



# WELCOMING THE ROMAN MISSAL 3RD EDITION

## Part VI -- Overview of the Mass

### *The Preparation of the Gifts*

#### **Third Edition of the Roman Missal**

With the new translation of the Roman Missal, the prayers that the priest says during the preparation of the gifts will change slightly. Most of us in the congregation, however, will first notice the differences in the invitation to prayer.

The new translation of the invitation to prayer makes the point that it is not just the priest who offers the sacrifice of prayer, but that he is joined by the people in offering the Eucharist.

“Pray, brethren (brothers and sisters), that **my** sacrifice **and yours** may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.”

In our response, the adjective “holy”, which was removed in our present translation, is returned:

“May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his **holy** Church.

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*On November 27, 2011, English-speaking Catholics in the United States will begin using a new translation of the Roman Missal (the book containing the prescribed prayers, chants, and instructions for the celebration of Mass in the Roman Catholic Church).*

After the Liturgy of the Word (the first principal part of the Mass) has concluded, we begin the second principal part of the Mass: the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Eucharist is composed of three main sections: the preparation of the gifts, the Eucharistic Prayer, and the Communion rite.

#### **Preparation of the Gifts**

Many of us grew up calling this section of the Mass the “Offertory.” And yet the real offering to the Father occurs during the eucharistic prayer. To bring out this truth, the Church now uses the title “preparation of the gifts” as better describing the true function of the rite, namely to prepare for what is to come.

Although the preparation rite contains a number of individual elements, the following are especially significant: preparation of the altar, presentation of the gifts, and the concluding prayer over the gifts.

#### **Preparation of the Altar**

This might be called “setting the table.” As a functional task, the action is done with simplicity and yet with a dignity and reverence befitting the solemnity of the occasion. The deacon or another assisting minister places the Roman Missal (the book containing the prayers prayed by the priest) on the altar. Then a square piece of white cloth (the corporal) is placed on the altar. Finally, a folded cloth (which will be used to wipe the rim of the chalice) called the purificator is placed to the right of the corporal. The preparation of the altar is a sign that something new is beginning. It is a sign that we are making ready to begin the eucharistic celebration.

#### **Presentation of the Gifts**

One of the most ancient customs of the Church is that of the people themselves providing bread and wine to be used. Sometimes, each one present brought forth bread and wine, with the surplus going to the poor. Many of the early writers stress the importance of each person bringing the gift of bread which, when transformed, would be received back by the communicant.

The bread and the wine are symbols of ourselves, our work, our stewardship of God’s creation. When our gifts of bread and wine are placed into the hands of the priest, it is not just bread that is offered, but with those pieces of bread are mixed all the sacrifices of our lives. And with the wine are mixed the joys and sorrows, the longings and desires of each member of the gathered assembly. At this presentation the faithful are like the Magi bringing gifts to the Christ child. But these gifts are of an even greater value than gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These are the gifts of our lives.

### **Prayers of Blessing**

The priest prays two short prayers of blessing, one over the bread and the other over the cup. He first raises the bread a little over the altar and recites a text, based on a Jewish table prayer, which blesses or praises God, as the creator of the world, for the gift of bread. A similar prayer is said after the cup has been prepared. These texts, which are primarily private prayers of the priest, recall the source, meaning, and goal of the gifts which are presented in view of what they will become, namely our bread of life and our spiritual drink.

### **Mixing of Water & Wine**

You will notice that the priest, in preparing the cup, adds a small amount of water to the wine. This mixing of water and wine has its roots in an ancient practice of diluting the wine to make it less strong. (Sources from the 2nd Century refer to this practice of mixing water into the wine.) Soon this practice received various symbolic interpretations. Today it recalls that just as wine receives water, so we are to share in the divinity of Christ who assumed human flesh for us.

### **Incensation**

At times the gifts, the altar, and the people are incensed during the preparation of the gifts. This action engages not only our sense of smell but our sight as well. Incense is the traditional symbol of prayer arising to God. Thus the gifts and the altar may be incensed as a sign that the assembly's offering and prayer will go up to God. Priest and people may also be incensed, not only to recognize the innate holiness of all God's people, but also as a sign that they are to unite themselves and their prayers with the gifts which will be offered in the eucharistic prayer.

### **Washing of the Hands**

The washing of hands took place at different parts of the liturgy before it settled into its present location. The ritual appeared in the 7th and 8th centuries just before the Preparation of the Gifts. It eventually moved to its present location because of the increased use of incensing. It served a practical function of cleaning the hands of the priest after he handled the censer. Today the rite expresses the presider's need for inward purification.

### **Prayer Over the Gifts**

The preparation rite comes to a close with the prayer over the gifts. It was once called the "secret," not because the Church desired to hide its contents, but from the silent manner of its recitation which was introduced in the early Middle Ages. The prayer usually asks that the gifts will be pleasing to God and it may make a reference to the season of the year or the day on the calendar. The people respond "Amen" to make the prayer their own.

*Although the preparation rite is essentially quite simple and brief, it is not meant to be an idle time in the celebration. Certainly we prepare the altar for the eucharistic meal, and we prepare the bread and wine for what is to come. But as we do so, we also prepare ourselves so that with faith-filled hearts we may joyfully acclaim the praise of God in the eucharistic prayer which follows. This prayer will be the subject of our next reflection.*

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Why is the term "Preparation of the Gifts" a better name for this part of the Mass than the term "Offertory"? By changing the terminology, what is the Church telling us about this part of the Mass and about what is to come?
2. Why is it important that the gifts of bread, wine and monetary offerings be presented by the people instead of simply being present on the altar at the beginning of Mass?
3. What is the significance that the priest and people, in addition to the bread and wine, may be incensed at this point in the Mass?