

Understanding the Mass – The Communion Rite

In ancient rituals, worship was a two step process whereby the people not only offered sacrifice to God but then they ate of the sacrifice in order to share in the divinity of the one they worshipped. In the Mass, we see this fully realized in the Eucharist – the sacrifice is offered with the Eucharistic Prayers and at Communion we eat the meal of sacrifice to share in the divine life of God.

The Communion Rite begins with the Lord's Prayer and ends with the Prayer after Communion. Since the Eucharist is a true spiritual meal, the Lord's Body and Blood should only be received by those who are properly prepared to join in this banquet.

In the Mass, we prepare ourselves by saying the Lord's Prayer. In it we ask for our daily food, which for Christians is the Eucharist, and to be purified from sin so that what is holy is given to those who are holy. We stand as we say this prayer for we are filled with joy that we are able to call God our Father and because we know that he will give us what we need.

The Rite of Peace follows as a visible sign of the unity we desire in the Lord's Prayer. With God as our Father, we are to be reconciled with each other and live in his kingdom as brothers and sisters in Christ. We extend the peace of Christ to each other that the harmony and unity of the Lord's kingdom may be fulfilled in us.

The priest then holds the Eucharistic Bread high, proclaiming in the new translation "*Behold the Lamb of God... Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.*" This language echoes the words of John the Baptist and those proclaimed in Revelation where Jesus Christ, as the Lamb of God, comes to unite himself to his bride, the Church.

We currently respond to this invitation with "*Lord, I am not worthy to receive you but only say the word and I shall be healed*". Our new response will be "*Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof but only say the word and my soul shall be healed*". This new response more closely corresponds to the actual words of Centurion in the scriptures who trusted fully in the authority and power of Jesus. By using these new words we better acknowledge our unworthiness to receive Jesus in the Eucharist while proclaiming our faith in his great power and mercy.

The distribution of Holy Communion then begins. By coming forward in procession to receive our Lord in the Eucharist we visibly reveal the life-long journey of our souls to be united with Christ. Once we have received our Lord in Holy Communion we should focus, either through the song or the silence, on thanking him for the great gift he has given to us.

Finally, the Prayer after Communion concludes the Communion Rite. In it we ask that the Sacrament we have received bears fruit in our lives.