



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We have now moved into the Liturgy of the Eucharist in our examination of the Mass. The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the Preparation of Gifts. We remember that the Eucharist is Presence, Sacrifice and Communion. As we prepare the Altar, it is good to keep this in mind: it is not just a table, from which the Last Supper was received, but an Altar, where the sacrifice of Christ is offered.

At the Last Supper, Jesus foreshadowed that His death on the Cross the next day would be part of the Passover Meal. He identifies Himself as the new Passover Lamb – thus making the *gruesome death* into an *eternal sacrifice* to the Father. The bread and wine that is offered by Jesus becomes His very Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. This means that at every Mass, we partake in this one sacrifice (now in an un-bloody form), and making present in time and space the sacrifice that He brought into eternity.

The Chalice is placed on the Altar. We use a chalice veil here because we veil those things which are sacred, to remind us to be reverent around the sacred. A cloth is set on top of the Altar, which is called a corporal. This unfolded (and refolded after Communion) in such a way that if any particles from the Host should fall on it, they will be reverently cared for. With the Chalice is another cloth called a purificator. This is used to wipe the Chalice. These linens are cleaned in such a way as always to respect and reverence the Eucharistic species with which they come in contact.

Then the bread and wine are brought to the Altar. This is a moment to offer up our intentions for this Mass. The bread and the wine – as they are brought to the Altar – symbolize all of creation being brought to the Lord. Think of the farmers, the truck drivers, the bakers, the vendors who sell the bread, the electricity, the gas ... everyone and everything involved in making the bread and bringing it to the Church. Think of the vineyard growers, those who pick the grapes, the ones who make the wine. All of creation, as it were, is being brought to the Altar. In the paten that holds the bread and the chalice that holds the wine, we offer ourselves, as well. "Sacrifice" literally means to make holy – and so in this great sacrifice of Christ, we make the whole universe – and ourselves – holy.

The priest then offers the bread to the Father saying: "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life." If there is no Offertory song, then the people may acclaim, "Blessed be God for ever." The priest (or deacon) then pours wine into the chalice and, with it, a drop of water, saying quietly, "By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity." The priest then offers the chalice saying, "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the wine we offer you: fruit of the vine and work of human hands, it will become our spiritual drink." And the people may respond as before. We offer to God the Father what He has given us, now worked by human hands as a gift back to Him.

The priest, in a quiet prayer, asks God to receive this sacrifice. He is a sinner, even as he offers this perfect sacrifice of Christ: "With humble spirit and contrite heart may we be accepted by you, O Lord, and may our sacrifice in your sight this day be pleasing to you, Lord God." He then washes his hands in a symbolic gesture of how he needs to be cleansed of his sin, "Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."

Now, addressing the people, the priest says, "Pray, brethren (brothers and sisters), that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father." The people rise and reply: "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."

My sacrifice and yours. What is that? The "My sacrifice" is the sacrifice of Christ which the priest offers "*in persona Christi capitis*" (in the person of Christ the head). "Your sacrifice" is the sum of all the sacrifices, intentions, prayers, etc. that you bring to this Mass to offer to God. It is, as it were, that we are placing our very selves into the paten and chalice to be offered to the Father in union with the sacrifice of Christ.