

Praying the Mass I

Being Present

The publication of the new English edition of the Roman Missal provides an important opportunity for a deepening of people's love and understanding of the Mass and for helping them to participate more fully in its celebration. But the negativity of much reporting of the new translation means that the process of preparing for its reception and use is sensitive and vitally important.

It is especially important that the priests of the diocese are well-prepared so that they offer leadership in their parish communities, and to each other.

The parishes of the diocese are a principal locus for formation but it is necessary to ensure that schools/colleges/chaplaincies are also included. Accessible materials will also be prepared for people to read and respond to in their homes and as families.

The process of introduction offers an opportunity to renew catechesis, liturgical celebration and prayer patterns.

I encourage you now to seize the opportunity that the new translation offers for in-depth catechesis on the Eucharist and renewed devotion in the manner of its celebration. "The more lively the eucharistic faith of the people of God, the deeper is its sharing in ecclesial life in steadfast commitment to the mission entrusted by Christ to his disciples" (Sacramentum Caritatis, 6).

Pope Benedict XVI,
To the Bishops of England, Scotland and Wales, 19th September 2010

Praying the Mass is offered as a resource to the parishes and other communities of faith in the Archdiocese of Westminster to help with this time of renewal and deepening.



Notes for Priests and Liturgy Groups

Praying the Mass I seeks to encourage people to gather quietly and purposefully for prayer; and to foster respect for and make good use of appropriate silence during the celebration of Mass. It concentrates especially on the Introductory Rites of Mass

- It encourages the faithful to an examination of themselves and their lives as they gather together for Mass.
- It encourages all to remember the mercy and glory of God so as to enter the celebration of Mass in a spirit of thanksgiving.
- All this might be summed up in the phrase 'Being Present' - present to ourselves and to each other, and above all, present and attentive to God.

This sheet offers suggestions about things that might be looked at during the first month of *Praying the Mass*, against the background of people's reflections on the material on the takeaway sheet.

Silence

- 91 Silence is an important element in all communication. It is particularly important to allow for silence as a part of the dialogue between God and the community of faith. It allows for the voice of the Holy Spirit to be heard in the hearts of the people of God and to enable them to unite personal prayer more closely with the word of God and the public voice of the Church. During liturgical silence all respond in their own way, recollecting themselves, pondering what has been heard, petitioning and praising God in their inmost spirit.
- 92 Liturgical silence is not merely an absence of words, a pause, or an interlude. It is a stillness, a quieting of spirits, a making of time and leisure to hear, assimilate, and respond. Any haste that hinders reflectiveness should be avoided. The dialogue between God and the community of faith taking place through the Holy Spirit requires intervals of silence, suited to the assembly, so that all can take to heart the word of God and respond to it in prayer.

Liturgical silence is a corporate activity shared in by all present, by which all support and sustain each other in profound prayerful solidarity. It demands a stillness and prayerful concentration, which the priest celebrant and all ministers can help to bring about.

- Structurally, liturgical silence is indispensable to the rhythm of a balanced celebration. Without periods of prayerful and reflective silence the celebration can become perfunctory in its haste or burdensome in its unrelieved sound and song.
- The purpose of any particular silence, depends on where it occurs in each part of the celebration. In the Penitential Act, all pause to remember their sinfulness and the lovingkindness of God in Christ. At the opening prayer, they put themselves and their deepest needs and desires before God. After the readings and Homily, they savour God's word, ponder it in their hearts like Mary (see Luke 2:19), and apply it to their lives. After Communion, they praise and pray to God in their hearts.
- Even before the celebration itself, calm and opportunities for silent prayer and reflection have their proper place in the church, in the sacristy and in adjacent areas so that those gathering for the assembly of the Church may recollect themselves and begin to prepare for prayer together. Providing opportunities for such calm and quiet is one of the many ways in which a community is able to show hospitality to those gathering for worship.

From *Celebrating the Mass*

Reflection Questions

- What experience do you have of silence during worship?
- How would you describe the benefits of liturgical silence?
- What helps and what hinders silence in your community's prayer?
- How might you help establish calm and quiet before Mass begins - in the church, in the sacristy and elsewhere?

The Introductory Rites

Full and clear explanation of the Introductory Rites is offered in *Celebrating the Mass*, the pastoral guide provided by the Bishops of England and Wales and published by the Catholic Truth Society. *Celebrating the Mass* is available on-line at www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Documents/index.html

The following section looks at some broader issues about how our church building serves us, and how we offer hospitality to those who come to the church to pray, and share in the communion of life to which the Lord calls us.

Before the Introductory Rites

First impressions matter!

Sit and watch and listen to what happens in your church before Mass begins. Does what happens contribute to the sense of gathering for prayer, or not. If not, are there ways in which it can be changed to help it better contribute to the sense of gathering for prayer, or might another time for this activity be found?



- How do we help people to remember (or learn) what the church is for?
- How do we welcome them to communion with the Lord and communion with the Church?
- How do we support them in moving from the activity proper to the rest of their lives and into the activity of prayer, mediation and worship that is proper to their time in church?

A. Environment

1. *Indications of the dignity of the church, and that it is a place consecrated and set aside for prayer*

How clean and tidy are the church and entrance area? (How up to date is the notice board? How relevant is the display to the life and mission of the parish? What information might visitors look for and not find?)

What resources are provided to support and guide prayer? For during Mass? For those visiting the church at other times?

- Leave an ample supply of Sunday Mass sheets and newsletters for weekday visitors to help them learn something of the life of the parish and the liturgy from which we draw our Christian identity.
- Provide resources for prayer for those who come to the church outside of regular service times, because they are experiencing particular sorrow or joy. This can be easily done by using a selection of Prayer booklets and cards such as those produced by the Catholic Truth Society (020 7640 0042; www.cts-online.org.uk) or the Prayer Trust (www.theprayertrust.org.uk)
- Offer the use of a prayer board, where people can write their prayer requests, and from which intentions for prayer might be gath-

Perhaps the most serious lesson to be learned from these last several decades is the almost total lack of thoughtful and sustained catechesis on the liturgy. My suspicion is that too much was presumed of a liturgy in the vernacular. Once the liturgy was in our own language we would have no more need of teaching because each of us would understand it. Just a few words of explanation would suffice, or at least that appears, in hindsight, to have been the operative wisdom.

Now we know differently. To understand the words is not necessarily to understand what we are doing when we gather to give praise and thanks, express our sorrow, pledge our lives, beg for healing or participate in any of the other sacramental moments. I have friends who will admit privately that they don't participate in the sacrament of reconciliation because they don't know what to do or say. I know others who still talk about the 'last rites' – which is precisely what these rites are not. I know scores of people who do not think there is much difference between a celebration of the Eucharist or a service of word and communion when a priest is not available for Eucharist, yet these are essentially different events of prayer.

Kathleen Hughes.
Saying Amen: A Mystagogy of Sacrament.
Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 1999

ered especially for weekday masses.

- Is there anything on display which would let those visiting the church know that they are welcome to meet with the priest, if they have need? And how to contact him?

2. *Holy Water Stoop*

Is it regularly cleaned? Is the water clean and plentiful and renewed regularly (perhaps directly from the font)?

It can be helpful to have an occasional notice to remind people about the significance and use of the Holy Water stoop. An example can be downloaded from the *Praying the Mass* section of the diocesan website. (There may even be a preaching opportunity here, relating the practice of Lent/Easter and RCIA.)

3. *Candles*

Are candles available for people to light as a sign and symbol of their prayer?

Some parishes find it helpful to have an occasional notice to remind people about the significance and use of candles. An example can be downloaded from the *Praying the Mass* section of the diocesan website

4. *Place of reservation of the Blessed Sacrament*

Is the place of reservation clear to those entering the church? Is it worthy? If it is not, then this may be a good opportunity to review the Church's expectations of the place of reservation. Those expectations are summarised in Chapter 9 of *Consecrated for Worship* <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/CFW/CFW.pdf>

It can be helpful to provide some leaflets or booklets in the vicinity of the place of reservation which help people to understand Catholic faith in the Real Presence, and helping them to pray to Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament.



B. Ministries

1. *Welcomers*

A team of welcomers can help those coming to Mass in a variety of ways. They can help them to participation aids. They can assist with any mobility needs. They can be of extra assistance to those coming to the church for the first time. Perhaps above all their presence and their work demonstrates that this community wants to show its care for those who come to join it in prayer.

