

17 THE PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS

We have completed our discussion on the Liturgy of the Word and this week we begin our discussion on the Liturgy of the Eucharist. This part of the Mass begins with the Preparation of the Gifts.

As a young boy, I remember very clearly, what an honor it was for my family to be the gift-bearers. It did not happen often, but when it did, we dressed in our Sunday best, and as a family, we all walked up the center aisle to hand the priest and servers the bread and the wine. What has been your experience of gift bearing, whether at Mass or in general?

In the early Church, members of the community would bring the food for the celebration, but also an offering to share with those less fortunate in the community. Gifts shared during this offertory (from the Latin to “bring forth”) were a sign of an individual’s or a family’s self-donation. Items that people shared with the community might have been beeswax, flowers, or part of a crop. In any case, everyone participated to help care for the poor, but also to have a beautiful and fruitful celebration. Today, most of us give a monetary donation. For many of us, this gift is a sacrifice we make to show our care for the parish family. Our gifts today still help feed the poor and much more.

As the gifts are prepared, we too prepare our hearts and minds to celebrate and share in the Great



Thanksgiving. Once the priest has received the gifts of bread and wine, he places them on the altar. He may incense the gifts, especially on solemn occasions (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* 75). The presider continues, “Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. . .” This prayer, prayed over the gifts of bread and wine, comes from the Jewish table prayers or *berakoth*. In the new missal, you will notice some slight changes in the priest’s part, but our response remains, “Blessed be God forever.” In many parishes, these particular prayers are said silently because the assembly is either singing or listening to organ/choral music.

The priest then offers a silent prayer and washes his hands as he silently prays, “**Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.**” You will notice the changes in bold. Then audibly, the priest says, “Pray, brethren (**brothers and sisters**), that **my sacrifice and yours** may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.” Our response, as we stand, has only a small change. We will say, “May the Lord accept the sacrifice . . . good of all his **holy** Church.” This section of the Liturgy of the Eucharist concludes with the Prayer over the Offerings to which we respond “Amen.”

Each of these succinct prayers is rich in imagery and theology. I invite you to listen more closely to the spoken prayers and use them in your private prayer as a way to reflect on the Eucharist. In religious formation sessions, these texts can be unpacked in a process of mystagogical reflection. Next time, we begin to analyze the Eucharistic Prayer.