

Active Participation in Mass: An Act of Stewardship

2. The Table Blessing and the Eucharistic Prayer

During this season of Lent, we ask this community to journey with us into the mystery of the Liturgy. During past seasons of Lent we have asked you to focus on discipleship and stewardship. Now we want to go back to the root of what it means to be a community of Catholic Christians. As we have tried to discern practical ways to carry out our mission as a parish, we have been drawn back to liturgy as the source from which our direction comes. We are seeking to make the connections between the words we hear at Mass and the way we carry out our lives more clear. Today we would like to focus on the blessing that precedes the Eucharistic prayer.

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.

Blessed are you Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink.

In times past, the community brought up other gifts – oil, corn, grain, extra clothes – to be distributed to those in need. We no longer bring up these kinds of gifts, but today, along with bread and wine, we offer up ourselves to be blessed and offered to God. God’s grace transforms not only the bread and wine, but us also. In this abundance of grace, we go forth from this meal to nourish others by our actions, as the bread and wine nourish us. “Human hands” have worked to shape the bread and make the wine. Let those hands be used in God’s creative work in our daily lives.

Consider for a few minutes what we hear as Father prays those words over the gifts – ordinary bread and wine. These are **our** gifts, brought forth by the entire community, through its representatives. We have been entrusted with the task of bringing them to the table to be blessed and transformed into food for us all – always enough to feed the entire community.

Before he was given up to death, a death he freely accepted, he took bread and gave you thanks. He broke the bread, gave it to his disciples and said: Take this, all of you, and eat it: this is my body which will be given up for you.

When the supper was ended, he took the cup. Again he gave you thanks and praise, gave the cup to his disciples and said: Take this, all of you, and drink from it: this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins might be forgiven. Do this in memory of me.

Takebless.....break.....give. Through these 4 actions, Jesus explains the meaning of his coming death. His body and blood, his entire life, sacrificed for all, in loving obedience

to God. We too are bread and wine. We come to the table. We are blessed, and in our brokenness, we give of ourselves in our everyday lives. We, as the body of Christ, live out this ritual action “in memory” of Jesus’ loving action, every time we sacrifice of ourselves. We grow through this discipleship to closer union with God, until we too are fully joined with him in new life.

Lord I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.

Healed – made whole, restored to unity with God and community. Through these words, we acknowledge our brokenness. But we also acknowledge the power of participation in this ritual. By eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ, we become one with Him. We are made whole, we are strengthened to walk the path of discipleship in our every day lives. We are one with this community, this Body of Christ. We anticipate our full unity with God.

Through these prayers, we begin to see the importance of our active and wholehearted participation in this ritual meal. Through our spoken and sung prayer, our attentiveness, our gestures, and our eating and drinking we discover what we must do to carry out our mission as the Body of Christ. As you hear these words today, put yourself fully into this sacred mystery and ask how can we “Do **this** in memory of me.”

The word tradition comes from the Latin *traditionem*, which means "handing over, passing on", and is used in a number of ways in the English language:

- Beliefs or customs taught by one generation to the next, often orally. For example, there is the tradition of sending birth announcements.
- A set of customs or practices. For example, we think of a family’s Christmas or other holiday traditions.
- A broad religious movement made up of religious denominations or church bodies that have a common history, customs, culture, and, to some extent, body of teachings. Our Catholic tradition comes primarily from the various councils that have occurred over the years from the Council of Trent in 1564 to Vatican II in 1962.

Have you ever wondered why we do certain things during mass? Do we simply do things because those around us do them? What do some of our actions (as traditions) symbolize?

Our physical gestures help make the act of worship at Mass one which involves our whole being, body and soul, thought, words, and actions. They also help create a spiritual disposition to receive our Lord in Word and Sacrament.

Consider this:

- One of the first things Catholics do when we come to church is dip our right hand in water and make the sign of the cross. This ritual is a reminder of our Baptism. We were baptized with water and signed with the cross. It is Baptism that brings us to Church. Making the sign of the

cross also is done show reverence for the house of the Lord and to bring us into a sense of worship.

- We genuflect (kneel) upon the right leg before sitting, looking at the crucifix and making the sign of the cross - remembering Christ crucifixion.
- Before Mass begins, we kneel in prayer, reflecting upon our sins and our need for forgiveness.
- The Gospel is the climax of the liturgy of the word. Catholic faith teaches that in proclaiming the Gospel, Christ is truly present to the community. For this reason the community stands to witness to Christ's resurrection which allows him to be present to his people.
- As the deacon or priest introduces the Gospel, we sign ourselves with the sign of the cross traced on the forehead, the lips and over the heart. This signing reminds us "Christ in my thoughts" <forehead>, "Christ in my words: <lips> and "Christ in my heart" <over the heart>.
- Catholics often bow or kneel during prayer. At times, they bow as they pass the altar or pray before a painting or statue. Neither the bow nor the prayer is symbolic of worshipping the structure, the painting, or the statue. Rather, the bow is a display of respect for what the altar represents, or for the person represented by the image.

So, how will you use the gifts entrusted to you? How will you take some simple things from mass and live them in your everyday life? Here are just a few ideas to get you started – can you think of others?

- Warmly greet those around me
- Lend my voice in song and prayer during mass
- Reflect on the readings & homily