

Scriptural Basis of the Mass: Session 4: The Liturgy of the Eucharist, Part 1

Written and Compiled by Theresa Lisiecki

Introduction

So far we have looked at symbol and sign, the Opening Rites and the Liturgy of the Word. My hope is that in these next two sessions we will spend the bulk of our time looking at the most sacred part of the Mass – The Liturgy of the Eucharist. Unfortunately the vast majority of us spend our time at this point in the Mass daydreaming rather than be attentive to the miracle that is happening before us. But not to worry, the reason we allow our minds to wander (in my opinion) is that we don't really understand what is happen in this moment of the Mass. Hopefully with our conversation on the Liturgy of the Eucharist where common gifts of bread and wine become the body and blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ we will find reason and cause to stay more attentive. So let's get to it.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is divided up into three parts:

- First we have the **Preparation of the Gifts** -- It is here that we present to our Lord the substances that we hope, through the power of God, to have transformed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. But it is not just the bread and the wine we bring to the altar, figuratively speaking. We will briefly look at how we as a community should be offering more -- ourselves.
- Second is the **Eucharistic Prayer** -- Through the power of God along with the actions and words of the priest who functions *persona Christi*, (in the person of Christ), the transubstantiation, the changing of substance into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, occurs. It is important to understand that this happens in union with OUR prayers so our "veging out" is not what the Church calls us to do during the Eucharistic Prayers.
- Finally we have the **Communion Rite** -- This is the part of the Mass that most of us re-engage. Some because we know in a moment we will be receiving Jesus in communion but for all too many of us we sigh relief because we know that we have something to "get" (communion) and Mass is almost over.

Over the course of the next few sessions we will be looking at all of this.

The Preparation of the Gifts: Again, this part of the Mass is one of the most ancient elements. Church historians can go back as far as the 2nd century; to the writings of Justin Martyr who wrote of the Christian community gathered: *Then someone brings bread and a cup of water and wine mixed together to him who presides over the brethren.* But it wasn't just bread and wine that was brought to the presider/priest. For centuries it was at this moment that the faith community would bring all sorts of things to the altar such as fruits and vegetables, animals for future slaughter, wax and textiles. These gifts were the products of the church members' skills and labors and it was intended for the use of the Church -- to give to the poor or sell for support. Many of us will remember this part of the Mass being called the

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Offertory and in light of this bit of historical information the name makes sense. As we prepare to come to the table of the Lord we offer what we have – our work. **READ: Mark 6:34-44.** “*How many loaves do you have?*” he asked. “*Go and see.*” When they found out, they said, “*Five—and two fish.*” (verse 38). As we see in this reading the disciples of Christ went through the crowd and gathered what was offered, five loaves and two fishes. Scholars believe this was a meal for a few who had come prepared. It was with this simple offering that Jesus, blessed it, broke it and shared it with over 5,000 people. God takes what we offer and makes it more which is an important concept or idea in this moment of Mass and for our lives of faith.

As we reflect on this moment let's first take a moment to look at the gifts of bread and wine. In our contemporary 21st century bread has lost its meaning and value. Today bread, while delicious, is often seen as almost evil. I don't know about you but I try very hard to not eat bread because as a “carb” it means extra calories or something my body will change into sugars. Weight gain and high blood sugars lead to problems and who needs those problems. So, why did Jesus use bread? (And by the way, the bread that Jesus used looked more like bread. Think of pita bread.)



For millenniums bread was more than just a side dish. Until recent times bread was the basic element of a meal for most people. Jesus, at the Last Supper, was celebrating a special meal of the Jews called the Passover or Seder Meal. While there were other things on the table at this special meal, it was not the common or daily fare. Think in terms of what you normally eat for a regular weekday lunch. Now think of Thanksgiving dinner. Just like most of us eat simply most days, for centuries bread was the main substance of most meals.

There might be a simple stew or soup depending on what was available, bread was always on the table. Why, because it was cheap and filling and when money is tight those are the things one goes for. But there is more. **READ: Exodus 16:1-5.** From ancient times during the 40 years of wandering in the desert bread (manna) was the way God fed His people. Later the Israelites, instructed by God in building the Tabernacle, would always keep twelve loaves (representing the 12 tribes of Israel) as an offering back to God. (See Exodus 25:23-30, 1 Samuel 21:4-6, 1 Kings 7:48 and picture above) This Shewbread, as it is called by the Jews, was a reminder to the Israelites throughout centuries of God's presence in their lives. Manna was also one of the things kept in the Ark of the Covenant. (Hebrews 9:3-4; Exodus 16:33-34) The bible even shows that bread is essential to life by calling it a staff -- *the staff of bread.* (Leviticus 23:15-20, Psalm 105:16, Ezekiel 4:16; 5:16). Even today when we talk about sitting down to a meal together we sometimes say that we are "breaking bread" together. Bread has always been an essential part, if not the main part, of most people's meal. So, when we see the bread

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brought forward it represents the substance of life... our life.



In the same way wine was not just something enjoyed on occasion, with a good meal or in good company. Wine was a common part of a meal. (Judges 19:19, 1 Samuel 16:20, 1 Samuel 25:36, Genesis 14:18) And in the same way bread was used in Temple worship, wine was offered in sacrifices. **READ: Nehemiah 10:36-39.** (See also: Exodus 29:38-41, Numbers 15:2-15) From a practical point of view, without modern sanitation and understanding of how water is contaminated by animal and human feces, wine (with its alcohol content) was the safer thing to drink. So, just as bread was an essential part of ancient life so was wine. While many of us today have a problem or issue with consuming bread and/or wine, to give these basic elements of a common meal was a sacrifice, but one willingly given to honor and acknowledge the lordship of God. It honors God because it was God who gave us the basic elements to make these products in the first place. What does the priest say at the altar after receiving the bread and the wine? *Through your goodness we have receive the bread we offer you... the wine we offer you.* God created out all things of love for us. So, We receive and offer back to God. But, as stated before, when the wine and the bread are brought up to the altar we are bringing so much more.

In Latin the word used to bring or to offer is *offerre*. As we sit watching the bread and wine being brought up to the altar, the intent of this moment is that we are to imagine each one of us being brought, being presented to the Lord. Remember the early communities not only bringing the bread and wine but their personal offerings as well. We no longer offer the works of our hands literally but we do figuratively. The physical gifts of bread and wine represent each one of us giving ourselves to God. At St. Colette, as with all parishes, this moment begins with the collection of monies. No longer do we bring the *works of our hands* but we offer our money. The money we bring and collected represents the time and talent we give to God. Another way to look at this offering is to think in terms of rather than *owning* the "stuff" of our lives we are simply stewards of God's gifts. Who gave us the talents and abilities we have to make the money and buy what we own? Who gives us time on this earth? While we may have worked for the things of our lives, logic dictates that it all ultimately comes from God. Faith informs us that we are simply **stewards** of God's possessions, talents and money. (1st

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Peter 4:10) We can all understand that time is money, time is valuable. What God requires of us is more than just an hour of our lives but all of our lives. Faith teaches us that He requires that we take what is given to us, put it to good use and then offer it back to God. **READ: Matthew 25:14-30.** In this passage God is represented by the Master and the gold or talents being given represent what God gives to each of us. We are the servants being given according to our ability. We are called to take what has been given and put it to good and holy use. But eventually the understanding is that what we have been given is to return to the Master, to God. And what happens to the servant who hordes or hides their gift? What little we have will be taken from us.

In understanding that we are given what we have as stewards, in this moment in Mass we, like the good and faithful servants, return back to God a small pittance of what God has given to us. Why do we do this? Not because God needs anything from us but because we need to learn something that we should have learned in kindergarten -- to share. We need to strip away another layer of selfish self investment and to focus our attention on the needs of others. And what does God do with it? He takes the little we offer and turns it into so much more.

Within this stage of the Mass, the Preparation of the Gifts, once the gifts have been received there are two significant moments as we prepare the gifts for the Eucharistic prayers:



