

LESSONS 34 & 35: THE MASS

Instruction for Faith Educators

For Basic Level / Age 8	:	Cover all points
For Intermediate Level / Age 11	:	Cover all points
For Advanced Level / Age 14	:	Cover all points

Revision from previous lesson:

In the past couple of lessons, we have been learning about the Sacraments. So far, we have covered the first three Sacraments: baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist. Together, these three sacraments are known as the Sacraments of Initiation. Furthermore, it is also important to know that the Eucharist takes place during Mass (that is, the public worship of the Church) when the priest prays over the bread and wine. It is therefore important for us to understand what takes place during Mass, because you are required to be regularly participating at the Mass all throughout your life as a Catholic.

Current lesson:

1. The Mass is the central act of worship in the life of the Catholic Church.
2. In the Mass, Christ unites Himself to His Bride, and Church, and feeds Himself to her through Word and Sacrament.
3. The Mass is also a sacrifice in which Jesus is offered as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. This does not mean that Jesus is being killed again at every Mass. His sacrifice on the cross was already good once and for all (Hebrews 10:10). However, the effect of His once-and-for-all sacrifice is perpetual and is offered repeatedly at every Mass. As we celebrate the Mass, Jesus is the Great High Priest who offers Himself before the Father as the Lamb of God in the presence of the Father.
4. The Mass is also an action of Christ Himself in the person of the priest. A priest is configured into Christ in his ordination, and when he celebrates the Sacraments, he does it in the person of Christ. This is why, as Christ offers Himself in Word and Sacrament in the Mass, an ordained minister is the one who proclaims the Gospel, preaches, and leads in the Prayer of Consecration. It is by the hands of the priest that unleavened bread and wine change to become the Body and Blood of Christ.
5. The Mass is made up of the following components:
 - A) Introductory Rites
 - B) Liturgy of the Word
 - C) Liturgy of the Eucharist
 - D) Concluding Rite

It is important to know what happens during each part of the Mass.

A) Introductory Rites

Procession and Entrance Song (or Entrance Antiphon)

- The priest enters, with a deacon (if there is one) and altar servers.
- During this procession, ordinarily, the entrance chant is sung. It is also permitted to sing a hymn appropriate to the liturgical season.
- “After the people have gathered, the Entrance chant begins as the priest enters with the deacon and ministers. The purpose of this chant is to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical season or festivity, and accompany the procession of the priest and ministers.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 47)
- “If there is no singing at the Entrance, the antiphon in the Missal is recited either by the faithful, or by some of them, or by a lector; otherwise, it is recited by the priest himself, who may even adapt it as an introductory explanation.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 48)

Reverencing the Altar

- The altar represents Christ and His holy sacrifice, and we are thus showing our adoration of Him by kissing it.
- The altar also represents the saints of the Church to whom we offer our salutations, and whom we know are also a part of our Eucharistic celebration.

Incensing the Altar

- The use of incense is a way of showing prayerful reverence to the altar which is a symbol for Christ. This is done by circling the altar and swinging a smoking censor of fragrant incense. In addition to the altar, the Cross is also incensed.
- For us, the bottom line about incense is that it is a symbol of prayer.
 - “Let my prayers rise like incense before you O Lord...” (Psalm 141:2)
 - “The smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints ascended before God from the hand of the Angel.” (Revelation 8:4)
- The use of incense is an option and although it may be used at the discretion of the celebrant, it tends to be reserved for special occasions. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* indicates it is to be used “when the occasion warrants it” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 49).
- Upon incensing the altar, the celebrant goes to his presidential chair.

Celebrant Goes to the Chair

- The chair is a symbol of authority and office as well as a symbol of teaching authority. Scripture records that when Jesus taught, he would usually sit (Mathew 5:1; Luke 4:20; Mark 13:3; John 8:2; among many examples).
- Now the Bishop’s Chair is especially imbued with this meaning and the priest’s chair only in a sense that is subordinate to the local Ordinary. The bishop is allowed to sit in his chair to teach, although many bishops do not practise that.
- In the more modern sense, the chair also symbolises the presiding role of the priest. “The chair of the priest celebrant must signify his office of presiding over the gathering



and of directing the prayer. ...Any appearance of a throne, however, is to be avoided.”
(*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 310)

- All three of these roles (governing, teaching, and presiding) really refer to Christ Himself. The priest, through his reception of Holy Orders, is configured to Christ and acts *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ).