2. *Gathering the ministers in prayer*

It is difficult for ministers to give time to prayer before Mass begins, if things are not ready.

- In your community are those things which can be prepared ahead of time, been got ready?
- Do ministers arrive in good time before Mass is due to begin?
- Is there a spirit of calm and recollection in the sacristy?
- Do the priest and other ministers pray together before Mass begins?

3. *Calling the whole assembly to prayer*

Some parishes ensure that there is always a minute or two of silence before the opening song, to help people with their final preparation before Mass begins. Sometimes instead of silence, music is played, or a gathering song is sung to help people settle quietly and gather their thoughts.

Who in your parish would best call the assembly to this time of preparation? The leader of the choir? A reader? Who? Or will it just 'happen'?

4. *Preaching and catechesis*

Would it be helpful to preach on the virtue of arriving at Mass in good time? And on how to prepare for praying the Mass?

Parish First Holy Communion programmes provide an important opportunity to offer catechesis to parents and children in 'how we pray the Mass'. What teaching and guidance is provided at present? Might it be developed to provide parents and families with further help?

Praying the Mass 2

Being Present

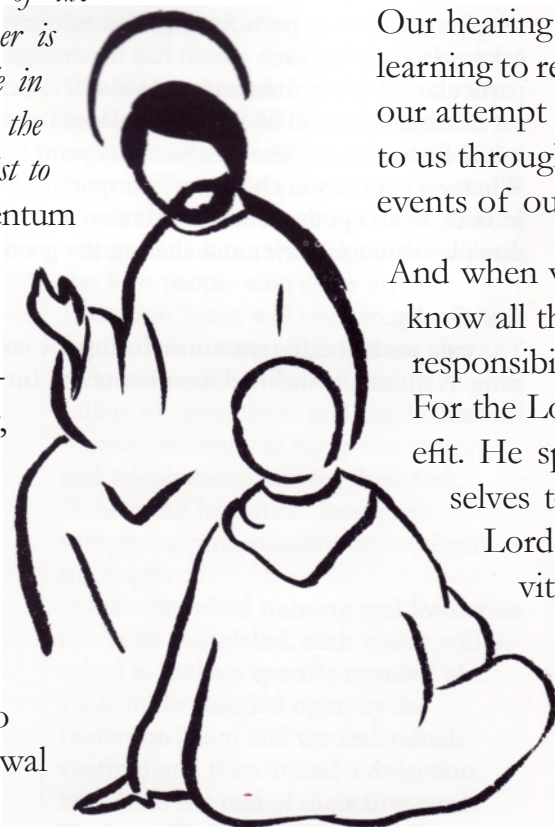
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Notes for Priests and Liturgy Groups

When the scriptures are read the Lord speaks with his people. But the Lord speaks so that we might hear. Not just with our ears, but with our hearts and minds too.

He speaks also that we might be drawn into conversation with him. Does he offer us consolation or encouragement? If so, it would be ungracious not to thank the Lord. Have his words challenged or upset us? Then let us open our hearts and express our confusion, doubt, fear. It helps to talk!

Such conversation as this makes demands on us. For the Lord does not want to hear from us platitudes and politeness. He is passionately interested in us, in all of the particularity of our lives - in how and who we really are.

Our hearing the Lord in the scriptures and there learning to recognise his voice is good training for our attempt to listen to the Lord when he speaks to us through the events of daily life, the various events of our own lives and of those around us.

And when we have learnt to know his voice, we know all the more clearly that we have a special responsibility in allowing his voice to be heard. For the Lord does not speak only for our benefit. He speaks to all. So even as we set ourselves to listen all the more carefully to the

Lord ourselves we realise that we are invited to share in the prophetic vocation of the whole Church - we who listen are asked to speak in love what we have heard. We are called to be witnesses to the truth that will lead all humankind to the fullness of life.

Verbum Domini

Pope Benedict recently issued *Verbum Domini*, (*The Word of the Lord*), in response to the 2008 Synod of Bishops on 'The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church.' It is published by CTS and by Alive Publishing and can also be accessed from www.rcdow.org.uk/liturgy

In *Verbum Domini* Pope Benedict there commends a variety of ways by which the importance of the word can be highlighted and people be helped to a fuller participation in the liturgy.

a) Celebrations of the word of God

Such celebrations offer privileged occasions for an encounter with the Lord and an important opportunity for liturgical and catechetical formation. Celebrations of this sort can help people prepare for Sunday Eucharist; and offer additional opportunities to pray and meditate on sacred Scripture, for example during the great liturgical seasons of Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter.

Celebrations of the word stand in a similar relationship to the Liturgy of the Word at Mass as services of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament stand to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. They enable the faithful to experience the power and importance of the word in a way that both derives from the Mass, and lead them to a fuller participation in the Mass.

In addition they provide an opportunity for liturgy with those who are not (yet) Catholic, or who are Catholic but who for a variety of reasons are not at present able to participate fully in the celebration of Mass.

A guide for preparing celebrations of the word can be downloaded from www.rcdow.org.uk/liturgy/

b) The word and silence

The great patristic tradition teaches us that the mysteries of Christ all involve silence. Only in silence can the word of God find a home in us, as it did in Mary, woman of the word and, inseparably, woman of silence. Our liturgies must facilitate this attitude of authentic listening: *Verbo crescente, verba deficiunt*. (When the Word appears, words fail)

Yet, ours is not an age which fosters recollection; sometimes people even seem afraid of entering into a time of silence and meditation. So if people are to be helped to rediscover the importance of God's word for their lives they will also often need help in rediscovering a sense of recollection and inner repose.

Silence and meditation are integral to the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word. They rarely 'happen' without our intending them, so we need to promote them and foster them. This can be done by ensuring there is a brief pause after the Collect and before the Liturgy of the Word begins, as the congregation settle and prepare to listen; by a silence at the conclusion of a reading, before the proclamation - 'This is the word of the Lord'; and a longer silence after the proclamation of the Gospel, the highpoint of the Liturgy of the Word, and again after the homily. These pauses and silences need not be long: even if the pauses last 15 seconds and the silences a minute, they will remind us that our both during and after a reading our work is that of an inner listening and responding to God's living word.

Reflection Questions

Does your community have celebrations of the word at present?

- If so, what benefit do they provide?
- If not, what benefit might they offer? When might they be celebrated? And how might they be promoted?

When does your community encounter silence in the liturgy?

- How do they use the silence?
- How do you help members of the community - children? adults? - to learn how to listen, and how to meditate?

c) Solemn proclamation of the word of God

On Sundays and major Liturgical feasts the dignity of the word can be highlighted when the Book of the Gospels (or in its absence, the Lectionary) is carried in procession during the opening rites. Every day there is virtue in taking care that the Gospel acclamation is sung, and where possible the Psalm too.

The ritual action of standing to hear the Gospel reinforces the importance of that reading, especially if we keep mindful of why we do it. So too will use of lights and incense to accompany the proclamation of the Gospel.

The greeting and concluding acclamations of the Gospel might be sung, and particularly on solemnities the Gospel itself might be proclaimed in song.

d) The word of God in Christian churches

The word of God is proclaimed so that it might be heard. So the design of churches needs to take this in account, so that their acoustic does not make people's listening more difficult. Good audio systems will support good proclamation, but they are no substitute for good proclamation. The dignity of the ambo should be respected in both its design and its use. The ambo is intended for the proclamation of the readings, psalm and Exultet. It can also be used for the homily and prayers of the faithful. Other talks and notices should be given from elsewhere.

It is proposed that churches give a place of honour to the sacred Scriptures, even outside of liturgical celebrations. It is good that the book which contains the word of God should enjoy a visible place of honour inside the Christian temple, without prejudice to the central place proper to the tabernacle containing the Blessed Sacrament.



When do you make fullest use of the various rituals commended for highlighting the dignity of the word of God?

How good is your church's sound system? Are there ways of improving it?

- What training and support is given to parish readers? What further help might be appreciated?
- Is the dignity of the ambo respected, by reserving it for its proper use.
- Is the importance of the scriptures indicated to those who visit the church outside of the times of public celebration?

e) The exclusive use of biblical texts

The readings of the Liturgy, drawn from sacred Scripture may never be replaced by other texts, however significant the latter may be from a spiritual or pastoral standpoint: 'No text of spirituality or literature can equal the value and riches contained in sacred Scripture, which is the word of God.'