Mixing of Water & Wine: Historically speaking, in the early church there was a very practical reason for the action of mixing a bit of water with the wine. The fermenting process of the ancient work would make the wine very thick. So, in most rich households one would dilute the wine with water to make it more palatable. In poorer homes the wine was diluted to make it last longer. Over time, as is the way of revelation, what was a practical act, God also gives the faithful deep theological

understanding and meaning. In the mixing of the water into the wine we experience/see humanity mingling with divinity. **READ: 2 Peter 1:3-4.** While as a human we will never be divine, as we spoke of before we are meant to seek in ongoing ways our own holiness. We are meant to be more like Christ. So, just as Christ shared in our humanity, we are invited by God to share in Jesus divinity. At the altar the priest says quickly to himself (some will remember the priest saying this for all to hear): *By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.* (See also Romans 5:1-2, Philippians 2:5-8). As the priest is pouring the tiny bit of water into the wine, with the wine symbolizing Jesus' divinity and the water our humanity, our natures mingle. It symbolized Christ taking on human nature and by our accepting Christ as our Lord and savior our sharing Christ's divinity into our lives. As we participate at Mass we experience Christ's divinity in the transubstantiation but we should be different each time we go. Each time we go we

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take on a bit more of Christ's divinity. This mingling of water and wine can also be seen as the water and blood that flowed from the side of Jesus at his crucifixion.

The Washing of the Hands: There was a practical reason for, once the gifts have been brought forward, that the priest washed his hands. Think back to our earlier conversation -- in the early church people brought produce, animals and all sorts of items that as the priest would accept them his hands would get dirty. So, just as we wash our hands before coming to the table for supper, the priest would wash his hands before coming to the table of the Lord. But this action dates back to the priests of the Jewish Temple. An outward sign or action (being spiritual unclean) of an inward state of being (becoming spiritually clean) for the Jews was an act of washing. The priest could not enter the Tabernacle of the Lord without being clean. Every Jewish man and woman could not enter the Temple without being clean. But as we all know sin is so much a part of our human nature just as dirt is. If we had to wait to be purified or clean before God to enter into His Church, His Temple we would never go. So, the washing of hands (and for the Jews feet and body as well depending on the circumstances) was an outward statement of an inward desire. (Exodus 40:12-15; Numbers 8:5-7; Revelation 7:14) As the priest echo's the words of King David's prayer each time he washes his hands with: *Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.* (Psalm 51:2) we are meant to think in terms of our desire to wash away the sins of our lives so that we might be spiritually clean.

The Eucharistic Prayer

All that we have done, the prayers we have said lead us to this moment as the bread and the wine are about to become the body and blood of Jesus. What the Church does at this moment can find its roots not only in scripture but in the structure of centuries old Jewish table prayers that are said at every meal. (See Handout) With the Eucharistic Prayers there are four different prayers that the priest can choose from on any given Sunday as well as other options for special circumstances. Each contains the same basic elements. There are six components to these prayers: The Preface, Sanctus (Holy Holy), Epiclesis, Words of Consecration, Mystery of Faith and Anamnesis which includes the Offering, Intercessions and final Doxology. We will start the conversation this session and continue next session.

The Preface: This is the exchange or the dialogue between the priest and the congregation that begins with:

Priest) The Lord be with you.

(All) And also with you.

(Priest) Lift up your hearts.

(All) We lift them up to the Lord...

Dating back to the third century church, the community invokes the words and attitude from the book of Lamentations. **READ: Lamentations 3:41.** As we have talked about previously the heart was not

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just an organ for the ancient Israelites. It was the source of life. In stating that one is lifting up one's heart one is actually saying they are lifting themselves, their lives to the Lord. Within the context of the Mass the Preface is there to call us back to attention. In this moment of Mass we are expected to give our fullest attention and this dialogue prayer is said to snap us back into the moment. **READ: Colossians 3:1-2.** St. Paul is speaking here of our lives in general but it definitely fits in this moment of Mass. Now with our attention back in hand we offer, once again our thanksgiving and praise.

(Priest) Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

(All) It is right to give him thanks and praise.

(See Psalm 136:1-3; 107:8, 15, 21, 31; Colossians 2:7)

Once these exchanges have been offered the priest recites a short prayer that begins with: *It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation...* There are several options for this prayer given which Eucharistic prayer the priest is offer or the liturgical season we are celebrating. The prayer sets forth a reasons for our praising God. For example in the Christmas season the priest thanks God for becoming human and in Holy Week how *the hour* is approaching. In the Easter season this part of the prayer gives thanks to God for eternal life that Christ has won for us. While each one of these prayers is different they follow a pattern -- Thanksgiving for creation, God's saving deed, request for God to come and rescue us. This whole pattern for the Preface prayer can be seen in Psalm 136. **READ: Psalm 136.** As we listen to this prayer try to allow the words of praise to wash over us.

