

## 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

*Exodus 16: 2-4, 12-15 + Psalm 78: 3-4, 23-25, 54 + Eph. 4:17, 20-24 + John 6: 24-35*  
2<sup>nd</sup> in series of 5 talks on the Mass: **THE PREPARATION OF GIFTS/ALTAR**

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: August 2, 2015

Last Sunday I shared with you that during these five Sundays when the Gospel is taken from the 6<sup>th</sup> Chapter of John, that I am going to talk about the structure of the Mass as well as give practical suggestions for improving our worship.

Today is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of these 5 Sundays in Jesus' "*Bread of Life*" discourse from John 6.

*"The Mass consists in some sense of two parts, namely the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, these being so closely interconnected that they form but one single act of worship.*

*For in the Mass is spread the table both of God's Word and the Body of Christ, and from it the faithful are to be instructed and refreshed."*

(GIRM—"General Instruction on the Roman Missal," #28)

These are the two pillars of the Mass, the two main parts, connected to each other: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The other two parts of the Mass are minor in comparison, though important: The Introductory Rites and the Concluding Rites.

Last week I spoke about the Communal Nature of our prayer when celebrating Mass. Then I reviewed the 1<sup>st</sup> part of the Mass---the Introductory Rites, whose function is:

- *To gather individuals into communion*
- *To prepare hearts and minds to listen to the Word of God*
- *To celebrate the Eucharist worthily. (GIRM #46)*

This Sunday and the next 2 Sundays I want to review the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of the Mass: the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

This 3<sup>rd</sup> part of the Mass is divided into 3 sections:

- The Preparation of the Gifts and the Altar
- The Eucharistic Prayer
- The Communion Rite

Today we will look at the first section of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the Preparation of the Gifts and the Altar.

Have you ever heard the following complaint: *“I don’t get anything out of Mass.”*  
Because we live in a consumer culture,  
many people tend to think they should “get something” from Mass.  
But it’s not first of all what we “get” out of Mass, but rather what we give  
to the celebration of the Mass that is important.

This 1<sup>st</sup> section of the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with our gifts being collected  
and brought to the altar, symbols of the very gift we are *making of ourselves* to Jesus.  
For here we join our lives to his in a very unique and powerful way.

In the celebration of the Mass, we give the gift of our self to the Lord, & to each other,  
by our *“full, active, and conscious participation.”*  
(The Documents of Vatican II, Sacrosanctum Concilium, #14.)

When we give ourselves fully to this sacred worship---mind, heart, soul, and strength—  
then we receive so much more in return.

When we actively participate in singing and praying and responding and listening,  
we are open to receive the Lord as he comes to us.

When we consciously do so---when we are truly present in this place at this time,  
aware of what we are doing and saying, and not simply mechanically going through  
the motions—then we become aware of the Lord’s saving presence in our midst.

However, giving the gift of our self by our “full, active, and conscious participation”  
can be a challenge in a culture where we have been programmed to be spectators.  
In today’s “entertainment” culture, we are programmed to sit back & be entertained.  
We are a passive spectator at movies, in front of our TV’s, and computers.  
But our attitude at Mass is not that of a passive spectator.

We are actively engaged. We are fully present.

We are conscious of what we are doing and of the Risen Christ’s presence with us.

How is Christ present in the Mass? Christ is really present in

1. *The very assembly gathered in His name*
2. *In the person of the minister*
3. *In his word*
4. *Substantially & uninterruptedly under the Eucharistic species.* (GIRM #27)

Since Christ is present in these various ways in this celebration,  
we come honoring Him present here.

Since Christ is present in one another in a powerful way in this communal prayer  
we share, we come respecting His saving presence in each other.

We give honor and respect to this presence by how we dress, by what we wear.

Growing up in the Jacobi household, I quickly learned that Sunday, and especially  
Sunday Mass, were set apart from the rest of the week.

My siblings and I wore clothes on Sunday that we did not wear the rest of the week.

We even wore different shoes.

My parents did not have much materially, so these were not new clothes,  
but they were “dress-up” clothes purchased by my mom at the local thrift store.

The word “sacred” means “set apart,” and I understood the sacredness of Sunday Mass  
by the very clothes I was expected to wear.

Today Sunday is like any other day of the week. For many people it is not honored as a  
“Sabbath” day.

Some people have to work, others choose to work.

Sunday becomes like any other day of the week, and treating every day the same is not  
good for the human person.

We need a day set apart to remember who we are and to whom we belong.

Dressing up for Sunday Mass physically helps us to do so.

In addition, we enter into a sacred space when we come through the church doors.

Even though this building was built as a temporary worship space,

it is still the house of God, a different space from all other spaces,

which calls for different clothes than we normally would wear.

The only other places we gather with large numbers of people in one space  
are at stadiums for sporting events or concerts.

Thus, in our choice of clothing, we sometime carry what I call “*stadium stupor*”  
into this sacred space, not even thinking about what we are wearing.

If you are rushing here from work or a ballgame and have no opportunity to change  
your clothes, that is a different matter—the most important thing is that we come.

But most of time, we have time to choose what we will wear, and using this time wisely  
is one of the ways we prepare for worship.

People dress up when they go to a wedding.

What we celebrate here is the wedding feast of the Lamb, for the Son of God has “married” humanity, uniting himself to us out of love and giving fully of himself to us. One of the ways we honor such love is by what we wear as the beloved of the Lord.

Now I would like to quickly review the Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts.

This first section of the third part of the Mass begins after the Prayers of the Faithful and concludes with the Prayer over the Gifts.

The altar is prepared while the gifts are being gathered, and the Offertory Song is usually sung during this time.

The giving of a monetary gift during the collection is a spiritual act, which has practical consequences, to support the work of Christ today in our local parish. It is an act of responding in gratitude to what God has done and is doing, which is why giving a gift wrapped in an envelope is important.

Once the gifts are all prepared, then there is a procession with the gifts to the altar. Along with the monetary gifts, the gifts of bread and wine, the fruit of the earth and work of human hands, are brought to the altar. Bread and wine, symbols of ourselves, our work, our stewardship of creation, are placed on the altar.

Then the priest says a prayer blessing God for the bread and then the wine:

*“Blessed are you, Lord God of all Creation..”*

This prayer of blessing can be said silently, especially if the Offertory Song is being sung, or it can be spoken aloud.

After God is blessed for the gifts of bread and wine, the priest washes his hands.

One of the reasons why this tradition developed of the priest washing his hands is before “money” was common, people brought gifts of animals and food.

The priest had to wash his hands after handling these kind of “gifts”.

After the priest washes his hands, he turns and says to the people:

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

*“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 holy Church.”*

Remember I stressed last week that communal prayer requires that what we do, we do together.

This is one of those parts of the Mass where not everybody stands together, because there is confusion among the faithful about when they are supposed to stand.

So, let's practice, with me saying my part, and then you standing when I am finished speaking and replying at that time with your part.

*(Practice this with the people.)*

Then this first section of the third part of the Mass concludes with the "*Prayer over the Gifts.*"

During the coming week, I encourage you to reflect upon the gifts you have received. Give thanks for the people God has placed in your life who love you, for your own unique talents, for your own good life.

Give thanks for the gift of Jesus, the Bread of Life, who satisfies our hunger for God, and become more aware of how he is coming to you daily to nourish and strengthen you by his love.

*Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi*