then we want to pour out our life force in love for God and in love for one another. The Body of Christ is what we become; the Blood of Christ is how we become it. If you are worried about germs, the alcohol content in the wine is more than enough to kill them. And the cups are wiped and turned after each communicant.

After we receive communion, we all remain standing until everyone has received. This is a mandate in our diocese. It recognizes that communion not only unites us with Christ it also unites us with each other. It is not just a “me and God” experience. This is why it is very inappropriate to walk out of Mass after communion. Not only is the liturgy not over yet, but receiving communion is never just about me getting the goods from God that I came for without any regard for the communion of people I am a part of. Plus we need time for our prayer of thanksgiving to God for what we receive in Christ.

Therefore, once we sit down after communion we have an extended period of silence that allows us to offer personal prayers to God but the silence also allows God a chance to speak to us very deeply and very personally. Finally, we stand for the “Prayer after Communion.” This ends the Rite of Communion.

We then move into the brief but all important Concluding Rites. They begin with any announcements we might have. The priest then greets the people with “The Lord be with you” to which you will respond one last time, “And with your spirit.” The priest will offer a blessing of the people, which is more elaborate on special feasts and occasions.

Then we have another fraction rite. Just as the Word of God was broken open in the first part of the Mass and then the consecrated bread was broken in the second part of the Mass, now the congregation is to break apart and go their separate ways bringing the presence of Christ with them into the world. The blessing empowers all of us to do that. When the priest dismisses everyone with phrases like, “Go, for the Mass is ended” or “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life” the people respond “Thanks be to God.” You are thanking God that you have been given the grace to become the real presence of Christ in your day to day lives and are agreeing to live that presence.

The word “Mass” comes from the dismissal rite because it originates from the Latin word “missa” which means dismissal or sending forth. We celebrate the Mass in order to be sent forth into the world to offer to others what we have received in this celebration.

@ Fr. Scott Detisch  
*All rights reserved*