It should be kept in mind that the Responsorial Psalm is also the word of God, and hence should not be replaced by other texts. Again, it is most appropriate that the psalm be sung.

Why do people sometimes wish to use non-biblical readings in the Liturgy?

- What can we learn from that?

f) Biblically-inspired liturgical song

Appreciation of the word of God can be developed by using as the songs proper to a particular liturgy, songs which are of clear biblical inspiration and which express, through the harmony of music and words, the beauty of God's word.

How might your community benefit from becoming more familiar with singing the psalms and the antiphons of the liturgy?

g) Particular pastoral need

Pope Benedict lays particular stress on helping those with difficulties in participating in the liturgy, for example, the visually and hearing impaired. 'I encourage our Christian communities to offer every possible practical assistance to our brothers and sisters suffering from such impairments, so that they should experience a living contact with the word of the Lord.'

Are the basics in place - eg a loop system; good lighting on readers and priest for those who rely on lip-reading; access to large-print hymn books. Is there more that might be done?

The Liturgy of the Word

A full and clear description and explanation of the Liturgy of the Word is offered in *Celebrating the Mass*, the pastoral guide provided by the Bishops of England and Wales and published by the Catholic Truth Society. CTM is available on-line at www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Documents/index.html

Ministering the Liturgy of the Word

I once more stress the need for the adequate training of those who exercise the munus of reader in liturgical celebrations, and particularly those who exercise the ministry of Reader, which in the Latin rite is, as such, a lay ministry. All those entrusted with this office should be truly suitable and carefully trained. This training should be biblical and liturgical, as well as technical: The purpose of their biblical formation is to give readers the ability to understand the readings in context and to perceive by the light of faith central point of the revealed message. The liturgical formation ought to equip readers to have some grasp of the meaning and structure of the liturgy of the word and the significance of its connection with the liturgy of the Eucharist. The technical preparation should make the readers skilled in the art of reading publicly, either with the power of their own voice or with the help of sound equipment.

cf Pope Benedict *Verbum Domini* 58

Praying the Mass provides a suitable occasion for our Diocese to look again at how we prepare, train and resource the readers of the diocese. They are entrusted with great responsibility - of proclaiming the word so that it might nourish the faith of those who come to Mass.

Theirs is not the task of reading only, not even reading clearly and loudly enough that we might hear them. They have the further task of reading so that we might understand what they read, and be moved to take it to heart and to learn from it how better to live our lives as disciples.

On the 17th September, at the Church of Our Lady, St John's Wood, from 11 to 4pm there is a

If Christian individuals and families are not regularly drawing new life from the reading of the sacred text in a spirit of prayer and docility to the Church's interpretation, then it is difficult for the liturgical proclamation of the word of God alone to produce the fruit we might expect. This is the value of initiatives in parish communities which bring together during the week those who take part in the Eucharist - priest, ministers and faithful - in order to prepare the Sunday liturgy, reflecting beforehand upon the word of God which will be proclaimed.

The objective sought here is that the entire celebration - praying, singing, listening, and not just the preaching - should express in some way the theme of the Sunday liturgy, so that all those taking part may be penetrated more powerfully by it. Clearly, much depends on those who exercise the ministry of the word. It is their duty to prepare the reflection on the word of the Lord by prayer and study of the sacred text, so that they may then express its contents faithfully and apply them to people's concerns and to their daily lives.

Pope John Paul II *Dies Domini*. 40

special celebration of the ministry of the Reader, organised by the Diocesan Liturgy Commission. There will be opportunities to learn more about the scriptures, and to discuss how best the ministry of Reader might be supported and developed in our Diocese.

All readers in the diocese are invited, but space is limited so people need to book in advance.

Details will shortly be circulated to parishes and posted on the diocesan website.

In the meantime, the second month of *Praying the Mass* gives an opportunity for parishes to reflect on they support and encourage this ministry and what their needs are. It is a splendid opportunity to thank ministers for the efforts they take, and the important contribution they make.

Praying the Mass 3

Thanksgiving and Sacrifice

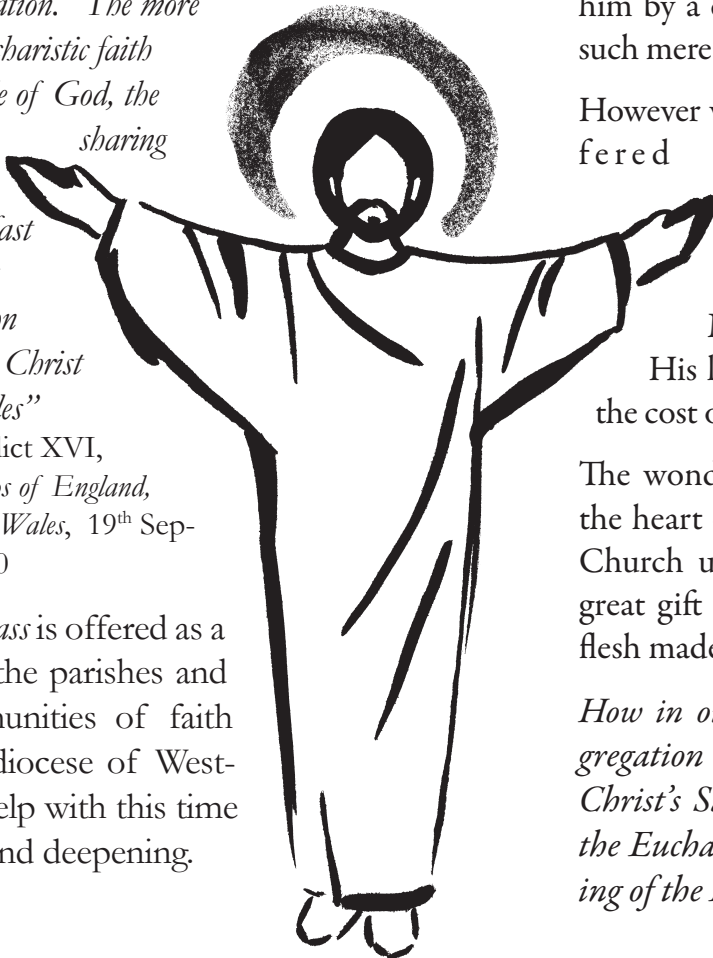
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Notes for Priests and Liturgy Groups

The language of sacrifice has been used from the earliest years of the Church to help present the meaning of the life and death of Jesus. It is there in the opening chapter of John's Gospel - 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.' It is there in the synoptic gospels in the description of the Last Supper and the words Jesus speaks in instituting the Eucharist. It is strongly present in the texts used at the Liturgy, and especially in the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I).

In recent times this language of sacrifice has been found an embarrassment by some writers and teachers. They see it as implying a cruel and vindictive God who can only be appeased by the suffering of Jesus. Yet the suffering of Jesus is not an appalling horror imposed on him by a cruel and unyielding Father. It is true that such mere destruction would not honour God.

However what does glorify God is the love freely offered by Jesus who in his humanity conforms himself to the Divine Will to love. And this is the sacrifice by which the Church lives - the self offering of God become Man that we might not be left to our selves.

His love is offered, and not withdrawn even at the cost of the Cross, so 'that we might lovely be'.

The wonder of that sacrifice that is His love is at the heart of the Mass. In the Eucharistic Prayer the Church unites in thanksgiving and in awe at the great gift she receives in God made flesh, and that flesh made holy in love.

How in our parish celebrations do we help the congregation to engage afresh with the awesomeness of Christ's Sacrifice; and indicate that our offering of the Eucharistic Prayer is the high point of our praying of the Mass?

One Bread One Body

The Eucharist as Memorial of Christ's sacrifice

'Amen' is a word we use often in our prayer and worship. Although sometimes translated simply as 'So be it!' or 'Yes', it comes from a Hebrew root which implies firmness and sureness. When we say 'Amen' at various times during the Mass - above all our 'Great Amen' at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer - we proclaim that we believe what has been said, that we unite ourselves to the prayer and that we are committed to all that it means. It involves a personal affirmation, saying 'I believe' as a sharing in the 'we believe' of the Church community gathered for worship.

When we receive Holy Communion, and hear the words 'The body of Christ', 'The blood of Christ', our response of faith is 'Amen' to the One who is offering and giving himself to us. This 'Amen' is, of course, an affirmation of the real presence of the Body and Blood of the Lord, but it is more than that. It is at one with the 'Great Amen', and we cannot properly separate the two. Above all, we confess our readiness to enter into all that Christ has achieved for us by his death and resurrection, the gift of salvation made present for us here and now as we celebrate Mass together.