Sign of the Cross

- Standing at the Chair the celebrant begins the Mass with the sign of the cross.
- The origin of this gesture goes back to the earliest days of Christianity when it seems to have been more of a sign of the cross traced on one's forehead.
- This practice probably developed from Scriptural allusions to the *tau* or “T” marked on the forehead of those to be saved from destruction (Exodus 17:9-14; Ezekiel 9:4, Revelation 7:3, 9:4, 14:1).
- The formula “in the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” declares that there is only ONE God, therefore one name, but there are three Persons in the One God.
- St Cyril states that at the sign of the cross, “demons tremble and angels recognise it. Thus the former are put to flight, while the latter gather about it as something pertaining to themselves” (from his *Catechetical Lectures*).

Greeting by Celebrant

- The celebrant greets the assembled people in one of the following ways:
 - I) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
 - II) The grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
 - III) The Lord be with you.
 - IV) Peace be with you (only bishops may use this greeting).
- In each case the people respond: “And with your spirit”. This expression can be addressed only to an ordained minister. Some scholars have suggested that “spirit” here refers to the gift of the spirit the minister received at ordination.
- “After the greeting of the people, the priest...may very briefly introduce the faithful to the Mass of the day.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 50)

Penitential Rite

- The penitential rite may take three different forms:
 - A) the *Confiteor* or “I Confess”;
 - B) a dialogue between the celebrant and the people (uncommonly used);
 - C) the *Kyrie* litany (the Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling of Holy Water, best used during the Easter season, can be used to replace this form).
- All three forms follow the same four-part pattern: (1) invitation to the faithful by the priest, (2) a pause for silence, (3) the prayer, and (4) the absolution by the priest.
- After the absolution, if the first two forms of the penitential rite were used, *Kyrie* must follow (*Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison*, or in English, “Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy”).



- “The rite concludes with the priest’s absolution, which, however, lacks the efficacy of the Sacrament of Penance.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 51)

The Gloria

- At Sunday Masses and special feast Masses, what comes next is a kind of outburst of praise called the *Gloria*, a very old and venerable hymn sung (or recited) by the Church. It is sung on Sundays outside the Advent and Lenten seasons, as well as on solemnities and feasts and at special, more solemn, celebrations.
- The text of the *Gloria* echoes the song of the angels at the Nativity, and it should be sung if possible.
- “The text of this hymn may not be replaced by any other text.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 53)

Opening Prayer (Collect)

- Now the priest says, “Let us Pray!” This prayer is traditionally called the “Collect” (Latin, *collecta*) because its purpose is to collect all these opening prayers and whatever other personal intentions we brought into one summary prayer.
- “All, together with the priest, observe a brief silence so that they may be conscious of the fact that they are in God’s presence and may formulate their petitions mentally.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 54)
- The people assent to the collect with their “Amen”.

Congregation Sits

- While sitting is a teaching posture, it is also a learning posture.

B) Liturgy of the Word

Scripture Readings

- The Liturgy of the Word begins with an Old Testament Reading, followed by a response from a Psalm, and then a reading from a New Testament Epistle, and climaxes with a reading from the Gospels.
- The lectionary provides for a three-year cycle for the Sunday Masses (years A, B, and C) and a two-year cycle for weekday Masses (Cycle I and Cycle II).
- The responsorial psalm is an integral part of the liturgy with its own significance. It is a moment of pious meditation, a lyrical rejoicing after the word of God had been received into the hearts of the believers.
- “By tradition, the function of proclaiming the readings is ministerial, not presidential. The readings, therefore, should be proclaimed by a lector, (and the Gospel by a deacon or, in his absence, a priest other than the celebrant). In the absence of an instituted lector, other laypersons may be commissioned to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture. They should be truly suited to perform this function and should receive careful preparation, so that the faithful by listening to the readings from the sacred texts may develop in their hearts a warm and living love for Sacred Scripture.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 59)



- “During the Liturgy of the Word, it is also appropriate to include brief periods of silence... It may be appropriate to observe such periods of silence, for example, before the Liturgy of the Word itself begins, after the First and Second Reading, and lastly at the conclusion of the Homily.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 56)
- “The dignity of the word of God requires that the Church have a place that is suitable for the proclamation of the word and toward which the attention of the whole congregation of the faithful naturally turns during the Liturgy of the Word. It is appropriate that this place be ordinarily a stationary ambo and not simply a movable lectern. The ambo must be located in keeping with the design of each Church in such a way that the ordained ministers and lectors may be clearly seen and heard by the faithful. From the ambo only the readings, the responsorial Psalm, and the Easter Proclamation (*Exsultet*) are to be proclaimed; it may be used also for giving the homily and for announcing the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful. The dignity of the ambo requires that only a minister of the word should go up to it.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 309)

