

What will be Different at Mass?

The Communion and Concluding Rites

On the night before he died, Jesus ate supper with his Apostles. He broke bread, blessed wine, and invited them to eat and drink. He offered them his very Body and Blood. Moreover, he commanded them to continue to do this in memory of him. For over two thousand years, we have never failed to follow this command. Every time we gather for Mass, we are still nourished by both word and sacrament. After listening and responding to the Scriptures, we offer our great prayer of thanksgiving—the Eucharistic prayer, recognizing all God has done for us. Then we are formed into an even more perfect union with God and each other as we receive this gift. That is why we call this sacrament “Holy Communion.”

THE LORD’S PRAYER

The rite begins with the prayer that Christ himself taught us. (Mt 6:9- 13) The Lord’s Prayer has been part of the Mass since the sixth century, when it was officially added by Pope Gregory the Great. The priest will offer a slightly different introduction: *At the Savior’s command and formed by divine teaching, we dare to say*, and a slightly changed embolism: *Deliver us Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that by the help of your mercy we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our savior, Jesus Christ.* The prayer, itself, retains the old English language of “art” and “thy”.

SIGN OF PEACE

St. Paul had urged his communities to “greet one another with a holy kiss” (Rom 16:16). The location of the sign of peace is immediately after the Lord’s Prayer to link it more closely with Holy Communion. In the new translation, only the last line of the presider’s invitation will change.

Priest: *Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles, Peace I leave you, my peace I give you, (Jn 14:27) look not on our sins but on the faith of your Church, and graciously grant her peace and unity in accordance with your will.*

Priest: *The peace of the Lord be always with you.*

All: *And with your spirit.*

Priest: *Let us offer each other the sign of peace.*

THE FRACTION OF THE BREAD or LAMB OF GOD

In the early Church, the entire Eucharistic celebration was called “the breaking of the bread.” Now, this rite “... signifies that the faithful are made one body (1 Cor 10:17) receiving Communion from the one Bread of life which is Christ,” (GIRM 83). The priest distributes the hosts from one vessel into several to prepare for the distribution of Holy Communion. He will also take a small particle of host and drop it into the Precious Blood. This is accompanied by the ancient litany, Lamb of God. If necessary, multiple invocations may be added to cover the ritual action. (GIRM 83). The final invocation will always end with “grant us peace.” This is the only chant which may be used during the Fraction of the Bread.

INVITATION

Next, the priest will invite us to Communion. He elevates the host slightly and says:

Priest: *Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world, Blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb.*

These words echo what John the Baptist said when he saw Jesus (Jn 1:29). They conclude with the vision of John in Revelation, when the angel told him to write down “blessed are all those called to the banquet of the Lamb” (Rv 19:9). We respond:

All: *Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, only say the word and my soul shall be healed.*

These new words will more closely resemble the words of the centurion who asked Jesus to cure his servant, even though he did not deem himself worthy to have Jesus enter his house (Mt 8:8 and Lk 7:6-7). We too, acknowledge with humility that we are unworthy to have Jesus enter our very being.

HOLY COMMUNION

Appropriately, our Communion procession is all about unity as we receive the sacrament of unity in the context of community. Even our music underscores this unity. Music begins as the priest consumes the Body and Blood of Christ and does not conclude until all have received. Following an ancient tradition, the minister says to each communicant, “The Body of Christ” / “The Blood of Christ.” In a profound exchange of faith, we respond, “Amen.”

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

After a period of silence or after a hymn, during which we all thank God for his great gift of the Eucharist, the presider prays the Prayer after Communion. He prays that the Sacrament may affect our lives and bear great fruit in God’s Kingdom.

The Concluding Rite: Go In Peace

The final words of our Mass make up the Concluding Rite. It consists of some brief announcements (if necessary), a greeting, a blessing, a dismissal by a priest or deacon, and the veneration of the altar (GIRM 90). A closing hymn is optional.

GREETING

The priest greets us with “The Lord be with you” and we respond “And with your spirit” as we have done four times earlier within the liturgy.

BLESSING

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, he raised his arms and blessed his disciples. (Lk 24:50) A blessing calls down God’s protection and it has long been part of Jewish and Christian prayer. Building on a variety of traditions, we now have three options for the final blessing – a solemn blessing, a simple blessing and a prayer over the people with a simple blessing.

DISMISSAL

The actual dismissal is usually given by a deacon (who traditionally announces all directives during Mass). In his absence, the presider dismisses the people. At a recent synod in Rome, bishops and scholars encouraged the Holy Father to add new options for the dismissal. They reflect the nature of the mission on which we are all sent.

Deacon or Priest: *Go forth, the Mass is ended. OR Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord. OR Go in peace, glorifying the Lord with your life. OR Go in peace. (Mk 5:34)*

All: *Thanks be to God*

VENERATION OF THE ALTAR

The altar is a sign of Christ in our midst. At the dedication of a church, the altar is anointed with chrism oil to recall Christ (“the anointed one”). Bishops, priests and deacons venerate it with a kiss when they process in and out of the Church. We, too, should venerate it with a profound bow.

CLOSING HYMN

Most assemblies will conclude with a final hymn, but it is not an official part of the Concluding Rite. When a hymn is used, its music accompanies our procession out of the church and its text usually emphasizes the important mission on which we are about to embark.

Yes, our Concluding Rite is brief. But it is rich in meaning and it is profound in its capacity to encourage us to live as disciples of Christ.