

Reflections on the Celebration of the Eucharist What We Do, Why We Do It, and How

THE GATHERING RITES

The Holy Spirit begins our gathering by prompting us to leave our homes and journey to Church for the celebration of Mass. We may think it is our decision to go, but it is really at the Spirit's prompting that we surrender to God's will and come to worship Him. During the Gathering Rites we connect with God and we connect with one another in the community that is gathering with us for worship.



The term “worship” comes from an old English phrase “worth ship” and means to give God His due. True worship comes from the heart and is guided by the Spirit and the Truth of God's love. What gives God His due? When we do our best for Jesus—truly our best—in the way we dress, when we are on time, when we participate fully, when we sing with the community, we are giving Him our best. Wandering in late, being present but not participating, dressing as for a picnic rather than a solemn banquet—these are not signs of doing our BEST for the Lord. How we gather speaks loudly about how much we care and how much we are willing to invest in giving God His due—in true worship.

There are two main parts to the Church. The “narthex” or the place of greeting, and the “sanctuary” or the place of prayer. We seem to get these confused as if the Church was a gathering Hall and people feel free to carry on conversations at will and at their loudest (children calls this our “outside”) voice. If people want to pray we tend to ignore them even in the House of Prayer which is God's Church. It is fine to greet people with a handshake and a smile, to whisper, and then to move into prayer. Conversations which cannot wait should be taken out into the narthex or delayed until Mass is over.

The Formal Gathering

The priest will greet the assembly of people in the Church, welcoming them, and informing them of any special considerations for Mass that day (i.e., a second collection, a special video, etc.).



The priest goes to join the other ministers for the Mass and processes in from the Baptismal Font to the altar, usually accompanied by a Crucifix and two candles. The Book of the Gospels is also carried in the entrance procession. We begin the procession with a song meant to focus our hearts and minds on Jesus, the object of our worship. Once on the altar the priest and deacon kiss the altar as a sign of the commitment and dedication to their Eucharistic ministry and then go to the presider's Chair. We all make the Sign of the Cross, and then we participate in an ancient ritual known as the Penitential Rite in which together we pray for God's mercy. We then glorify God in the most ancient of all pieces of the original liturgy preserved through the years: the GLORIA. We are here today to give GLORY to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

At the conclusion of the Gloria we are invited to pray, first in silence, and then the priest gathers together all of our individual prayers in the COLLECT, or Opening Prayer. The AMEN that we say at the conclusion of the prayer is an important part of the prayer because the word itself means “I believe”—we express our belief in God's presence and that He hears our prayers. We are then invited to sit.

The Liturgy of the Word

The Scriptures proclaimed to us at Mass are organized in a three-year cycle. This means that every three years the Scriptures will be repeated. There is also a two-year cycle used at daily Masses. If one were to participate 52 Sundays per year, plus daily Masses, they would hear most of the Scripture proclaimed in Church.

The First Reading comes to us from the Jewish Scriptures (also known as the Old Testament) except during the Easter Season when it normally comes to us from the Book of Revelations. This reading teaches us an aspect of how God was present to the Jewish people—in their Exodus from Egypt to the Holy Land, in their success and failure to live the 10 Commandments, in the prophets that continuously called them back to living according to God's will, and in Creation and the love of all that He created, and in the promise of a Savior.

The Responsorial Psalm follows the 1st Reading and is taken from some of the oldest texts used in the worship of God by the Jewish people.

The 2nd Reading comes to us from the epistles (or letters) written by St Peter, St. John, and St. Paul to the early Church. They contain valuable lessons in living the faith for the early Church communities, and also for us today.

Active Listening

The Liturgy of the Word calls us to be **active listeners**. The skills we need to develop to do this well include:

- Looking at the person speaking
- Putting down anything that one might be holding
- Listening for a word or phrase that “jumps out” or touches you in a special way.
- Ignoring distractions, such as a baby who is crying or playing
- Listen in such a way as to be prepared to answer a question about what has been proclaimed.

Children can be taught these skills, and can be asked later questions about the Scriptures to see if they were truly listening in an active way. We recommend that parents do this on a regular basis.

Another practice which aids active listening is to read the Scriptures before coming to Mass, perhaps the night before. We place the Scripture references into the Bulletin for the Sunday masses with the first Mass—that 5:00pm Mass on Sunday—and we also include in the bulletin a “Breaking Open the Word” section which has the Gospel and reflection questions to use in preparing for hearing the Word at Mass.

Active listening to the Scriptures (1st Reading, 2nd Reading, Gospel) is important because God is speaking to us through them, and there is a personal message for each individual present at Mass. Hopefully we want to hear and act upon that message in seeking to do God’s will in our lives.

Singing during the Liturgy of the Word



Unless there is no music at the Mass, there are two parts of the Liturgy of the Word that are sung: the Responsorial Psalm and the Gospel Acclamation. Singing is prayer. Engaging fully in the sung prayer of the Church is important. For some it brings a spirit of joy to their celebration. For others who are nervous about singing, it draws them out of themselves to do their BEST for Jesus.

The Homily

The priest or deacon delivers a homily which seeks to tie together the Scripture that has been proclaimed, what it may have meant to those who originally heard it, what it may mean in our culture and in our lives today, and how it leads to the Eucharist. Sometimes homilies fulfill the ideal, sometimes there may be an aspect missing. In any event, it is part of the proclamation of the Word and deserves the same attention as the other readings. Using our best active listening skills should be our response to the homily, for again Jesus is communicating through it.

The Creed

The final composition of the Creed was adopted by the Council of Nicea in 325AD. It is actually much older than that. It is a statement of our basic beliefs as Catholics. We should make an effort to memorize it so that we can pray it outside of Mass as well. The Creed contains the “four marks of the Church”:

- We are ONE—we are united as one community under the leadership of the Pope and our Bishop.
- We are HOLY—we strive towards holiness in our lives, as people who are prayerful, compassionate, truthful, and giving of ourselves from our time, our treasure, and our talent.
- We are CATHOLIC—we are universal, open to all people throughout the world. Through Baptism we are united to all Christians, and through our common belief in God (however we may have learned to call Him) we see ourselves as children of the one God.
- We are APOSTOLIC— we continue in our own day the missions of the Apostles—to bring Christ to others and to bring others to Christ.

There is a point in the Creed when we are called to make a profound bow (a bow from the waist) as a sign of reverence for a key article of faith:

by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

Bowing here expressed our reverence for the “Incarnation” when Christ was conceived in Mary’s womb, taking His Humanity from Mary and His divinity from the Holy Spirit—thus becoming a new creation: God and Man in one person.

The Prayer of the Faithful—(General Intercessions)

This is the community’s intercessory prayer, asking God to love, protect, heal and bless the needs of people in our Community and in the world.

The Collection

The people’s offerings are taken up to support the operation of the parish community, to support the poor, and for special needs. A portion of the general collection is given to the Bishop as well for the operation of the diocesan community. Collections for special needs are sent 100% to the agency for which they are collected, and our monthly Maintenance and Development Collection is not share with the Bishop but is designated to go for major repairs, equipment replacement, etc.