

Catholic

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The Liturgy of the Eucharist

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From the procession
of the gifts to the
concluding rites, God's
people, enriched by
God's word, enter into
holy Communion.



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We celebrate the wondrous deeds of God on behalf of people in every celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Yet our frequent participation in the Mass can easily blunt our appreciation of all that the Liturgy of the Eucharist involves. For the purpose of discussion, I will speak here of (1) the preparation—of altar, gifts, and people, (2) the eucharistic prayer, and (3) Communion.

We'll start with preparation. Originally, the preparation ceremony was very simple and informal. Gifts—bread, wine, and offerings for the poor—were brought to the priest. He would say a prayer over them and then begin the eucharistic prayer.

This preparatory part of the eucharistic liturgy was restored to its primitive simplicity at the Second Vatican Council. It begins with preparing the altar. Up to this point, the altar has been bare. During the Liturgy of the Word, our attention has been directed elsewhere: to the Scripture readings in which we hear the word of God and the homily that breaks open that word.

The homily is followed by the intercessions and the Creed. These having been completed, the missal is brought to the altar by the server, and the gifts (bread and wine and the offerings for the poor) are brought from the gifts of the

Acclamation of Praise. Moved by the proclamation in the preface, the presiding priest invites all to sing the acclamation of praise: the “Holy, Holy, Holy.” The assembly joins with the whole of creation as, with one voice, the entire communion of saints gives glory to God.



congregation and presented to the priest. Music may accompany the procession of the gifts.

Having received the gifts, the priest says a prayer over them, asking God to receive these gifts and to bless the people from whom they come.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: GOD'S SAVING LOVE

Preface. The word *preface* has the usual meaning of introduction only in a secondary sense, namely, that it comes at the beginning of the eucharistic prayer. Its fundamental meaning makes clear to the presiding priest that he must do more than recite the eucharistic prayer. He must proclaim it in a voice that is strong, persuasive, and convincing.

Beginning with an introductory dialogue, calling the community to join in praising and thanking God, the preface sets forth, in the body of its content, a particular reason for praising God on this occasion. It is always some aspect of God's goodness in creation and redemption. The missal is rich in prefaces: nearly one hundred to choose from to fit the season or whatever the particular celebration may be.

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