It is here that we come to the heart of our Catholic understanding of the Mass: the celebration of the Eucharist makes sacramentally present the whole mystery of salvation. The Mass is the sacrament of salvation, the memorial of the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We say 'Amen' to this truth of faith when we receive Holy Communion.

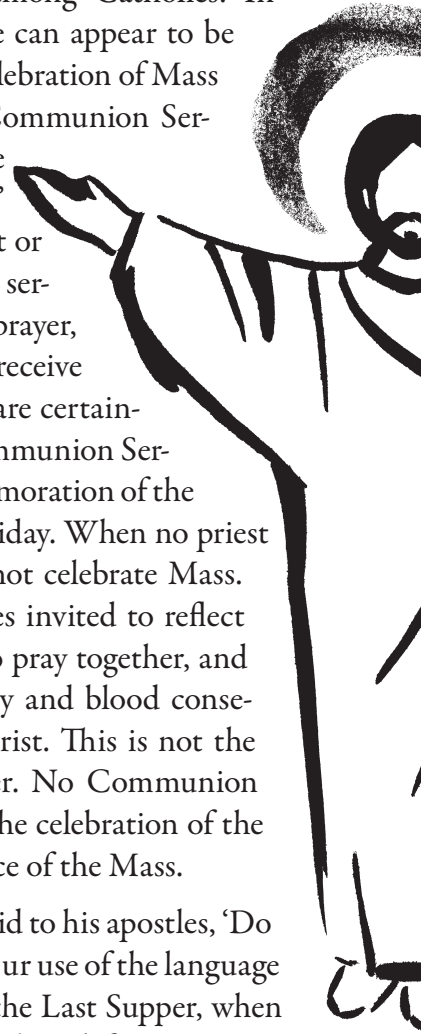
Since the Reformation, many Christians in the West have rejected Catholic teaching on the Eucharist as 'sacrifice' because they believed it denied the unique saving work of Jesus Christ, a free gift of grace to be accepted by faith. Ecumenical dialogue should have made it clear to our fellow Christians that Catholics also are firmly committed to belief in Christ's 'one, perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world'; that 'Christ's redeeming death and resurrection took place once for all in history', and that there 'can be no repetition of or addition to what was then accomplished once for all by Christ.' Yet we believe that this once-for-all event of salvation be-

comes effectively present for us through the power of the Holy Spirit every time the Mass is celebrated: 'The Eucharist is the heart and summit of the Church's life, for in it Christ associates his Church and all her members with his sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered once for all upon the cross to his Father.'

This 'sacrificial' understanding of the Eucharist needs renewed emphasis even among Catholics. In some Catholic circles there can appear to be a confusion between the celebration of Mass on the one hand, and a Communion Service or 'Celebration of the Word and Communion' on the other. The Eucharist or Mass is much more than a service in which we are led in prayer, hear the Word of God and receive Holy Communion. There are certainly proper occasions for Communion Services, above all the Commemoration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday. When no priest is available, Catholics cannot celebrate Mass. Instead, they are sometimes invited to reflect on the word of God and to pray together, and then to share Christ's body and blood consecrated at a previous Eucharist. This is not the same as the Mass, however. No Communion Service can substitute for the celebration of the Eucharist, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

At the Last Supper, Jesus said to his apostles, 'Do this as a memorial of me.' Our use of the language of 'memorial' is rooted in the Last Supper, when Jesus gave the Passover Meal its definitive meaning. It was used by the ancient Fathers of the Church, by the great medieval theologians, and by the Council of Trent, as a way of expressing the relation between the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ and our celebration now of the Eucharist. 'Memorial' is a word that lies at the heart of the Eucharistic Prayers of East and West.

What do we mean by a 'memorial'? At the Passover meal each year, the Jews celebrate a memorial of the Exodus. At the Last Supper, Christ gave the Passover celebration its full meaning. In doing so he entrusted to us a memorial of his own passion and resurrection. A biblical memorial is far more than simply calling to mind past events and their significance: in the liturgical celebration of



these events, they become present and real. A memorial means at very least 'the making effective in the present of an event in the past.' Catholic use of the word 'memorial' in the Eucharist involves making effectively present here and now an event in the past. A memorial is a sacred gateway into living communion with God in his work for our salvation. By the power of the Holy Spirit, 'the Church's living memory', the saving events of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are recalled and made powerfully present for us. Their saving power touches our lives today, and through us can touch and transform the lives of

all. Very much anchored in the present, we are united across time with the past, and indeed with the future, by the eternal Spirit of God, who is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. The prayer *O Sacrum Convivium*, attributed to St Thomas Aquinas, acclaims this mystery of the Eucharist: 'O sacred banquet in which Christ is our food, his passion is recalled, the soul is filled with grace, and a pledge of the life to come is given to us.'

In the Eucharist, Christ's gift of his life to his Father for our salvation is made present, so that we may be united with him in his sacrifice and be accepted in him by the Father: 'In the celebration of the memorial, Christ in the Holy Spirit unites his people with himself in a sacramental way so that the Church enters into the movement of his self-offering.' The Mass is the ultimate act of worship. By our communion with the Risen Christ, we become one with him in his giving of himself to the Father. Our lives are at-one with his as he commends his spirit to the Father. United with Christ, we lift up our hearts to the Father and give him thanks and praise. 'Through him, with him and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit', the Church becomes 'an everlasting gift' to the Father, 'a living sacrifice of praise.' We give to God all that he first gave to us, all that we are and have, uniting ourselves with the self-giving of Jesus himself. Our sharing in the Eucharist should make us a sacrificial people, lifting up and laying down our lives in love for God and for one another, and sharing all that we have and are with those in need.

By our communion with the Risen Christ, the Church becomes 'an everlasting gift' to the Father, 'a living sacrifice of praise.'

Because of the Church's intimate communion with Christ, as a body to its head, the Eucharistic sacrifice is offered to the Father by the 'whole Christ', head and members together. 'In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value.' Because Christ's one sacrifice is present in the Eucharist, 'all generations of Christians can be united with his offering.'

The sacrificial nature of the Mass was solemnly proclaimed by the Council of Trent and reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council. It continues to be carefully presented in the revised Order of Mass promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1969 (the *Missa Normativa* or Ordinary Form of the Mass), and especially in the Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Missal. Although there have been changes in its celebration through the centuries, the Mass remains the same, from the 'breaking of bread' of the first Christians and the Eucharist described by St Justin Martyr in the second century, to the Mass celebrated after the Council of Trent and the same Mass celebrated today using the missal of Pope Paul.

The people of God are the worshipping community which offers the sacrifice of Christ to the Father. The Eucharist is the action of the whole Church, and this should be expressed in the way we celebrate together. Today's *Roman Missal* bears witness to the ancient and unbroken tradition of the Catholic Church. It complements and enriches the liturgical norms of the Council of Trent. Above all, it seeks to draw Christ's priestly people more deeply into the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice through their 'conscious, active and fruitful participation', so that they may grow in holiness.

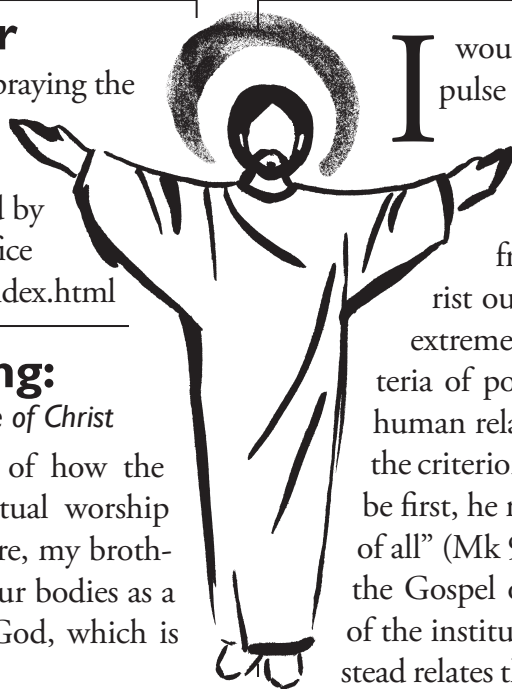
The Risen Lord in person calls together his Church and presides invisibly over the Eucharist as our Head and great High Priest. It is our Catholic faith that Christ presides in and through the visible ministry of a bishop or priest. In the midst of God's priestly people, the bishop or priest is the living sacramental sign and instrument of Christ as our Head and Shepherd, our Teacher and High Priest. Because the Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's sacrifice, the action of the presiding minister 'stands in a sacramental relation to what Christ himself did in offering his own sacrifice.' The priest 'offers sacramentally the redemptive sacrifice of Christ.'

One Bread One Body, 27-40. Catholic Bishops' Conferences of England & Wales, Ireland and Scotland

Reflection questions can be downloaded from
<http://www.rcdow.org.uk/liturgy/>

The Eucharistic Prayer

A full and clear guide to best practice in praying the Eucharistic Prayer is given in *Celebrating the Mass*, the pastoral guide from the Bishops of England and Wales, published by CTS. It is available too at www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Documents/index.html



Praying our Thanksgiving:

uniting ourselves with the Sacrifice of Christ

Saint Paul offers a concise description of how the Eucharist makes our whole life a spiritual worship pleasing to God: 'I appeal to you therefore, my brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship' (Rom 12:1).

In the Eucharistic Liturgy, the faithful of God have a number of opportunities by which to associate themselves with the self-offering of Christ, by which they receive life, and which they are invited to imitate in their daily living.

The Procession with the Gifts is a powerful expression of the assembly's participation in the Eucharist and in the social mission of the Church. It is an expression of the humble and contrite heart, the dispossession of self that is a necessary prerequisite for making the true offering which the Lord Jesus gave his people to make with him. The Procession of the Gifts expresses also our eager willingness to enter into the "holy exchange" with God: "accept the offerings you have given us, that we in turn may receive the gift of yourself." *Celebrating the Mass* 180.

The Preface Dialogue is of special value. It is not only an external sign of communal celebration, but also fosters and brings about communion between priest and people. The dialogue establishes at the outset that the Eucharistic Prayer is prayed in the person and power of the Lord who is with the Church, and in the name of the whole assembly and indeed of the whole Church in heaven and on earth. All are invited, in the biblical term, to lift up their hearts, that is, to raise up and place in God's presence their entire being, thoughts, memories, emotions, and expectations, in grateful attention and anticipation. *Celebrating the Mass* 190.

Doxology Faithful to the Jewish pattern of prayer known and used by Jesus and his disciples, the Eucharistic Prayer concludes where it began, with an ascription

I would like to emphasize the impulse which the Eucharist gives to the community for a practical commitment to building a more just and fraternal society. In the Eucharist our God has shown love in the

extreme, overturning all those criteria of power which too often govern human relations and radically affirming the criterion of service: "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (Mk 9:35). It is not by chance that the Gospel of John contains no account of the institution of the Eucharist, but instead relates the "washing of feet" (Jn 13:1-20): by bending down to wash the feet of

his disciples, Jesus explains the meaning of the Eucharist unequivocally. Saint Paul vigorously reaffirms the impropriety of a Eucharistic celebration lacking charity expressed by practical sharing with the poor (1Cor 11:17-34).

Can we commit to responding with fraternal solicitude to one of the many forms of poverty present in our world? I think for example of the tragedy of hunger which plagues hundreds of millions of human beings, the diseases which afflict developing countries, the loneliness of the elderly, the hardships faced by the unemployed, the struggles of immigrants. These are evils which are present—albeit to a different degree—even in areas of immense wealth. We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (Jn 13:35; Mt 25:31-46). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged.

Pope John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 28

tion of praise and glory to God, which is endorsed and ratified by all present in their acclamation Amen. Saint Paul considered this ratification by the assembly to be essential to the thanksgiving prayer (see 1 Corinthians 14:15-16), and early Christian writers laid great stress on it as the people's confirmation of all that was proclaimed on their behalf by the priest. *Celebrating the Mass* 198.

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Additional resources can be accessed at www.rcdow.org.uk/liturgy

Praying the Mass 4

Living Communion

The publication of the new English edition of the Roman Missal provides an important opportunity for a deepening of people's love and understanding of the Mass and for helping them to participate more fully in its celebration. But the negativity of much reporting of the new translation means that the process of preparing for its reception and use is sensitive and vitally important.

The process of introduction offers an opportunity to renew catechesis, liturgical celebration and prayer patterns.

I encourage you now to seize the opportunity that the new translation offers for in-depth catechesis on the Eucharist and renewed devotion in the manner of its celebration. "The more lively the eucharistic faith of the people of God, the deeper is its sharing in ecclesial life in steadfast commitment to the mission entrusted by Christ to his disciples"

Pope Benedict XVI,
*To the Bishops of England,
Scotland and Wales,*
19th September 2010

Praying the Mass is offered as a resource to the parishes and other communities of faith in the Archdiocese of Westminster to help with this time of renewal and deepening.

Notes for Priests and Liturgy Groups

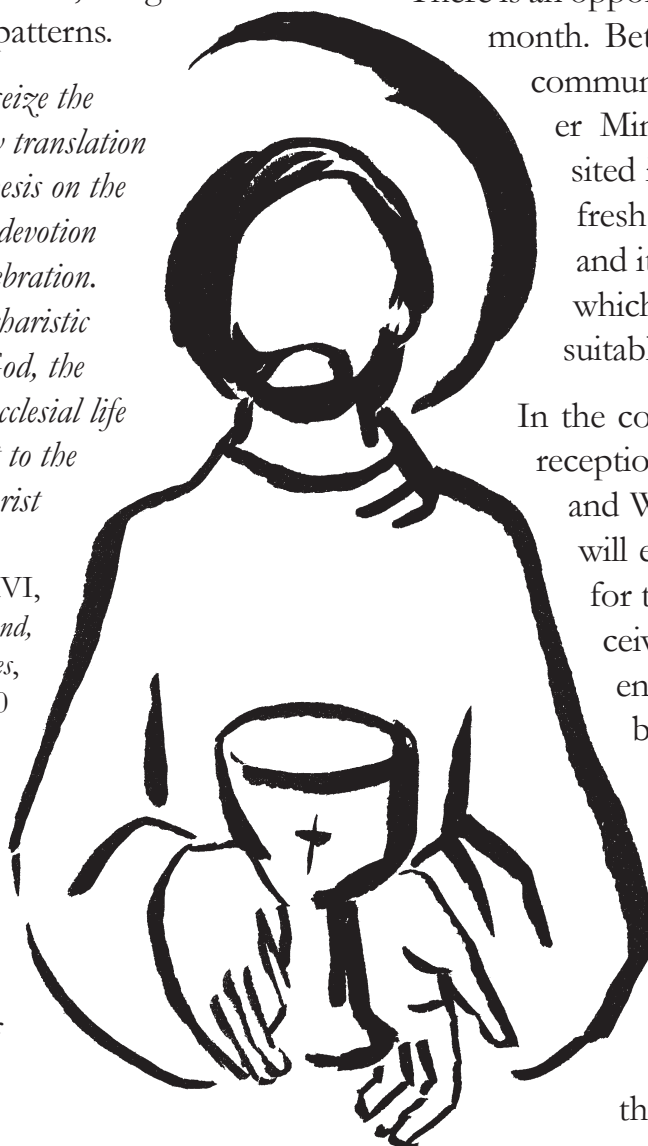
The time of sharing in Holy Communion is rich with meaning and potential. The Lord of Life gives himself as food and drink to the faithful. Those who are not worthy to receive Him, receive the Bread of Life and drink from the Cup of eternal salvation.

Changes in the manner of reception over recent decades have sometimes been accompanied by a loss of prayerfulness, even by an awareness of significance. Sometimes the manner of distribution and reception lacks the sense of awe and reverence that should always be present.

There is an opportunity to address such matters this month. Better organising of processions of communicants, new attention as to whether Ministers of Holy Communion are sited in the best places in the church; a fresh catechesis on Holy Communion and its reception are among the ways in which any reason for concern might be suitably addressed.

In the coming months new norms for the reception of Holy Communion in England and Wales are likely to be issued. These will establish a new Sign of Reverence for the lay faithful to make prior to receiving communion - namely a reverent bow of the head. This Sign might be usefully promoted even now.

Finally we should remain mindful of those in the assembly who are not in a position to receive Holy Communion. A fresh catechesis on the nature and value of Spiritual Communion may be helpful to them, and the parish as a whole.