Homily

- The homily is to be preached by a member of the clergy.
- It is required on Sundays and holy days of obligation at all Masses that are celebrated with a congregation; it is not to be omitted without serious reason.
- “...*the purpose of the homily is to explain the readings and make them relevant for the present day. This is the task of the priest. And the faithful should not add comments or engage in dialogue or anything similar during the homily.*” (*Liturgicae instaurationes* #3, 2)

The Creed

- The congregation responds to the homily by professing their faith, that is, reciting the creed of the Church.
- The Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed that we recite or chant at Mass is a summary of faith expressed by the Councils of Nicaea (325 AD) and of Constantinople (381 AD) as ratified by the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD).
- The purpose of this creed is to unfold the contents of the Christian faith.
- We make a profound bow at the sentence “and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man” to honour the Incarnation. During the Annunciation and Christmas, we actually kneel as we recite this sentence, since these are feasts that give specific honour to the Incarnation.

Prayer of the Faithful (General Intercession)

- “In the Prayer of the Faithful, the people respond in a certain way to the word of God which they have welcomed in faith and, exercising the office of their baptismal priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all. It is fitting that such a prayer be included, as a rule, in Masses celebrated with a congregation, so that petitions will be offered for the holy Church, for civil authorities, for those weighed down by various needs, for all men and women, and for the salvation of the whole world. As a rule, the series of intentions is to be:

For the needs of the Church;



For public authorities and the salvation of the whole world;
For those burdened by any kind of difficulty;
For the local community.

Nevertheless, in a particular celebration, such as Confirmation, Marriage, or a Funeral, the series of intentions may reflect more closely the particular occasion.

It is for the priest celebrant to direct this prayer from the chair. He himself begins it with a brief introduction, by which he invites the faithful to pray, and likewise he concludes it with a prayer. The intentions announced should be sober, be composed freely but prudently, and be succinct, and they should express the prayer of the entire community.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 69-71)

- The intentions are to be announced by the deacon if there is one present. Otherwise it can be announced by a lay person animating the Mass.

C) Liturgy of the Eucharist

- As important and precious as the Word of God is, it all points here: the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Word became Flesh and dwelt among us, and now the Word that we have heard, Jesus Christ, will become the Flesh and Blood that we receive.
- At the Last Supper Christ instituted the paschal sacrifice and meal. In this meal the sacrifice of the cross is continually made present in the Church when the priest, representing Christ, carries out what the Lord did and commanded his disciples to do in his memory.
- The Church has arranged the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy to correspond to the words and actions of Christ.
- In antiquity, the Liturgy of the Eucharist was called the “Mass of the Faithful”.

Preparation of the Altar

- The altar is prepared and gifts are brought forward and offered.
- There are some crucial items you will notice in the preparation of the altar:
 - The altar itself
 - The corporal
 - The purificator
 - The chalice
 - The Roman Missal

Prayer over the Gifts

- Once the altar is prepared and ready, the priest will pray over the gifts either audibly or inaudibly. *The special purpose of this prayer is to ask God to receive the bread and wine to sanctify it and make it holy.*
- If the priest prays audibly, then after each of the two-part prayer, the congregation responds, “Blessed be God forever”.



Incensing the Gifts

- Now out comes the incense again! Incense, as we have discussed before, is usually used only on more solemn occasions in most parishes.
- Recall that incense is a symbol of prayer as we see from the Psalm, “Let my prayer rise like incense and the lifting of my hands as an evening offering” (Psalm 141:2).

Priest washes his hands

- Something peculiar happens at this point: the priest washes his hands.
- When the priest washes his hands he says quietly, “Lord wash away my iniquity and cleanse me of my sins”.

Invitation to Pray

- Next, the priest invites the congregation to pray: “Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father”, and the congregation in turn responds, “May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and the glory of His name, for our good and the good of all His holy Church”.