Holy, Holy (Sanctus): While all that we do and say in the Mass is taken, either in word or attitude, from the Bible there are few moments clearer than in the Holy, Holy. **READ: Isaiah 6:1-3.** You may remember we read this last week. Isaiah is in the midst of a God given vision and in it he sees the angels and the saints giving God glory. As they give glory they sing *Holy, Holy, Holy...* In this moment of Mass we are once again joining in chorus with all the angels and saints. Listen to the words of the priest: *And so, with the Angels and all the Saints we declare your glory, as with one voice we acclaim:* (Eucharistic Prayer II) We sing in one accord acknowledging God as God. In the book of Revelation we read: *heavenly powers, with the angelic hosts sing together the unending hymn of praise...* (4:8)

The second part of this prayer we repeat the words of the crowds that greeted Jesus as he entered into Jerusalem for the last time. **READ: Matthew 21:6-9.** (See also Mark 11:4-10; Luke 19:35-38) The word "Hosanna" has its basis in a Hebrew word that translated means "Save Us!" The crowd in meeting Jesus as he entered into Jerusalem is not only welcoming him into their midst but is also acknowledging their need for Jesus' saving work. As we move closer to the moment Jesus physically becomes present in the bread and the wine we too welcome him into our midst crying out "Save us! In summery in the Holy Holy Holy prayer we are hailing God as God and asking for salvation, not only in this moment but throughout our lives.

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The Epiclesis: To understand this moment in the Mass we need to delve into our Jewish roots. (Yes, since Jewish roots since Christianity comes out of the Jewish religion.) For centuries before the time of Christ the Jewish community has prayed for the Messiah to come. Three times each day they pray for the one who is to lead them into restoring their nation, ending wickedness and sin and restoring the Temple. In the same way the Jews, to this day, pray for the Messiah to come into the world; as we begin our prayers at our table the priest implores the Holy Spirit to make the Messiah-King, Jesus to become present once again in the form of bread and wine. In the Eucharistic Prayer II we hear: "*Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.*" (Eucharistic Prayer II) In the



same way that Jews today pray and expect the Messiah to come and restore their nation, we pray in the Epiclesis with confident hope that the Messiah will come and be present with us in the bread and the wine.

Words of Consecration: READ: Matthew 26:17-30. (Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-22) This is a passage that, by now we should all be familiar with. Jesus gathered with his disciples at the Last Supper. Once again, to get a full and complete understanding of what happened on that night over 2000 years ago and what we celebrate today, we must look take a moment to look at the Jewish Seder Meal and to do that we must look back into part of the story of salvation history that lead up to and included the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.

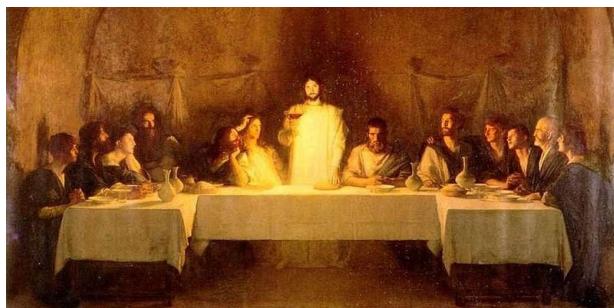
In Genesis we read of 12 brothers, sons of their father Jacob. (Genesis 37:1-39) One son is sold into slavery which takes this son, Joseph into Egypt. Years past and this son becomes a powerful man, second only to the Pharaoh. (Genesis 40:1-41:57) A famine has taken the land and the 11 brothers and their families come to Egypt seeking salvation. 400 years later the Israelites, Joseph's family are slaves under the Egyptians but they have physically thrived and are now a large nation unto themselves.

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They plead to God for their release and God answers them by sending Moses and 10 plagues. As they face the final plague, so that the Israelites do not fall prey to it and therefore would know freedom God requires of them an act of prayer. **READ: Exodus 12:1-14.** For thousands of years and to this day the Jews, every spring celebrate a Passover or Seder meal to commemorate God coming into their human history and bringing salvation from slavery through this final plague. Jesus, being the good Jewish boy that he was gathered his "family", his apostles and disciples and celebrated this meal. But what Jesus did was he changed it. He gave it new meaning, new direction and new depth; because now he would become the lamb who was to be sacrificed for all of humanity and their salvation. Jesus was God made man who entered into human history once again to deliver us from slavery, the slavery of sin. He became the Lamb of God. Each weekend, each time Mass is celebrated we take our place at the Table of the Lord, the Altar and in our own way celebrate a Passover meal as one of Jesus' disciples. Just as God entered into the history of the Israelites thousands of years ago, God enters into our history today. God saved the Israelites from the slavery of the Egyptians and today God through Jesus Christ saves us from the slavery of sin.