One Bread One Body

Receiving Communion, Living Communion

The Church's unity is rooted and centred in the Eucharist: 'The Eucharist is the creative force and source of communion among the members of the Church, precisely because it unites each one of them with Christ himself.' We become companions in the literal sense of the word, sharing bread together, the Bread of Life. The Eucharistic Prayers of the Catholic Church are prayed 'in union with the whole Church'. We pray for the Catholic Church, that the Father may grant it 'peace and unity throughout the world.' We pray that 'all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ may be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit', that we may 'grow in love' together with the Pope and bishops, and that we may 'become one body, one spirit in Christ,' 'healed of all division.' The healing and uniting power of the Eucharist is such that we can ask the Father to unite all his children, 'wherever they may be.'

This healing power of the Mass is important for Catholics gathered together in worship. There are times when we need to be reconciled to one another, when our little faith needs to be renewed and strengthened, when our love needs to be refreshed or brought to life again. The offering to each other of

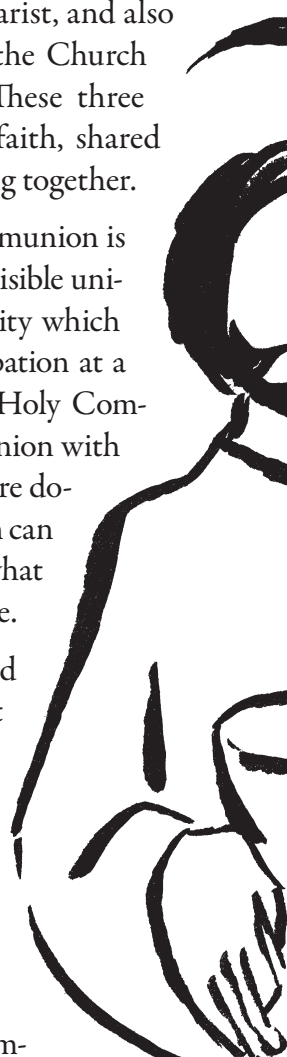
the 'kiss' or sign of peace before receiving Holy Communion expresses something of this. St Cyril of Jerusalem taught that 'the kiss joins souls together in search of complete forgiveness from one another. ... So the kiss is a reconciliation, and therefore holy.' Others saw it as a profession of unity and mutual love before we share together the 'one bread' as the 'one body' of Christ. Jesus himself calls us to be reconciled with one another first before offering our gift at the altar. We come to the Eucharist as sinful pilgrims struggling along the way to holiness. But we believe that Christ is there to welcome us and to say his word of healing, to sanctify and transform our lives, and to deepen our unity with the Holy Trinity and with one another in his Church.

Each celebration of Mass is one Eucharistic moment in the life of the Church from East to West, and through the ages. The community gathered for Mass does not

celebrate on its own, but as united with 'all who hold and teach the catholic faith that comes to us from the apostles.' A truly Catholic community is open to every other such community, united in Christ by the Spirit so as to be one in truth and in love. This is an essential part of our Catholic understanding. This unity of the universal Church is a communion in truth, in love and in holiness. It is rooted in sharing the same faith and in our common baptism, in the Eucharist, and also in communion with the bishops of the Church united with the Bishop of Rome. These three signs and sources of unity - shared faith, shared Eucharist and shared ministry - belong together.

The simple act of receiving Holy Communion is the highest expression of a living and visible unity of faith and life with the community which celebrates that Eucharist. Full participation at a Catholic Mass through reception of Holy Communion normally implies full communion with the Catholic Church itself. What we are doing when we receive Holy Communion can never be divorced from our faith in what we are as a community of faith and love.

The whole Catholic Church is involved in every celebration of Mass. We are not simply a group of believers gathered around a priest at an altar in a particular place. We are united with our local bishop, and through him with the whole college of bishops united with the Pope. This is why we include the names of our bishop and of the Pope in the Eucharistic Prayer. We are not simply praying for them; we are expressing our communion with them. The bishop is associated with every parish celebration of Mass. This was symbolised for several centuries in Rome by the Pope sending a particle of the consecrated bread from his celebration of Mass to each priest presiding at a local celebration, so that they would not be separated from communion with him. This particle (known as the fermentum) was then added to the chalice before the distribution of communion, to express the truth that the Eucharist is the sacrament of the unity of the Church. We can also say that 'the Pope is associated with every celebration of the Eucharist', as the sign and servant of the unity of the universal Church. The words of the Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs



and Occasions (EPVNO) express this faith: 'Strengthen the bonds of our communion with N.. our pope, N. our bishop, with all bishops, priests and deacons, and all your holy people.' Receiving Holy Communion at a Catholic Mass implies a longing for communion in faith and love with the local Catholic bishop and the Pope.

Receiving Holy Communion is the supremely powerful sign that a person is a full member of the Catholic Church. When Christians of other traditions are received into full communion with the Church their receiving Holy Communion is an effective sign which on that one occasion, the Mass of Reception, actually brings about the state of full membership.

We should not forget that the Eucharist is a Sacrament of Initiation. When young children make their First Holy Communion, they too are brought into a new and deepened communion with the Catholic Church.

This deepened communion brought about by the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist includes not only that with the members of the pilgrim Church here on earth, but 'also between these and all who, having passed from this world in the grace of the Lord, belong to the heavenly Church or will be incorporated into her after being fully purified.'

In the Eucharistic Prayer, we ask for a share in the fellowship of Mary, the Mother of God, the apostles, the martyrs and all the saints, and we pray to be made worthy to share eternal life with them. We are united with the angels and the saints in the heavenly liturgy as we worship

God, and we pray: 'When our pilgrimage on earth is complete, welcome us into your heavenly home, where we shall dwell with you for ever. There, with Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, with the apostles, the martyrs and all the saints, we shall praise you and give you glory through Jesus Christ, your Son.'

At the end of Mass, we are sent forth in peace to love and to serve the Lord, in deeper communion, we hope, with each other and with the whole Church. We receive the body of Christ so that we may go forth as the Body of Christ into the world, the living sacrament of his presence in the midst of others. Through the Eucharist we become more profoundly the Church and we are sent

forth as the Church to fulfil our mission in and for the world. There is an intimate and inseparable link between Mass and mission, between worship and way of life. Our communion with Christ means that we share not only his life but also his mission. At each Eucharist, the Risen Christ says to us anew: 'As the Father sent me, so am I sending you', and breathes his Spirit upon us. The Spirit we receive anoints us afresh to bring good news to the poor, since any true communion with the living Lord will lead us to recognise him in those most in need.

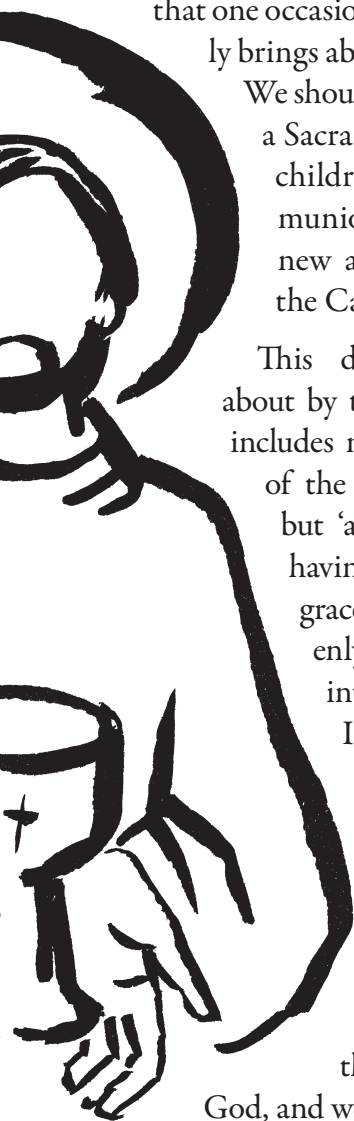
The celebration of the Eucharist commits us to the poor and should flow into social action; our active love for the poor and oppressed, the sick and the sad, leads us back to the Eucharist as the source and summit of all we do. 'To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognise Christ in the poorest', his brothers and sisters. Jesus himself powerfully reminds us that whatever we do for those in need, we do for him. In the early Church, bishops like St John Chrysostom challenged those who recognised Christ in the breaking of bread to recognise him also in the broken lives of those around them: 'Would you honour the body of Christ? Do not despise his nakedness; do not honour him here in church clothed in silk vestments and then pass him by unclothed and frozen outside. Remember that he who said, "This is my body", and made good his words, also said, "You saw me hungry and

Through the Eucharist we become more profoundly the Church and we are sent forth as the Church to fulfil our mission in and for the world. Our communion with Christ means that we share not only his life but also his mission.

gave me no food", and, "in so far as you did it not to one of these, you did it not to me". In the first sense the body of Christ does not need clothing but worship from a pure heart. In the second sense it does need clothing and all the care we can give.'

In EPVNO, we pray: 'Open our eyes to the needs of all; inspire us with words and deeds to comfort those who labour and are overburdened; keep our service of others faithful to the example and command of Christ. Let your Church be a living witness to truth and freedom, to justice and peace, that all people may be lifted up by the hope of a world made new.' As bishops, we pray that all of us in the Catholic community may say and live our 'Great Amen' to those words.

cf One Bread One Body, 56-67. Catholic Bishops' Conferences of England & Wales, Ireland and Scotland



The Communion Rite

A full and clear guide to the celebration of the Communion Rite is given in *Celebrating the Mass*, the pastoral guide from the Bishops of England and Wales, published by CTS. It is available too at www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Documents/index.html

Praying our Communion:

eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Christ

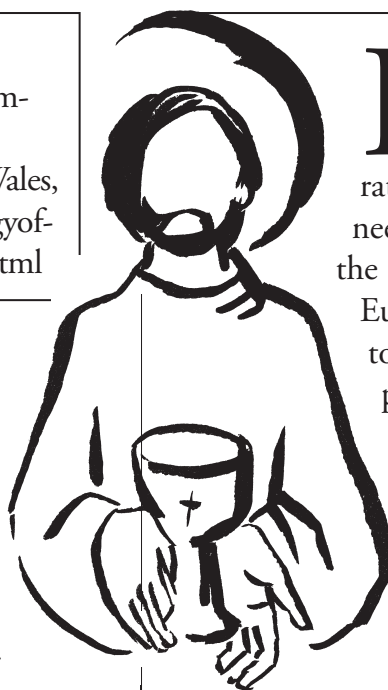
The Communion Rite is centred on Christ's present and eternal gift of himself to his Church, and nothing during the Rite should obscure or distract us from his Presence and his giving of himself to the Church.

The Sign of Peace prior to the reception of Communion is an acknowledgement that Christ, whom we receive in the Sacrament, is already present in our neighbour. In this exchange the assembly acknowledges the insistent Gospel truth that communion with God in Christ is enjoyed in communion with our sisters and brothers in Christ. The rite of peace is not an expression merely of human solidarity or good will; it is rather an opening of ourselves and our neighbours to a challenge and a gift from beyond ourselves. Like the Amen at Communion, it is the acceptance of a challenge, a profession of faith that we are members, one with another, in the body of Christ.

- All the members of the assembly, ministers and people, turn to those immediately around them. The Sign of Peace is not transmitted in sequence, as it were from a single source. Christ, who is its only source, is present and active in the assembly. *cf Celebrating the Mass 204*

Breaking of the Bread This characteristic action of Christ at the feeding of the multitude, at the Last Supper, and at his meals with the disciples after his resurrection was so central to the Eucharist that it seems to have given its name to the entire celebration in the days of the Apostles. The natural, the practical, the symbolic, and the spiritual are all inextricably linked in this most powerful symbol. Just as many grains of wheat are ground, kneaded, and baked together to become one loaf, which is then broken and shared out among many to bring them into one table-fellowship, so those gathered are made one body in the one bread of life which is Christ (*cf 1 Cor 10: 17*).

- The regular use of larger Breads will foster an awareness of the fundamental Eucharistic symbolism in which the whole assembly, priest and people, share in the same



Ask everyone, especially ordained ministers and those who, after adequate preparation and in cases of genuine need, are authorised to exercise the ministry of distributing the Eucharist, to make every effort to ensure that this simple act preserves its importance as a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus in the sacrament. Observe the current norms faithfully, see in them an expression of the faith and love with which we all must regard this

sublime sacrament. Furthermore, the precious time of thanksgiving after communion should not be neglected: besides the singing of an appropriate hymn, it can also be most helpful to remain recollected in silence.

Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 50

bread. At every Mass at least one large Host is broken into several portions. One of these portions is consumed by the priest, the rest are distributed to at least some other members of the assembly.

- The faithful are not ordinarily to be given Communion from the tabernacle. *cf Celebrating the Mass 205*

Silence or Song of Praise after Communion

When Communion is completed, the whole assembly may observe a period of total silence. In the absence of all words, actions, music, or movement, a moment of deep corporate stillness and contemplation may be experienced. Such silence is important to the rhythm of the whole celebration and is welcome in a busy and restless world.

- Silence and true stillness can be achieved if all, the assembly and its ministers, take part in it.
- As an alternative or addition to silent contemplation, a psalm or song of praise may be sung. Since there should normally have been singing during Communion, silence may be more desirable.
- This period of deep and tranquil communion is not to be interrupted even by parish announcements, which, if needed, come correctly in the Concluding Rite, or the taking of a collection. Nor should this silence be broken or overlaid by the public reading of devotional material. *cf Celebrating the Mass 215*

Praying the Mass 5

Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life

The publication of the new English edition of the Roman Missal provides an important opportunity for a deepening of people's love and understanding of the Mass and for helping them to participate more fully in its celebration. But the negativity of much reporting of the new translation means that the process of preparing for its reception and use is sensitive and vitally important. The process of introduction offers an opportunity to renew catechesis, liturgical celebration and prayer patterns.

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Pope Benedict XVI

To the Bishops of England, Scotland and Wales,
19th September 2010

Praying the Mass is offered as a resource to the parishes and other communities of faith in the Archdiocese of Westminster to help with this time of renewal and deepening.



Notes for Priests and Liturgy Groups

At the recent Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist Pope Benedict was urged to approve an additional text for insertion into the Missal to make still more clear to us the connection between the Mass just celebrated and the mission of Christians in the world.

That text has now been prepared and approved. It will appear in the new edition of the Missal for England and Wales which will soon be published. The text appears as the subheading to this last part of *Praying the Mass*: 'Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.'

Beginnings and endings matter. They establish what we are about. This is the last of the series of *Praying the Mass* leaflets. But this series is simply the beginning of the process of preparation for the new edition of the Missal for use in our Diocese, with its new translation.

New resources have been distributed to parishes and can be used to follow up what *Praying the Mass* began:

- *Become One Body One Spirit in Christ*: an interactive DVD which explores different dimensions of the Mass, its meaning, its texts and its celebration.
- *Understanding the Revised Mass Texts* which helps us appreciate the new translation of the Missal.

Still more resources will be made available shortly to help parishes begin to use the new translation.

The new texts will be introduced incrementally, to support catechesis which will help us learn them in good time for the full Missal being used from Advent 2011.

Gather Faithfully Together: practical steps we can take

In the following paragraphs Cardinal Mahony proposes several habits that each church-going Catholic can begin to cultivate that will bring us together into a life-giving liturgical practice Sunday after Sunday. How might these steps serve your parish community's participation in and living of the Mass?

Become people who worship in the midst of the Sunday Liturgy.

Know which Gospel and New Testament letters we are currently reading on Sundays, and use these for daily reading. Bring to the prayer of intercession on Sunday all that you pray for; take from it persons to be remembered daily by you; when you hear the news of the community and the world, hear it as a Christian who must in prayer lift up the world's needs. Mark with prayer your morning rising and your evening going to bed: the Lord's Prayer certainly, but also some song or psalm from the songs and psalms of Sunday Liturgy in your parish.

Become people who prepare themselves for Sunday Liturgy and people for whom Sunday Liturgy is preparation for the week.

Seek little ways that can help you make the Lord's Day as much as possible a day when liturgy has room. Find some habit for Sunday morning that helps you anticipate being together as a Church to do the liturgy. Find just one steady practice that makes you stretch toward the Reign of God we glimpse at Mass: It might be a way to make more real the collection that happens on Sunday for the Church and the poor; extending the peace of Christ that you receive each Sunday to others in need of that peace; or fasting from food or distractions and so becoming thoroughly hungry for God's Word and the Eucharistic banquet. In ethnic communities we find many examples of practices that resonate with the Sunday Liturgy, such as the blessing of children that is so much to be praised in Hispanic families.

At the Liturgy, be the Church.