The Preface Dialogue & the Preface

- The Mass now enters into the Eucharistic Prayer, which is a prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. This is the very centre and high point of the entire Mass.
- It begins with a short dialogue, just after the prayer over the gifts and before the singing of the *Sanctus*. This beginning is called the “preface dialogue” and it is really quite remarkable in its sweeping vision and heavenly call.
- By greeting the people with the words “The Lord be with you”, the priest expresses his desire that the dynamic activity of God’s spirit be given to the People of God, enabling them to do the work of transforming the world that God has entrusted to them. The expression “And with your spirit” can only be addressed to an ordained minister.
- The celebrant then goes on to say, “Lift up your hearts!”, to which the congregation responds “We lift them up to the Lord!” After greeting us in the Lord, he invites us to go to heaven! Through the celebrant, the Lord is inviting us to go to the eternal altar that is in heaven, where our Lord Jesus Christ literally offers himself at once as both the High Priest and the victim.
- The text of the preface changes based on the season or the saint or feast of the day. But it always ends in this or a similar manner: “And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim: Holy, Holy, Holy...” And thus we are reminded that our worship is caught up into the heavenly liturgy where our voices join innumerable angels and saints in the glorious act of praise.

Preface Acclamation (Holy, Holy or *Sanctus*)

- The Preface usually concludes with words describing the praise of the worshippers joining with the angels, who are pictured as praising God, with the words of the “Holy, Holy” or the *Sanctus*. This *Sanctus* is either recited or chanted by the congregation together with the priest before the celebrant continues with the rest of the Eucharistic Prayer.



- When we begin the *Sanctus*, we are not simply saying it alone. We are moved outside of time, united to heaven in a very mystical way, because the hosts of heaven are chanting the same song.

The Eucharistic Prayer

- After the preface dialogue and preface acclamation have been recited, the celebrant chooses among several different Eucharistic prayers. Some are longer than others, but each one has a similar structure and contains the following two elements:
 - I) An *epiclesis* (which means, in English, “calling upon”): We call upon God the Father to send down the Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.
 - II) Institution and Consecration: This is when we recall how Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper. Through the words of consecration, Jesus’ action, and the power of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ.

Memorial Acclamation

- Next, to prompt the people to declare the Memorial Acclamation, the priest says: “The mystery of faith” or *mysterium fidei* in Latin.
- The Memorial Acclamation is an acclamation chanted or recited by the people after the institution narrative of the Eucharist. It was common in ancient eastern liturgies and has more recently been introduced into the Latin Rite since 1969.
- Here, we proclaim the mystery of faith: in Greek, the word *mysterion* (“mystery”) is the equivalent of the English word “sacrament”. The Holy Eucharist is the greatest mystery, or sacrament of faith, because in the Eucharist, our Lord Jesus Christ is really present: body, blood, soul, and divinity.
- There are three acclamations that the congregation can choose in response to the celebrant’s prompting. However, all three of the acclamations mention death (in the third acclamation “Cross” is used that refers to Jesus’ death on the Cross) and Resurrection.

Doxology and the Great Amen

- What happens next is, the priest holds the Body and Blood of Christ throughout the chanting of the doxology. If there is a deacon present at the liturgy, the priest holds the Body of Christ and the deacon holds the Blood of Christ.
- This is when we offer our glory and honour to God, who becomes tangible in our midst: the Body and Blood of Christ. The faithful acclaim this proclamation, that is, they make it their own, with the singing of “Amen”.
- Doxologies are our way of praising, glorifying, and honouring the Triune God who seeks to unite us to himself.
- The Amen which follows the doxology is called the “Great Amen”, because it is our way of agreeing enthusiastically with the doxology.

The Our Father

- At this point, the priest invites all the faithful to chant or say the Lord’s Prayer with him. He says, “At the Saviour’s command and formed by divine teaching, we dare to say...”, and the people begin praying the Our Father together with the celebrant.
- The most obvious reason that the Our Father is prayed in every single Mass celebrated in the Catholic Church is that it is the very prayer that has been handed over by Jesus to His Apostles, who in turn handed it down to us. For this reason, the Our Father is the best-known prayer among Christians.
- Its placement in the Mass just before Holy Communion is natural, since it is a petition both for daily food, which, for Christians, means also the Body and Blood of our Lord, and also, for forgiveness from sin, so that what is holy may be given to those who are holy.
- At the end of the Our Father the priest alone adds a prayer called the “embolism”. In Greek and Latin, *embolismus* refers to an insertion of some sort. Hence this prayer is inserted between the Lord’s Prayer and the familiar doxology, “For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever”.
- On the issue of lifting one’s hands during the Our Father: Many Catholics may not be aware that the extending of one’s hands during prayer at the Mass (also known as the *orans* posture) is exclusively a priestly gesture.
- On the issue of joining hands during the Our Father: The Congregation for Divine Worship has consistently taught that “holding hands during the Our Father has become common place, but it is an illicit addition to the Liturgy. Holding hands is a sign of intimacy and not reconciliation, and as such disrupts the flow of the Sacramental signs in the Mass which leads to the Sacramental sign of intimacy with Christ and our neighbour, Holy Communion” (“Notitiae”, 1975, Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, The Vatican, Vol. XI, P. 226).

