

The Mass Deconstructed
A Liturgical Catechesis
Understanding The Communion & Concluding Rites

The Communion Rite

The Lord's Prayer

The Communion Rite begins with an invitation from the priest to pray the most familiar of all the prayers, the one that the Lord Jesus himself taught us.

As we pray the “Our Father” our request for “daily bread” takes on new meaning in the light of the Bread of Life which we are about to receive. The Eucharist is our daily bread. Its effect is that we may become what we receive. Our daily bread is also the reading you hear and the hymns you sing in church. All are necessities for our pilgrimage

After the faithful have recited the Lord's Prayer, the Priest expands upon the last four words: “deliver us from evil.” The prayer suggests that we should be delivered from evil and consequently kept free from sin, we will know peace in our day and peace in our hearts. Such a peace is not an end in itself, however, but is part of the quickening expectation of the coming of the Lord Jesus at the end of time, which we await, “with joyful hope.” The prayer concludes with an ancient doxology associated with the Lord's Prayer since the time of the *Didache*.

The Rite of Peace

The Lord's Prayer is followed by the Rite of Peace, at the heart of which is a prayer to the Lord Jesus, recalling how when he appeared to his disciples in the Upper Room after the Resurrection his first words to them were “Peace be with you.”

So we ask the Lord Jesus to deliver us from all anxiety and to grant us that peace which the world cannot give. After the Priest concludes the

prayer, he wishes all present the peace of Christ, and then all offer it to those who are standing around them.

The Fraction

One of the most ancient rites of the Mass is the Breaking of the Bread. “The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the Body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:16b-17).

“As grain once scattered on the hillsides, was in this broken bread made one. So from all lands thy Church be gathered into thy kingdom by thy Son” (Didache).

The Priest breaks the bread into pieces so that all might receive from the one loaf, “the many made one body in Christ.”

While the Breaking of the Bread is taking place, the *Agnus Dei* is sung, asking the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world (as we sang in the *Gloria*) to have mercy on us, and finally, to grant us His peace.

Jesus is the Lamb of God, the name first given him by St. John the Baptist on the day of his baptism in the Jordan. He is the Pascal Lamb, sacrificed for our sins.. He is the Victorious Lamb, of whom the Book of Revelation speaks who from his throne in the heavenly Jerusalem is the hope of all the Saints, now freed from sin, for they have washed their robes in his Blood and have become whiter than snow.

This ancient rite has come to signify the unity of the Body and Blood of Christ. The Church has always taught that those who may not drink from the Chalice still receive the whole Christ, Body and Blood, soul and divinity. In the same way, those who would drink only from the Chalice, receive the same whole Christ. While it is commendable to receive both the Consecrated Bread and the Precious Blood whenever possible so that

the signs of eating and drinking Christ's Body and Blood will be more apparent, the whole Christ is present in either species alone.

Holy Communion

“Behold the Lamb of God.” These words, taken from the Book of Revelation echo John the Baptist's cry before the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan river and look forward to the time when we will sit at the heavenly banquet in the Kingdom of Heaven. In a very real sense, we participate in those moments when we answer the Priest with the words of the good Centurion. “Lord I am not worthy ...”

Like the Centurion who went to Jesus asking that his servant be healed, we know that we are not worthy for Jesus to enter into our lives. We trust in God's mercy, knowing that the power of Christ's mercy to free us from our sins is greater than even our weaknesses. Having repented of our sins, we now approach the table of the children of God to receive the bread of life and the cup of eternal salvation.

How We Receive Holy Communion

As the assembly receives Holy Communion, a Communion chant or song is sung, by which the faithful praise God in one voice as they process together to receive their Eucharistic Lord.

The reception of Holy Communion is one of the most intimate moments in the life of every Catholic. To prepare to receive Holy Communion we pray fervently on the most holy mystery we are about to receive. But even before we come to church, we confess our sins and receive absolution in the Sacrament of Penance, especially if we are aware of any serious sins. For at least an hour, we fast from eating anything at all.

When we go to receive Holy Communion, we never go alone. The Communion procession is one of the three great processions of the Mass. The first is the Entrance Procession, where we come to recognize that we

are a royal priesthood gathered by Christ our High Priest. The second is the Presentation of the Gifts, where we join our lives to the Sacrifice about to be offered by the Priest. Now, singing a Eucharistic hymn, we come forward as Christ's own people to be fed by him with his own Body and Blood.

As you approach the minister to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, bow your head as a sign of veneration of the Body and Blood. The minister will hold the Host and Cup before you and say, "The Body of Christ / The Blood of Christ," to which you respond, "Amen." Christians have spoken this "Amen" with conviction and faith. It is in the first place, an affirmation of Christ's presence in the Blessed Sacrament. It is also an acceptance of the consequences of eating his Body and drinking his Blood. Be a member of Christ's body, so that your *Amen* may be authentic.

When you approach, do not extend your hands with palm upward and fingers apart, but make your left hand a throne for your right hand, the latter is to receive the Lord; then, while answering "Amen," receive the body of Christ in the hollow of your hand.

The Concluding Rites

Prayer After Communion

The Communion Rite is concluded with the Prayer after Communion, in which we give thanks for the great gifts we have received in this Mass.

Blessing and Dismissal

To conclude the Liturgy, the Priest blesses the people and the Deacon typically makes use of a spare Roman juridical formula: *Ite Missa Est* (literally, *it is over, go!*) now translated: **Go forth, the Mass is ended.**

This sending (*missa*) is spoken to a people transformed by the Holy and Living Sacrifice, which they have celebrated and nourished by the Body and Blood of their Savior. There are three more dismissal formulas:

Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.

or

Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.

or

Go in peace.

John Paul II reflects on the meaning of the dismissal and the implications of the Mass for Catholics as they leave the church building and return to the world. “Christians will feel more obliged than ever not to neglect their duties as citizens of the world. Theirs is the task of contributing with the Light of the Gospel to the building of a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God’s plan (to work for peace, to base relationships between peoples on solid premises of justice and solidarity. All who take part in the Eucharist be committed to changing their lives and making them a certain way, completely “Eucharistic.”

The Priest and the Deacon kiss the altar, and with the ministers bow in veneration. Then they leave the church in the same way in which they entered. Often a “closing hymn” is sung as the ministers process from the church.

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the Eucharistic dimensions of “our daily bread” and deliver us from evil.”
2. Discuss the Breaking of the Bread and the unity of the Church.
3. Discuss the story of the Centurion and our response to the “Behold, the Lamb of God!”
4. Describe the typical way of receiving Holy Communion.
5. What does it mean to receive a blessing?
6. Talk about the dismissal at Mass and our responsibility to the poor of this world.
7. How, practically speaking, can we give thanks after Mass?