

Year of the Eucharist

October 2004 to October 2005

Part 22 in a series on
The Year of the Eucharist
from
The Office of Rites and Sacraments
Department of Worship & Spiritual Life
Catholic Diocese of Memphis
in Tennessee

The Structure of the Mass The Liturgy of the Eucharist An Overview

Having prepared ourselves in the Introductory Rites, listened and received God's word into our hearts, professed our faith and brought the needs of the church and the world to God in the Liturgy of the Word, we are now ready for the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

It surprises some people to learn that the telling of the story of God's saving love is not completed when the Liturgy of the Word comes to an end. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, we continue the story, but we tell it differently. As we move from ambo to altar, we move from word to ritual action.

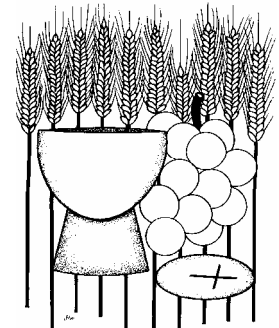
We watch as the presider, deacon, servers and members of the community carrying gifts all move to the altar. With prayers of praise and thanksgiving, with dialogue between the priest and the assembly, with gesture, with change of posture and sung acclamations, with the calling down of the Holy Spirit on gifts of bread and wine, we continue the story of a God who loves to the point of sending his only Son into the world, "in the fullness of time," so that all could be saved and enter into new and everlasting life.

At this point in the liturgy, we want to pay very close attention. While the action seems to be mostly on the part of the priest at the altar, all that he does there is done on behalf of everyone present. The prayers he voices belong to the entire assembly, and we express this in our "Amen." While this could look like "Father's part of the Mass," it is a time for heightened awareness and full participation by the assembly. We listen to the continued story and we respond.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is both banquet and memorial sacrifice. In daily life, having been invited to any other banquet, we would not give thought to sacrifice. Yet it is Christ's sacrifice of his life that makes it possible for us to be invited to this banquet. It is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet to which we are invited. If this banquet gives us some idea of how we will spend eternity, wouldn't you expect us to give it more attention than we often do?

In the Liturgy of the Word, we listen with faith to the stories of Jesus who walked among the people, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and telling of the promise of a new kingdom where peace and love and justice would reign.

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist we encounter this Jesus as we listen to the continued story told in the Eucharistic Prayer. If we are open, we allow this Jesus to heal us where we are sick and feed every hunger we hold in our hearts. When the priest offers the bread and wine and calls upon the Holy Spirit to change these gifts into the body and blood of Christ, we offer ourselves to be transformed into Christ's body here on earth. We come forward to receive the body and blood of Christ in solidarity and hope and belief that, in the words of St. Augustine, "we will become what we receive." This is a communal moment because Christ's sacrifice has made us one body. It is a private moment because God who longs for union with each one of us comes again and again to make a home in us. To the degree that each of us responds to such Love will we be the body on earth that Christ desires and deserves.



FROM THE
**GENERAL INSTRUCTION ON THE
ROMAN MISSAL...**

**#28. THE STRUCTURE OF THE
MASS INCLUDES:
INTRODUCTORY RITES
LITURGY OF THE WORD
LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST
CONCLUDING RITES**

**Word and Eucharist are so
closely interconnected that
they form but one single act
of worship. (G.I.R.M. #28) The
other rites open and
conclude the celebration.**

Text: Judy Gray
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