The Sign of Peace (optional)

- “The Rite of Peace follows [the Our Father and the Prayer “Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your Apostles, ‘I leave you peace...’”], by which the Church asks for peace and unity for herself and for the whole human family, and the faithful express to each other their ecclesial communion and mutual charity before communicating in the Sacrament. As for the sign of peace to be given, the manner is to be established by Conferences of Bishops in accordance with the culture and customs of the peoples. It is, however, appropriate that each person offer the sign of peace only to those who are nearest and in a sober manner.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 82)
- Other instructions pertaining to this are found in the Roman Missal itself (#128, #129), indicating that the exchange of peace is shared “if appropriate” and that the celebrant “gives the sign of peace to a deacon or minister”.
- “The priest may give the sign of peace to the ministers but always remains within the sanctuary, so as not to disturb the celebration” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 154). (Note that there are rare exceptions listed there, but we will not go into such great detail on the matter.)

Breaking of the Bread (Lamb of God)

- The exchange of peace is accompanied almost immediately by the singing or recitation of the Agnus Dei or the “Lamb of God”.
- “The priest breaks the Eucharistic Bread, assisted, if the case calls for it, by the deacon or a concelebrant. Christ’s gesture of breaking bread at the Last Supper, which gave the entire Eucharistic Action its name in apostolic times, signifies that the many faithful are made one body (1 Corinthians 10:17) by receiving Communion from the one Bread of Life which is Christ, who died and rose for the salvation of the world. The fraction or breaking of bread is begun after the sign of peace and is carried out with proper reverence, though it should not be unnecessarily prolonged, nor should it be accorded undue importance. This rite is reserved to the priest and the deacon. 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 living and glorious Body of Jesus Christ.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 83)
- In speaking of the Eucharistic Bread to be used at the Mass, we are instructed that it should “...be made in such a way that the priest at Mass with a congregation is able in practice to break it into parts for distribution to at least some of the faithful. Small hosts are, however, in no way ruled out when the number of those receiving Holy Communion or other pastoral needs require it. The action of the fraction or breaking of bread, which gave its name to the Eucharist in apostolic times, will bring out more clearly the force and importance of the sign of unity of all in the one bread, and of the sign of charity by the fact that the one bread is distributed among the brothers and sisters.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 321)
- When the priest breaks the Sacred Host he also drops a small piece of it into the Chalice, which is called *Commingling*. *Commingling* signifies that the Body and Blood of Christ are reunited in His glorious resurrection, in Heaven, and in the Eucharist.
- When the celebrant lifts up the Body and Blood of Christ, saying “Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb”, it is an echo of the angelic invitation to the heavenly wedding feast in Revelation 19:9.
- The response from the congregation to the invitation is, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed”. These words also recall the story in Matthew 8:8 when the Roman centurion had faith that if Jesus just said the word, he would heal his servant without having to enter his house. The type of healing that takes place at the Mass is much greater than the physical healing of the centurion’s servant. Through the Eucharist, the soul – the core of our being – is healed.

Communion

- People who may receive Holy Communion are those who are baptised and in full communion with the Catholic Church, who have received their First Holy Communion, and are in a state of grace. They must not have eaten any food for at least an hour before receiving Holy Communion (but this does not include medicine and water).
- If a person is conscious of having committed a grave sin, he should go to Confession before receiving Communion, that is, even before the Mass begins.

- We must at least receive the Eucharist once a year (at the Easter season). We may receive the Eucharist twice in one day when the second time is at a full Mass that we attend and participate in.
- After receiving Holy Communion, you should spend time with Jesus in personal and intimate prayer in sacred silence.

D) Concluding Rite

- Just as Mass began with certain prayers, so it ends in a similar fashion. The prayer is then followed by a final blessing given by the celebrant. A few brief announcements may precede the final blessing.
- After the final blessing, the congregation is dismissed. The celebrant (or the deacon, if there is one present) says: “Go in peace”, and the congregation responds, “Thanks be to God”.
- This dismissal is called *missa* in Latin, and this is where the Mass gets its name from.



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