I highly, highly, HIGHLY recommend you check out David Brickner's presentation on Youtube.com: Christ in the Passover. Wonderfully informative as to not only the Passover celebration but it's implications coming from our Christian perspective.



We will end there knowing that we will pick up the conversation next session. In the meantime take a moment to reflect through these questions:

1. In our discussion of the presentation of the gifts I shared that we offer ourselves, our time and talent along with our treasure. What time and talent do you offer to God in your life? Is it enough?
2. During the Preparation of the gifts the priest mixes water into the wine symbolizing the mixing of humanity and divinity. How do you understand divinity in your or other's life?
3. Is there something else that you learned in this session that you would like to share or discuss?

Catechism of the Catholic Church

1346 The liturgy of the Eucharist unfolds according to a fundamental structure which has been preserved throughout the centuries down to our own day. It displays two great parts that form a

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fundamental unity:

–the gathering, the liturgy of the Word, with readings, homily, and general intercessions;

–the liturgy of the Eucharist, with the presentation of the bread and wine, the consecratory thanksgiving, and communion.

The liturgy of the Word and liturgy of the Eucharist together form “one single act of worship”; the Eucharistic table set for us is the table both of the Word of God and of the Body of the Lord.

1334 In the Old Covenant bread and wine were offered in sacrifice among the first fruits of the earth as a sign of grateful acknowledgment to the Creator. But they also received a new significance in the context of the Exodus: the unleavened bread that Israel eats every year at Passover commemorates the haste of the departure that liberated them from Egypt; the remembrance of the manna in the desert will always recall to Israel that it lives by the bread of the Word of God; their daily bread is the fruit of the promised land, the pledge of God’s faithfulness to his promises. The “cup of blessing” at the end of the Jewish Passover meal adds to the festive joy of wine an eschatological dimension: the messianic expectation of the rebuilding of Jerusalem. When Jesus instituted the Eucharist, he gave a new and definitive meaning to the blessing of the bread and the cup.

1350 The *presentation of the offerings* (the Offertory). Then, sometimes in procession, the bread and wine are brought to the altar; they will be offered by the priest in the name of Christ in the Eucharistic sacrifice in which they will become his body and blood. It is the very action of Christ at the Last Supper — “taking the bread and a cup.” “The Church alone offers this pure oblation to the Creator, when she offers what comes forth from his creation with thanksgiving.” The presentation of the offerings at the altar takes up the gesture of Melchizedek and commits the Creator’s gifts into the hands of Christ who, in his sacrifice, brings to perfection all human attempts to offer sacrifices.

1351 From the very beginning Christians have brought, along with the bread and wine for the Eucharist, gifts to share with those in need. This custom of the *collection*, ever appropriate, is inspired by the example of Christ who became poor to make us rich: *Those who are well off, and who are also willing, give as each chooses. What is gathered is given to him who presides to assist orphans and widows, those whom illness or any other cause has deprived of resources, prisoners, immigrants and, in a word, all who are in need.* (St. Justin)

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1352 The *anaphora*: with the Eucharistic Prayer—the prayer of thanksgiving and consecration—we come to the heart and summit of the celebration:

In the *preface*, the Church gives thanks to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, for all his works: creation, redemption, and sanctification. The whole community thus joins in the unending praise that the Church in heaven, the angels and all the saints, sing to the thrice-holy God.

1353 In the *epiclesis*, the Church asks the Father to send his Holy Spirit (or the power of his blessing) on the bread and wine, so that by his power they may become the body and blood of Jesus Christ and so that those who take part in the Eucharist may be one body and one spirit (some liturgical traditions put the epiclesis after the anamnesis).

In the *institution narrative*, the power of the words and the action of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit, make sacramentally present under the species of bread and wine Christ's body and blood, his sacrifice offered on the cross once for all.