

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- The Mass has two main parts.
- All actions and events of the Mass have a specific function.
- The liturgy is the re-presentation of the paschal mystery.
- Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist.



The Mass

Imagine you are attending a family reunion hosted by your grandparents. They warmly greet family members as they arrive. Each family or individual brings something special to add to this celebration.

It's great to see relatives shake hands and embrace one another, even those who haven't spoken to each other for a long time. For today, differences are forgotten because there is so much to celebrate. Older relatives bring out photographs of loved ones who have died. You meet relatives you never met before and appreciate those you know well even more. You are amazed by the extent of your family and touched by the love that's present.

Why Is the Mass So Important to Catholics?

For Catholics who view their faith communities as part of the family of God, the Mass, especially the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy, is like a special

family reunion. It's a time when the children of God gather to give thanks and praise to God, listen to the word of the Lord through sacred Scripture, and be nourished by Christ's Body and Blood in holy Communion. For mature Catholics, Sunday (or Saturday evening) **Mass** isn't just another obligation but a celebration of faith that takes place at the table of the Lord. Individuals alongside the entire community of faith grow and are strengthened by the **liturgy**, a word that means "the participation of the People of God in 'the work of God'" (CCC 1069).

Let's briefly examine the principal parts of the Mass.

The Introductory Rites

Mass begins with the gathering of the faith community into a place of worship—usually the parish church. The community of believers is completed by the entrance of the ministers and the priest (also called the presider or celebrant) who will preside over the celebration. A deacon also may assist with the celebration. Often at this time, a gathering hymn is sung by the community, also called the assembly.

The priest leads the assembly in the sign of the cross, reminding us of our faith in the Holy Trinity and of Jesus' victory over death. In doing this, members acknowledge the very Real Presence of Christ in their midst. During the **introductory rites** and throughout the liturgy, the assembly is asked to respond in word and song. The assembly's active participation is very important because that's what gives prayer meaning and life. Through our response, prayer becomes conversation or dialogue with God.

Next is the **penitential act**, a time when we recall moments when our actions or thoughts separated us from God. Before we can freely and fully participate in this celebration, we must ask God for forgiveness and mercy. In so doing, God washes away the sins that separates us from God—and one another.

Recall a time when you asked forgiveness from someone.



- How did you feel after the person acknowledged your words and feelings?
- Does asking for—and receiving—forgiveness strengthen relationships? How?

From the penitential act, we move to the "**Gloria**," or "Glory to God," an ancient hymn of praise that begins with the song of the angels from St. Luke's account of the birth of Christ. The "Gloria" is often sung because of its joyful, powerful words. Then, after a moment of silent prayer, the presider gathers or collects the prayers of the assembly and presents them to God.

The Liturgy of the Word

The **Liturgy of the Word** is a time when God speaks to us through sacred Scripture. These readings are taken from the **Lectionary**, a book containing the Scripture readings for Mass on a given day.



The *Lectionary* is not the same as the Bible, but the *Lectionary* readings are taken from Scripture. Readings are organized by day or theme (baptism, marriage, and so on). An individual *Lectionary* reading is called a *pericopes*, meaning "section" or "cutting" because it is only a portion of a book or chapter of the Bible.

Readings From Scripture

The first reading is usually taken from the Old Testament except during the Easter season. This reading helps us understand the history of our faith by telling us about God's faithful relationship with the ancient Jews, who, because of God's revelation to them, understood themselves to be God's Chosen People. Usually the first reading relates to the day's Gospel reading.

The **responsorial psalm** follows the first reading. The psalms were originally composed as songs to God, so the responsorial psalm is usually sung. It is our response to the Word of the Lord in the first reading—a dialogue with God.

On Sundays and solemnities, a second reading follows the psalm. It is taken from the writings of St. Paul or one of the other Letters of the New Testament. It does not necessarily relate to the other readings but familiarizes us with the lessons taught by these early Christian writers.

