

The Communion Rite

We come to the end of Stewardship Month here at St. Mark the Evangelist, and also our preaching on the Mass itself, that through a deeper understanding of the Mass we might live the Mass Monday through Saturday. Living the Mass daily, not just on Sundays, is an act of faith and stewardship.

The concluding portion of the Mass, the Communion Rite and Dismissal, encompasses the Lord's Prayer, the Sign of Peace, the Communion Procession and the final prayer and Sending.

In the Lord's Prayer, a petition is made for our daily bread, especially the Eucharistic Bread, and asking also for forgiveness of our sins, as we forgive others. This prayer rightly appears in many places in our lives. It is a morning and a night prayer for many. It is a prayer at bedsides and at gravesides. Here it is a communion prayer. Recited or sung, it is everyone's prayer, the words we all own. The Priest pronounces the invitation to the prayer, and all the faithful say the prayer with him; then the Priest asks for deliverance from the power of evil for the whole community of the faithful.

There follows the Sign of Peace, by which the Church entreats peace and unity for herself and for the whole human family, and the faithful express to each other their communion and mutual charity before receiving the Blessed Sacrament. We offer one another a sign for what that communion means. We turn to one another and say, "Peace," or "Christ's peace." Communion means no walls. It means no first place and last place but all in the same place. It means today is God's reign, some little bit of it, here, among us. This goes beyond the hospitality we extend to one another on arriving for the liturgy. It is caught up in this word "peace," the greeting spoken by the risen Lord to the disciples.

Meanwhile the Priest breaks the Eucharistic Bread and prepares the vessels, with the help of the Deacon. The gesture of breaking bread done by Christ at the Last Supper, which in apostolic times gave the entire Eucharistic Action its name, signifies that the many faithful are made one body by receiving Communion from the one Bread of Life, which is Christ, who for the salvation of the world died and rose again.

The Priest breaks the Bread and puts a piece of the host into the chalice to signify the unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the work of salvation, namely, of the Body of Jesus Christ, living and glorified at the right hand of God the Father. The prayer Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) is usually sung by the choir or cantor with the congregation replying.

The Priest prepares himself in prayer, said quietly, so that he may fruitfully receive the Body and Blood of Christ. The faithful do the same, praying silently. Then the Priest shows the faithful the Eucharistic Bread, holding it over the paten or over the chalice, and invites them to the banquet of Christ; and along with the faithful, he then makes a prayer of humility, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you ..."

While the Priest is receiving the Sacrament, the Communion song is begun, its purpose is to express the spiritual union of the communicants by means of the unity of their voices, to show gladness of heart, and to bring out more clearly the "communitarian" character of the procession to receive the Eucharist. And so, we come forward. This procession that we make is not like going to the bank or the grocery. At those places, we just line up. But here, this is a procession. It is a procession to a common meal of a common people partaking of the earthly food of bread and the earthly drink of wine become for us the body and the blood of Christ our Lord. It is a procession, and it must look and move and feel like a procession. That is why we sing through this time. It is the music of moving as one, as the church.

When the distribution of Communion is over the Priest and faithful may pray quietly for a few minutes. A reflective Psalm or hymn may also be sung by the whole congregation as a form of grateful meditation.

To bring to completion the prayer of the People of God, and also to conclude the whole Communion Rite and the Mass, the Priest proclaims the Prayer after Communion, in which he prays for the fruits of the mystery just celebrated. The people make the prayer their own by means of the acclamation Amen.

The Concluding Rites may include brief announcements, should they be necessary; the Priest's Greeting and Blessing, which on certain days and occasions is expanded and expressed by the Prayer over the People or another more solemn formula; the Dismissal of the people by the Deacon or the Priest, so that each may go back to doing good works, praising and blessing God.

Do you see how it all depends on all of us who gather in this space, and not simply on the priest? As priest I am leader of prayer and also servant. You are the ones who must do these rites. There is no audience. All are partakers because it is the loving action of the church that happens here. To have a liturgy that lets us pour out our whole lives as Christians and that gives us strength and challenge to live all the hours of the week as Christians, we who are this assembly, we the people who surround the book and who surround the table, must ourselves take on the hard work that is the church's-making praise of our God. We must live the Mass and its fruits daily, Monday through Saturday.