

Understanding the Mass: Communion Rite and Concluding Rites

I. Introduction to Communion Rite and Concluding Rites:

- A. **Four Presences of Christ at Mass:** Focus: Christ's presence par excellence at Mass: the Eucharist
- B. **Three Tables:** Focus is on second table, the altar, from which we receive the Body and Blood of Christ, and the third table, the tables of the world to which we are sent as missionary disciples to serve as the Lord's voice, hands, and feet.
- C. **An Analogy:** An expansion from last week: 1) host prepares the table for dinner (Altar Preparation Rites after Prayers of the Faithful); 2) host prepares the meal (Eucharistic Prayer); and 3) guests make final preparations just before going to dine (Communion Rite); 4) guests and host dine together (Reception of Holy Communion); and 5) the guests express thanks to the host after the meal (Life after Mass: living out the Eucharistic liturgy as missionary discipleship).
- D. **Four Sacraments of Forgiveness:** Baptism, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, and Eucharist. The reception of the Holy Eucharist, when we are properly disposed, *forgives venial sins*.

II. Communion Rite (Final Preparations Before Going to Dine):

- A. **Deeper truth:** Eucharist isn't just a snack of a small wafer/a sip of wine. It is Jesus Christ himself, body, blood, soul, and divinity, the One who redeems us. So we take stock of who *Christ is* and who *we are* in order to appreciate the gift we will receive at a deeper level. The Communion Rite may be likened to a type of final examination of conscience before receiving the medicine of forgiveness and immortality.
- B. **Lord's Prayer:** The Lord's Prayer, in the context of Mass, is a petition for daily food, which for us is preeminently the Eucharistic bread/wine, and for purification from sin (forgive us our sins as we forgive others).
- C. **Embolism:** (Deliver us Lord, we pray . . .): An ancient tag to the Lord's Prayer interceding to God for our deliverance from evil and for the gift of peace in our times.
- D. **Doxology of Lord's Prayer:** Originally added to LP in antiquity in the liturgy, perhaps to give the prayer a resounding conclusion. Eventually found its way into Matthew's LP text, perhaps by overzealous copiers of the Scriptures as a gloss (a marginal interpretation or pious note). The Latin version used for the translation of the King James Bible had this gloss and became part of the Protestant's version of the LP. Catholics omit because it was never used by the Lord himself.
- E. **Sign of Peace** is one of the oldest parts of the Mass, existing since the early 2nd century. Not simply a greeting of another person nearby but a ritual gesture of fraternal communion before the reception of Eucharist. A call to reconciliation, unity, and communion.
- F. **Lamb of God** is a ritual expression of one's belief in what Jesus Christ (the Lamb) has done for us in his passion, death, and resurrection (Paschal Mystery) and our petition for his mercy and peace. The ending, grant us peace, connects the community to what was just ritualized in the sign of peace. An appropriate petition in preparation for Holy Communion.
- G. **Breaking of the Bread and Commingling:** A gesture of unity, namely, all who receive from the bread that is broken are one body in Christ. Originally all the people received bread from one larger loaf. Centuries later, small hosts replace one loaf as larger numbers of people receive. Today, the priest is, at least, to break a large host and distribute what he does not consume to other communicants as a sign that we are one body in Christ. // Priest breaks off small part of host and places it into chalice, called the "commingling." There are two understandings of ritual, both expressing unity. Earliest tradition: bishop breaks off small portions of the bread he consecrated, acolytes would take them to all communities in his diocese that day, and local priest would take the fragment and place it in the chalice as a sign of unity with the bishop. The second understanding was to unite the bread with the wine as a sign of the Resurrection.

- H. **Invitation to Communion** (Behold...) with its response by the people (Lord I am not worthy...) is an act of faith and an act of humility (i. e., like the centurion (Mt. 8:8)) in which those who are about to receive Holy Communion express their desire for healing of their venial sins.
- I. **Reception of Holy Communion:** Who and what do we receive? We receive the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ. What does that mean for our actual lives? A few examples: the food of eternal life, food for our journey in this world, the medicine of immortality. // The Eucharist is a *sacrament of unity* that is ritualized in its reception. Christ and the people are united anew. All coming forward toward the altar receive from it is another expression of unity. "Communion" in his context means receiving the Eucharist in union with each other, the Body of Christ being received by the body of Christ united as one. // All are asked to *bow their head* as a sign of reverence before receiving Body and Blood of Jesus Christ who is worthy of our reverence since kneeling to receive the Eucharist is no longer the normative practice in the U.S.. All reply "Amen" after the communion minister presents the consecrated bread and consecrated wine as an act of faith. "Amen" means "I believe," "It is true."

The oldest tradition of reception of the Eucharist is in the hand. Practice abandoned in Middle Ages for a variety of reasons; Communion on tongue replaced it. In 1977, the reception of Communion in the hand restored in the United States and communicants may receive either way. Communion under both kinds by the people, consecrated bread and wine, an ancient practice, was abandoned for a variety of reasons in the Middle Ages but restored after Vatican II as a fuller form as a symbol of unity with Christ and fuller symbol of the Eucharist as a meal and banquet. // Singing during the reception of Communion expresses our union of spirit thru unity of voices, so appropriate as everyone comes forward to share in sacrament of unity with Christ/one another.

- J. **Prayer after Communion:** After all have received Communion, the priest offers the Prayer after Communion, a prayer summing up the purpose of the Communion Rite in a single prayer to God.

III. Concluding Rites (Guests Express Thanks to the Host by Missionary Discipleship after Meal):

- A. The Mass does not conclude with reception of the Eucharist; it concludes with a *commission*. The purpose of Mass is not only to change bread/wine into Body/Blood of Christ, but to change us and our world.
- B. **Final Blessing:** The blessing given by the priest requests that God continue to extend God's generosity to the people as they prepare to go forth from the Mass. It is a genuine blessing that precludes the need for people to ask for an individual blessing from the priest after Mass.
- C. **Dismissal:** The people are sent forth to do good works and to praise the Lord. The language of the dismissal gives us our charge: to put the Church's social teaching into practice by promoting justice, particularly those who are poor, sick, elderly, prisoners, those with disabilities, those enslaved by addiction, the unemployed, the young who live without hope, etc. (John Paul II, Eucharistic Congress, Seville, 6/5/94). Pope Benedict adjusted the dismissal language in 2010 to make this social and evangelical ministry more explicit. His two additions are these: *Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord* and *Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life*.
- D. **Concluding Song:** It is customary to sing a song/hymn at the end in U.S. However, there may be occasions when omitting a final song/hymn makes good sense.

RESOURCES

- Barron, Robert. *Eucharist*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008.
- Irwin, Kevin W. *Models of the Eucharist*. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2005.
- Johnson, Lawrence J. *The Mystery of Faith*, revised edition. Washington: Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, 2006.
- Turner, Paul. *At the Supper of the Lamb*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2011.