

A walk through the Mass
Part One: Introductory Rites:
Theological Overview of the Mass:

Jesus celebrated the First Mass at what we know as “The Last Supper”. As recorded in the three synoptic Gospels, Jesus took bread, blessed it and said, “Take this and eat, it is my body.” Later He took the Cup of Thanksgiving and said, “Take this and drink from it, this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the New Covenant.” From this time on, the Church has celebrated this event by celebrating the Mass.

Now we need to look at the Passover because at the Last Supper, Jesus was celebrating the Passover with His Apostles. In Ex 12:1-30, the lamb is sacrificed. This sacrifice is to bring life and freedom: a meal in which the body of the sacrificial lamb and unleavened bread are eaten and the people give thanks to God. The Mass is both a Meal and a Sacrifice which is why there is an hour of fasting prior to reception of the Eucharist. The old name for the Mass is “the breaking of the bread” (Acts 2:42). Jesus is the Sacrifice which brings us eternal life: freedom from evil and sin and reconciles us with the Father by offering us forgiveness.

Jesus gave us the Mass as a way of continuing to make present, through all time, His sacrifice, His love and His forgiveness. Giving us His own Body and Blood is the best way Jesus has of being with us and helping us to be with Him.

In the Mass, Jesus is present to us in different ways: 1) The Body of Christ that is assembled, the congregation, 2) The Word of God proclaimed in the Scriptures, 3) in the sacrifice of the Mass, 4) in the person of the Priest, 5) in the Holy Eucharist which we receive, 6) in the Eucharist held in reserve in the Tabernacle.

The Mass is a Liturgy. Liturgy is the Public Worship carried out by the people of God. Liturgies make present for us the History of Salvation: the saving love the Father has for us in His Son through the Holy Spirit. Liturgies recall the events of the History of Salvation, the celebration of the Mass being our chief liturgy. However, there are many other liturgies. Each of the Sacraments has its own liturgy as do Benediction, Stations of the Cross, Funerals, and Liturgy of the Hours.

Colors used in the Mass. Each color of the vestment the priest wears, the banners and altar cloth represent the season of the Church year that we are in or the mystery and feast we are celebrating. Purple used in Advent and Lent represents penance. White used at Christmas or Easter represents being cleansed of sin, purity; Gold can also be used for Christmas or Easter and represents nobility and value. Green is used in ordinary time to represent life, the life we receive from Christ. Red representing blood or fire is used on Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Feast of the Martyrs to show blood spilt and on Pentecost to show the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Why Jesus gave us the Mass. Jesus gave us the Mass as a way of continuing to make present through all time His sacrifice, His love and His forgiveness. Giving us His own Body and Blood is the best way Jesus has of being with us and helping us to be with Him.

For this paper explaining the Mass, I used the book written by Fr. Paul Turner, “Understand the Mass” and Professor Edward Sri’s book “A Biblical Walk Through the Mass” in addition to the Roman Missal and my own notes and understanding. Both these books are very good reading and I encourage you to purchase them and study them more.

Parts of the Mass: Introductory Rites:

The Mass has four parts: “Introductory Rite,” the two main parts of the “Liturgy of the Word,” and the “Liturgy of the Eucharist” and the “Closing Rite”.

The intent of the introduction of the Mass is that the assembled group unites as a worshiping community prepared to hear God’s Word and to celebrate the Eucharist. It goes from when we stand up to sing to the end of the Opening Prayer.

We stand to show we will act on what we celebrate and to show respect for the Priest as personae Christi.

The introductory rite usually begins with a song, called the Gathering Song to stress that we gather together as the Body of Christ.

Sign of the Cross

(We make the SIGN OF THE CROSS)

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.	All: Amen
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We begin with the Sign of the Cross. The Sign of the Cross is a prayer which reminds us of Jesus’ sacrifice for us, His love for us, and that He is God with the Father and the Holy Spirit. We believe in the Trinity. The tracing of the Sign over our bodies has biblical roots: early Church Fathers saw this prefigured in the Old Testament in the book of Ezekiel where a mark on the forehead, an X or cross, was used as a sign of divine protection and to distinguish the righteous from the wicked (Ez 9:4-6). The Book of Revelation draws on this image, showing that the saints in heaven have a seal upon their foreheads (Rv 7:3). This mark separates the righteous from the wicked and protects them from the coming judgment (Rv 9:4). The theologian Tertullian (160-225) wrote that in making this Sign, we are invoking God’s presence and inviting Him to bless us, assist us, and to guard us from all harm. The early Christians also saw the Sign of the Cross as demarcating God’s people and protecting them from all evil. When we make the Sign of the Cross, we are making a commitment to live according to Christ’s standards and not the world’s. Additionally, we are asking God to protect us from harm and evil.

With the words of the Sign of the Cross, we call on God’s name. To call on the name of the Lord is to worship and pray, and is often associated with sacrifice. Adam’s son Seth and his descendants called on the name of the Lord in worship and prayer (Gn 4:26) as did Abraham (Gn 12:8) and Isaac (Gn 26:25). In the Scriptures, a name represents the essence of a person and carries the power of that person. To call on God’s name is to invoke His presence and His power to be with us.

So at the beginning of the Mass, we invoke God’s divine presence and power so that everything we do in the Mass, we do in His name and in worship of Him. We make the Sign of the Cross with careful attention and reverence, opening ourselves up to God’s presence, power, and love.

“Amen” means “I believe” or “Yes it is so.” It signifies acceptance and ratification of what was said.

Greeting:

There are three different greetings that can be used. In the most common option is the priest says

Priest: The Lord be with you	All: And with your spirit.
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This greeting is similar to us saying hello or Good Morning to each other.

The Lord be with you: This greeting alerts the assembly that they are entering a sacramental realm. The greeting conveys the reality of Jesus’ presence with the community of believers as He promised: “When two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst” Mt 18:20. This greeting also expresses the reality of God’s life dwelling within us by virtue of our Baptisms. It is a prayer for that life to continue to grow within us. It is used frequently in the Bible as a greeting or encouragement (Jdgs 6:12; Ruth 2:4, 2 Chr 15:2) and is a call to a mission beyond their comfort zone and their reliance on God: Isaac (Gn26:3,24), Jacob (Gn28:13-15), Moses (Ex3:12), Joshua (Jos1:5), King David (2 Sam 7:3), Jeremiah (Jer 1:6-8), the Blessed Virgin Mary (Lk1:28). It is an assurance that God will be with each of us as we worship Him in the Mass and follow Him in our lives - living as He calls us to be, no matter the struggles and difficulties and trials.

“And with your spirit”. This is style of greeting used throughout the Bible (Jd 6:12; Ruth 2:4, 2 Ch 15:2, Lk 1:28) and the conclusions of four of St. Paul’s letters, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit” (Philippians 4:23; Philemon 25; Galatians 6:18; 2 Tim 4:22). It connects us more closely to the Scriptures and language of St. Paul. St. Paul uses “spirit” to refer to the whole person. St John Chrysostom said that “with your spirit” reminds us that it is the grace of the Holy Spirit, present in the bishop/priest that is acting in this mystical sacrifice. He also shows that this response has a 1,700 year old, liturgical history. One is acknowledging the Holy Spirit’s unique activity through the priest during the Mass. The people are addressing the deepest part of the priest, the part of his being ordained to lead the people in the sacred Mass. The people are saying, “Be the priest for us now”. It is an acknowledgment of Christ as priest is present in the priest at Mass, and a prayer for that priest to be finely tuned to Christ so as to celebrate this sacred duty.

Penitential Rite:

The Penitential or Sprinkling rite is asking God to forgive our sins. There are several forms this can take. The most common is the *Confiteor* or the “I Confess” prayer or stating what Jesus did for us with 3 responses of “Lord or Christ have mercy”

<u>The Confiteor</u>
I confess to almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do; through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault ; therefore I ask blessed Mary, ever virgin, all the angels and saints and you, my brothers and sisters to pray for me to the Lord, our God.

When people encounter God in the Bible, they are always aware of their sinfulness, (Gn 17:2; Ex 3:6; 19:16), and the disciples in Mt 17:6 and Rv 1:17. When people know they are going to encounter God, like before the Ten Commandments were given, they take time to prepare by consecrating themselves to the Lord and cleaning their clothing (Ex 19:9-19). We know that we will encounter God in the Mass in His Word and even more so in His Body and Blood.

“I confess”: The priest asks us all to prepare for this encounter, “Prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries”. We do this by humbly confessing our sins to God and each

other. We do not confess our individual sins as in Confession, but admit that we have sinned with the “Confiteor” – Latin for “I Confess”. People confessed their sins in the Bible (Neh 9:2; Prv 28:13; Sir 4:26; Lv 5:5 and Dn 9:20) to mention a few examples. In the New Testament, John the Baptist heard people confessing their sins before he baptized them, Mt 3:6. The Apostle John tells us that if we confess our sins, Jesus will forgive and cleanse us (1 Jn 1:9). St. Paul tells his readers to examine themselves before receiving the Eucharist so as to be worthy (1 Cor 11:28). The Didache, written around 100 AD, describing the Mass, says to gather for the Eucharist “but first make confession of your faults so that your sacrifice may be a pure one.”

“to almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters”: We confess not only to God, but to each other. This follows the words of St. James to “confess your sins to one another” (Jas 5:18) and it draws attention to the social effects of our sins – that our sins affect our not only our relationship with God, but also our relationships with each other.

“that I have greatly sinned”: This is a change. It reflects King David’s words to God, “I have sinned greatly in that I have done this thing” (1 Chr 21:8).

“in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do”: This calls us to think about the four areas in which we may have sinned and serves as an examination of conscience. 1) Thoughts: We frequently sin with only our thoughts as Jesus tells us in Mt 5:27-28; 7:1. 2) Speech: St. James warns us that the spoken word can be used to bless or curse (Jas 3:5). The Bible mentions many ways of sinning with our words, like gossip (2 Cor 12:20), slander (Rom 1:30), insult (Mt 5:22), lying (Col 3:9), and boasting (Ps 5:5). 3) Actions: This is the area easiest to see and think about since our actions directly hurt others or our relationship with God. The Ten Commandments look at our actions. 4) Failure to do good: Looks at when we have failed to do the good that Jesus asks of us. The Christian life is not just about avoiding evil, but is about imitating Christ. St. Paul says to “Put on compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, patience and most of all love” (Col 3:12-15).

“through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault”: This is a change. This three-fold repetition is to more deeply express our sorrow for our sins.

I ask blessed Mary, ever virgin, all the angels and saints and you, my brothers and sisters to pray for me to the Lord, our God: We are asking the entire Church to pray to God for us: the Church Triumphant that is in Heaven and the Church on earth that is each one of us.

Prayer of Absolution:
The priest’s prayer “May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.”

This is a prayer of absolution seeking God forgiveness of our sins.

Lord have Mercy: The Kyrie:	
P: Lord, have mercy;	All respond: Lord, have mercy
P: Christ, have mercy	All respond: Christ, have mercy
P: Lord, have mercy	All respond: Lord, have mercy

This three-fold prayer is a plea for God’s mercy and an expression of our repentance. It follows the three-fold admission of sin in the new translation of the “I Confess” prayer and also connects to the three-fold praise of God in the “Holy, Holy, Holy” within the Eucharistic Prayer. It serves to remind us of the Holy Trinity.

Gloria:

Glory to God in the highest, **and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father.**

Lord Jesus Christ, **Only Begotten Son**, Lord God, Lamb of God, **Son of the Father**, you take away the **sins** of the world, have mercy on us; **you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer**; you are seated at the right hand of the Father, **have mercy on us.**

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

With the *Gloria*, the liturgy now changes from our repentance to our joyful praise. The hymn is inspired by the Gospel of John, but is not a quote from the Gospel. The Gloria is used on Sundays and major feast days to give God praise for saving us. This hymn has been used since at least the second century. We do not sing the Gloria during Advent and Lent. The prayer is Trinitarian: praising the Father then the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. This first line comes from the Angels' greeting to the shepherds when announcing the birth of the Savior (Lk 2:14). As the angels proclaimed with joy the coming of God to earth in the wonder of the Incarnation, we now proclaim with joy the coming of God to us in the Eucharist. The older translation stressed to whom the people belong: "his," meaning God, it now stresses the quality of the people, those of "good will". This clearly places the responsibility for peace on us. People of good will seek peace with one another; they are open to peace and right relationships. God gives us His grace, but we have to be willing to work with Him to achieve peace on earth. It roots us more firmly in the Scriptures, gives us words to praise God, and to reflect on the forgiving power of Christ.

We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father. This has five verbs, again matching the Latin version. It is a richer expression of the awe of God's presence. "**Heavenly King**" and "**Almighty**" are common biblical titles for God (Gn 17:1; Ex 6:3; Bar 3:1; 2 Cor 6:18; Ps 68:14; 19:1; Rev 4:8; 11:17) to list a few instances. "**King**" is another title frequently used for God (Ps 98:6; Is 44:6). In saying "**Heavenly King**", we acknowledge that God is the "King of kings". The title "**Father**" shows that God governs us as Heavenly King - not as a dictator does - but with the love of a parent. God's Power is in union with His Love.

The next lines tell the story of Jesus' 1) coming, 2) redeeming death, and 3) His resurrection and ascension. It summarizes the prologue in the Gospel of John (Jn 1:1-14) and reiterates Jesus' mission.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sins of the world,

Only Begotten Son, This is capitalized to show that this is a title for Jesus. It draws our attention once again to the prologue of John's Gospel, and the eternal Word who is God and was with the Father and through whom all things were made (Jn 1:1-4). We are all called to a special relationship with God as God's adopted children through the grace of Baptism. However, Jesus is unique in that He is the only Begotten Son, not adopted: "only Son from the Father" (Jn 1:14). He was begotten and not created as we were. He is, always was, and always will be the Son of

God. Jesus is the eternal, divine Son by nature (Jn 5:17-18; 10:30-33; 2 Cor 1:19; Heb 1:1-2).

Lamb of God: This recalls the Lamb's triumph over evil and the devil in Revelation (Rv 5:6-14; 12:11; 17:14). With this title, we join with the angels and saints in heaven to worship God (Rv 5:8; 12-13; 7_9-10).

you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer. The important change here is from sin (singular) to sins (plural). This is to make it clearer that Jesus takes away not just generic sin from the world but our own individual sins. This is the line John the Baptist used when he first saw Jesus passing by (Jn 1:29). Jesus is revealed as the new Paschal Lamb who gives His life on the cross for our sins to free us from the eternal death caused by sin.

you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. This line recalls Jesus ascending into heaven and sitting at the right hand of God (Mk 16:19). It is the climax of salvation history. Sitting at the right hand is a position of power and authority (Ps 110:1 Heb 1:13). Aware of the power that Jesus has, we ask Him to both receive our prayer of praise and to give us mercy by forgiving our sins.

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ. This uses three biblical titles to give praise to Jesus. "Most High" is a title for God as the Supreme Being over all others (Gn 14:18; Ps 7:17). "Holy One" is an expression of God's nature as holy meaning other (Hos 11-9-11; Prv 9:10; Is 1:4). Jesus uses this title for Himself (Rv 3:7) and angels give this title to Him also (Rv 16:5). St. Peter calls Jesus "the Holy One" (Jn 6:69) as do demons (Mk 1:24; Lk 4:34). "Lord" is a title given to God in the Bible many times and calling Jesus "Lord" means He is God (1 Cor 8:6; Phil 2:11). Lord was also a title used by the Roman emperor. To proclaim Jesus as the only Lord would be understood by the Roman government as a refusal to worship the Roman emperor and the Roman gods. This was a serious crime punishable by death.

with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father. Amen. This brings in the third person of the Blessed Trinity. The Mass is prayed to the Father, through Jesus, with and by the Holy Spirit.

Opening Prayer or Collect:

Each Sunday has a different Opening Prayer. I am not going to address them individually. After the priest calls the Assembly to prayer, there is a brief pause while people say their own private prayer and then the priest gathers all these prayers and presents them to God with his public prayer that gathers up the prayers and intentions of all the people at Mass and offers them as one prayer to God. The Opening Prayer concludes the Introductory Rite.