

THE OFFERTORY

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

Having begun with the Introductory Rites, and moved through the Liturgy of the Word we have just finished what ought to be hard work; concentrating on the scripture and on making prayers of intercession takes energy and leaves us both lifted up and a little worn out. We come to the Offertory, a quiet moment of transition from the Liturgy of the Word to the all-important Liturgy of the Eucharist; a time to get the space and ourselves ready for the most central and defining moment of the Mass. This time is also called the *preparation of the table* or *preparation of the gifts*.

Bread and wine are brought forward, such simple things, food and drink associated with the tables of ordinary people. Here they are called "fruit of the earth" and "work of human hands" as they are placed on the table in our midst. At the same time, the "work of human hands" is seen in the money that is collected, to support the work of the parish and care for the poor and others in need. Because the money and the bread and wine are bound together. We are about to surround a single table and make a single prayer and eat of one bread and drink of one cup. Part of our preparation for this seems to be this gesture of pooling our resources, putting into one basket some of the money we have earned or received.

The Offertory at Mass is an integral part of the Sunday liturgy, not just because it is the primary means by which the parish receives financial support from the parishioners, but because it is also an expression of our gratitude to God for the blessings He has given us, to return a portion of them back to Him for use by His Church. The Offertory stands as a transition between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

We get ready for Eucharist by setting a table with bread and wine, but even more by showing some important things in this collection of money. One is that we are bound to one another-thus some of our contribution is for the work of the church. A second thing we show is that this bond is not selfish but is for the life of the world-thus some of our money is for the poor. And third, we show that what we do here together is bound to all the business and commerce and give-and-take of everyday life. Bread and wine show that, but perhaps money shows it even more clearly.

By our baptism as Catholics we are called to be stewards of God's gifts to us, to use them in ways that build up our families, our parish, our community, and our world. In that stewardship, we are encouraged to be deliberate and intentional in weighing our various obligations against our limited resources as we decide where we spend those resources of time and talent and treasure. When we give to our parish and to the greater Church, we are witnessing to our children and to the world about our values and about what's important to us.

The parish offers various methods by which parishioners can support her mission through various offerings and collections. Each method has unique recipients and benefits both to the giver and the parish.

Singing may always accompany the rite at the Offertory, even when there is no procession with the gifts.

The bread and wine are placed on the altar by the Priest to the accompaniment of the prescribed formulas; when incense is used it signifies the Church's offering and prayer rising sweetly in the sight of God.

Then the Priest washes his hands at the side of the altar, a rite in which the desire for interior purification finds expression.

Once the offerings have been placed on the altar and the accompanying rites completed, by means of the invitation to pray with the Priest and by

means of the Prayer over the Offerings, the Preparation of the Gifts is concluded and preparation made for the Eucharistic Prayer.

The Offertory ends with the Prayer over the Offerings