

## Liturgy of the Eucharist

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### The Preparation of the Gifts

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During the presentation and offering of the gifts, we find the following elements: The offertory procession, the presentation of the bread, the mixing of the wine with water and its offering, the private prayer of the minister, the incense, the lavabo and the prayer over the offerings.

Originally, this rite was as simple as silently placing upon the altar the bread

and wine that would become the Body and Blood of Christ. Later a procession with the offerings was added. At first it was in silence as well but later was accompanied by hymns.



The rite is not a mere presentation of gifts, but rather also includes a certain offertory meaning. We symbolically offer part of ourselves along with the bread and wine. By offering incense in front of the offerings and people present, we recognize the offertory meaning of each of these. In other

words, the bread and wine which are going to be transformed into Christ and the ministers and faithful Christians should also become a “permanent offering.”

The current Roman liturgy, unlike others, presents the bread and wine separately. It is a rite full of richness and expressiveness. “The presentation of the offerings at the altar takes up the gesture of Melchizedek and commits the Creator’s gifts into the hands of Christ who, in His sacrifice, brings to perfection all human attempts to offer sacrifices.” (CCC, 1350)

This is the privileged moment for the collection, so that the faithful may offer their material assistance to their brothers in need. “From the very beginning Christians have brought, along with the bread and wine for the Eucharist, gifts to share with those in need. This custom of the collection (1 Cor. 16:1), ever appropriate, is inspired by the example of Christ who became poor to make us rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

The Holy Father, Benedict XVI, in his recent Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, “*Sacramentum caritatis*,” speaks about the presentation and offering of the gifts in number 47:

***“The Synod Fathers also drew attention to the presentation of the gifts. This is not to be viewed simply as a kind of “interval” between the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. To do so would tend to weaken, at the least, the sense of a single rite made up of two interrelated parts. This humble and simple***

*gesture is actually very significant: in the bread and wine that we bring to the altar, all creation is taken up by Christ the Redeemer to be transformed and presented to the Father. In this way we also bring to the altar all the pain and suffering of the world, in the certainty that everything has value in God's eyes. The authentic meaning of this gesture can be clearly expressed without the need for undue emphasis or complexity. It enables us to appreciate how God invites man to participate in bringing to fulfilment his handiwork, and in so doing, gives human labour its authentic meaning, since, through the celebration of the Eucharist, it is united to the redemptive sacrifice of Christ.”*



I would like to comment on the very important ideas mentioned in this dense paragraph. First of all, the Pope mentions how all of creation is taken up by Christ to be presented to the Father in the sacrifice of the Mass. In this moment, every man presents, with Christ, his sufferings, joys and work, which is considered as a collaboration in the creative work of God, according to the commandment of Genesis:

“Fill the earth and subdue it.” (Gen. 1:28)

The Holy Father points out that this gesture has no need for “undue emphasis or complexity.” It is not necessary to offer other things with the offerings (such as a ball, a book, a shovel, etc.), as symbols of leisure, study or work. All human realities and all creation are included in the bread and wine, in all their simplicity.

In the rite, the priest first takes the paten with the bread and, with both hands, slightly lifts it up over the altar, while saying the corresponding prayer. He does the same with the wine. The two almost identical prayers that the priest pronounces, out loud or quietly, are similar to those that Jesus used in his prayers of blessing, according to the Jewish tradition (berekah; Lk. 10:21; Jn. 11:41)

The priest says the following, first over the bread and then over the wine, as Christ did:

***“Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread***

*of life.”*

*“Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink.”*

The people respond:

*“Blessed be God for ever.”* (Rm. 9:5; 2 Cor. 11:31)

After presenting the bread and wine, the priest bows before the altar and prays quietly:

*“Lord God, we ask you to receive us and be pleased with the sacrifices we offer you with humble and contrite heart.”*

In this way the priest prepares to celebrate the Eucharist “in spirit and in truth,” knowing that “a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” (Ps. 50)

Now is the moment when the offerings, the altar, the celebrant and the people can be incensed. The priest then washes his hands, thus obtaining his “interior purification.” Once at the altar again, he calls all present to prayer:

*“Pray, my brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.”*

*“May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of His name, for our good, and the good of all His Church.”*

The prayers of the faithful, united to those of Christ, are here lifted up to God like the incense. (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 5:8, 8:3-4) The faithful present unite themselves to Christ the victim and prepare to offer themselves to God as “a fragrant offering and sacrifice.” (Eph 5:2).

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(Sacramentum Caritatis, 47)