The singing of the "**Alleluia**" precedes the third and final reading, called the Gospel (except during Lent when another acclamation is sung). The "Alleluia" emphasizes the presence of Jesus in the word of God. The Gospel is taken from Matthew, Mark, or Luke depending on the year. John's Gospel is read during Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter. We stand up during the Gospel as a sign of our reverence and respect because the Gospels contain the words of Jesus himself.

The readings for Sunday liturgies are arranged so that, over the course of three years, almost all of the New Testament and much of the Old Testament is read.

Reflection on the Readings

The homily follows the proclamation of the Gospel. The **homily**, usually given by the presider or sometimes another ordained minister present at the Mass, seeks to explain the day's Scripture readings and make them more meaningful to our lives today. It's important we listen with open minds and hearts.

If we listen with our minds hungry for Christ's vision and direction, there will always be something in the Liturgy of the Word that we can take with us.

The faith community responds to the readings and homily by standing and reciting the Creed, our profession of faith (see E4, "The Creed").

Universal Prayer

With our faith renewed, we present our petitions to God; this time of laying our specific needs before God is also called **Universal Prayer**. We pray for the Church, our world, and our local community.

These petitions bring the Liturgy of the Word to a close. Christ's presence through his word has been made very real to us. We now enter a deep union with Christ and with Catholics throughout the world in the **Liturgy of the Eucharist**—the supper of the Lord.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Preparation of the Gifts

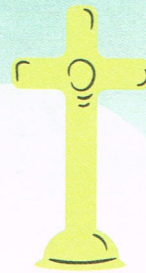
During the **offertory**, the bread and wine are brought to the altar to be prepared for offering. In the early Church, members of the faith community brought food and other necessities. Eventually, this became known as the collection, when parishioners make financial contributions toward the care and upkeep of the parish. Special collections for the poor and needy are also taken at this time.



The prayers spoken during the preparation of the gifts thank God for all the gifts we have been given. Then we offer to God our gifts, the work of human hands. The bread and wine that we offer represent a return to God of all we are, and we ask that they be transformed into the bread of life and the cup of salvation.

The Eucharistic Prayer

This magnificent prayer begins with a song of praise to God called the "**Holy, Holy, Holy**." It's usually sung because it's based upon the song of the angels in the Book of Isaiah 6:3. It is proclaimed by the entire assembly.



The priest then asks God to send the Spirit to transform the simple gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus. The prayer recalls and mystically makes present the event of the Last Supper, when Jesus took the bread and wine, gave thanks to God, and transformed them into his Body and Blood (more about this in C5: "The Eucharist"). The moment when the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of our Lord is called the **consecration**. With the words of consecration, Jesus is present as an offering to God to bring us closer to God, despite our imperfections.

The assembly responds with the mystery of faith, also called the paschal mystery. This paschal mystery—Christ's death, rising, and eventual return in glory—is central to our faith.

The Eucharistic Prayer ends with the great "Amen," by which the entire faith community means, "Yes, we believe!" in all that is taking place.

The Communion Rite

This rite begins with the Lord's Prayer, which is recited or sung by the assembly. With the sign of peace, we extend a gesture of our unity in Christ to one another by shaking hands or even hugging.

Then, in the **Eucharist**, we share in the Body and Blood so that, though many in number, we become one body in Jesus. In this meal, we are united with every other believer. The Eucharist is our most intimate union with our Lord.

Mass concludes with a brief prayer after the Eucharist and the final blessing. After being nourished at the Lord's table, we are sent forth with the command, "Go forth, the Mass is ended" or "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life." And we respond, "Thanks be to God!"

The first reading is taken from _____

_____ follows the reading of the Gospel.

_____ is our profession of faith.

The "Holy, Holy, Holy" comes from the Book of _____ .

The _____ is the moment when the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of our Lord.


The sign of peace is a gesture of _____

The _____ or _____ reads the Gospel.

The psalms were originally _____

We _____ when the Gospel is read.

Christ's death, rising, and eventual return in glory is called the _____ .



Catholics are often asked why they are required to attend Mass on Sundays (or Saturday evenings). Think back to our comparison of the faith community to a family. What happens if a family never takes time to be together? Why do relationships—even relationships between people and God—require the commitment of time?

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