Know the awesome responsibility you share for making this liturgy! Do not hide; do your private praying in the other hours of the week. Welcome one another, be at peace with one another. Sit together. Sing songs from your heart. Do not be afraid to show in your eager attention that you are hungry for God's Word when the readers

read, hungry for Christ's Body and Blood when you come forward in Holy Communion. Give thanks and praise to God by your great attention in the Eucharistic Prayer. Keep your eyes open to one another and do everything you can to build up the Church, the Body of Christ. If the presider or homilist needs help, do not criticise - help.

Apart from the Liturgy, be the Church.

Remember we are always the Body of Christ, always in communion with one another. Know that you can ask for help from one another. Let others know that. In the simplest deeds of daily life at work or at home, be conscious of this life we share in Christ, of its joy and its hope. Do not set yourself as separate from others, but understand that we who are the Church are one with others. In us, God is calling and blessing and sanctifying the world God loves. Look at the liturgy as a remote preparation for your week. Listening to God's Word on Sunday morning is preparation for the listening we do for God's Word in our lives all week. The thanks we proclaim at the Eucharistic Prayer is a preparation for thanks over all tables and all meals, and also over all. The common table of Holy Communion is a preparation for looking at the whole world.



Give thanks always.

Pray grace at meals even when you are alone in the traditional prayer of 'Bless us, O Lord,' or a phrase as simple as 'Let us give thanks to the Lord our God; it is right to give thanks and praise!' Sing when you are with others at table. If your morning and night prayer is not permeated with praise and thanks to God, enrich it with verses of psalms and prayers from our tradition. (For example, 'We worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory,' Or, 'Blessed be God for ever!' Or any or all of Psalm 148.) Cultivate moments of contemplation even during the busiest day, when gratitude can flow from the goodness of a person, any element of creation, or any good work of human making.

Cardinal Roger Mahoney

Gather Faithfully Together: A Guide for Sunday Mass

The social implications of the Eucharistic Mystery

The union with Christ brought about by the Eucharist also brings a newness to our social relations: 'this sacramental 'mysticism' is social in character.' Indeed, 'union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own.' The relationship between the eucharistic mystery and social commitment must be made explicit. The Eucharist is the sacrament of communion between brothers and sisters who allow themselves to be reconciled in Christ, who made of

Jews and pagans one people, tearing down the wall of hostility which divided them (cf. Eph 2:14).

Only this constant impulse towards reconciliation enables us to partake worthily of the Body and Blood of Christ (cf. Mt 5:23-24).

In the memorial of his sacrifice, the Lord strengthens our fraternal communion and, in a particular way, urges those in conflict to hasten their reconciliation by

opening themselves to dialogue and a commitment to justice. Certainly, the restoration of justice, reconciliation and forgiveness are the conditions for building true peace. The recognition of this fact leads to a determination to transform unjust structures and to restore respect for the dignity of all men and women, created in God's image and likeness. Through the concrete fulfilment of this responsibility, the Eucharist becomes in life what it signifies in its celebration. As I have had occasion to say, it is not the proper task of the Church to engage in the political work of bringing about the most just society possible; nonetheless she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the struggle for jus-

The Christian laity, formed at the school of the Eucharist, are called to assume their specific political and social responsibilities

tice. The Church 'has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper.'

In discussing the social responsibility of all Christians, the Synod Fathers noted that the sacrifice of Christ is a mystery of liberation that constantly and insistently challenges us. I therefore urge all the faithful to be true promoters of peace and justice: 'All who partake of the Eucharist must commit themselves to peacemaking in our world scarred by violence and war, and today in particular, by terrorism, economic corruption and sexual exploitation.' All these problems give rise in turn to others no less troubling and disheartening. We know that there can be no superficial solutions to these issues. Precisely because of the mystery we celebrate, we must denounce situations contrary to human dignity, since Christ shed his blood for all, and at the same time affirm the inestimable value of each individual person.

The mystery of the Eucharist inspires and impels us to work courageously within our world to bring about that renewal of relationships which has its inexhaustible source in God's gift. The prayer which we repeat at every Mass: 'Give us this day our daily bread,' obliges us to do everything possible, in cooperation with international, state and private institutions, to end or at least reduce the scandal of hunger and malnutrition afflicting so many millions of people in our world, especially in developing countries. In a particular way, the Christian laity, formed at the school of the Eucharist, are called to assume their specific political and social responsibilities. To do so, they need to be adequately prepared through practical education in charity and justice. To this end, the Synod considered it necessary for Dioceses and Christian communities to teach and promote the Church's social doctrine. In this precious legacy handed down from the earliest ecclesial tradition, we find elements of great wisdom that guide Christians in their involvement in today's burning social issues. This teaching, the fruit of the Church's whole history, is distinguished by realism and moderation; it can help to avoid misguided compromises or false utopias.

Pope Benedict XVI. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 89, 91

Session 5 of Praying the Mass gives the opportunity to arrange a joint meeting between the parish Liturgy Group, Catechists and the Parish Justice and Peace Group. The work of each of these groups has a bearing on the others, but there is not always an opportunity to reflect on this. Why not invite them together and ask each to speak first on something they value in parish practice, and then on something they think might be strengthened?

The Concluding Rites

A full and clear guide to the celebration of the Concluding Rites is given in *Celebrating the Mass*, the pastoral guide from the Bishops of England and Wales, published by CTS. It is available too at www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Documents/index.html



Praying our Missioning:

Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life

After the Communion Rite, the Mass closes with a brief Concluding Rite. Its purpose is to send the people forth to put into effect in their daily lives the Paschal Mystery and the unity in Christ which they have celebrated. They are given a sense of abiding mission, which calls them to witness to Christ in the world and to bring the Gospel to the poor.

The Concluding Rite consists of:

- brief announcements, if they are necessary.
- the priest's greeting and blessing, which on certain days and occasions is enriched and expressed in the Prayer over the People or another more solemn formula.
- the dismissal of the people by the deacon or the priest, so that each member goes out to do good works, praising and blessing God.
- the kissing of the altar by the priest and the deacon, followed by a profound bow to the altar by all the ministers. If there is a tabernacle containing the Most Blessed Sacrament on the sanctuary, they genuflect.
- an orderly procession of the ministers and the assembly.

When another liturgical rite is to follow immediately, for example, the final commendation at a funeral, the entire concluding rite is omitted because these other rites will have their own form of conclusion.

Announcements

Just as the introductory comments by the priest at the beginning of the celebration may help the assembly to a better appreciation and experience of the mysteries celebrated in the Eucharist, so also the pastoral announcements at the end may help the people make the transition from worship into renewed Christian witness in society. They should help people become aware of the faith life and pastoral activity of the community and invite participation in the ongoing work of the Church.

Dismissal(s)

- It is fitting for Holy Communion to be taken directly from Mass to the sick or those unable to leave their homes.
- Appropriate times for ministers to receive a pyx from the priest and be 'sent' to take Holy Communion and leave the assembly are either after the Communion of the people or

The Liturgy is frequently spoken of as the source and summit of Christian life. It is source: for in the Liturgy we receive the grace we need to live in communion with God each day of our lives. It is summit: because we bring to the Mass all the events of our lives, the joys and sorrows, the failures, the successes, and they are

united with Christ's self offering of himself to his Father.

What we receive at Mass we take to our lives: what we live we bring to the Mass. Mass leads us to life and life leads us to worship – there is a progression, a cyclical, spiralling progression able to lead us into an ever-deeper relationship with God.

Pope John Paul recently asked us whether this is how things are (*Spiritus et Sponsa*, 6). 'To what extent does the Liturgy affect the practice of the faithful and does it mark the rhythm of the individual communities? Is it seen as a path of holiness, an inner force of apostolic dynamism and of the Church's missionary outreach?'

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immediately before the final blessing.

- The ministers may depart before the Prayer after Communion, immediately after the Prayer after Communion or as part of the concluding procession.
- The Presider will normally speak words of dismissal or missioning over these ministers. These words may be based on the words of the Communion antiphon, on the readings of the day, a simple form for this dismissal is given in CTM.
- Local circumstances will determine which of these various options will be most fitting in any particular parish.
- The Dismissal sends the members of the congregation forth to praise and bless the Lord in the midst of their daily responsibilities.
- The practice of a final song or hymn is foreign to the Roman Rite, which is notably brief in its concluding rites. The use of a final hymn at Mass which keeps ministers and assembly in their place after the dismissal detracts somewhat from the dimension of missionary imperative present in the dismissal texts. The use of instrumental music, particularly an organ voluntary, is more appropriate to this moment.

cf Celebrating the Mass 217--225

