



Pastor's Column

St. Peter Catholic Church

December 30, 2018, Feast of The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

The Mass Explained-Offertory and the Preface

We continue our Pastor Column series on the Mass explained, and we turn now to the Offertory and the Preface.

The Offertory (also known as the Preparation of the Altar). Following the General Intercessions and the conclusion of the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist now begins with the Offertory. The various implements needed on the altar are brought up by the altar servers (the corporal, the purificators, the Missal, the Chalice, etc.), and with the Sunday Mass, the congregation's tithe is collected at the same time. Regarding the altar implements: the corporal is the larger altar linen on which sits the paten (the little plate holding the Host) and/or the ciboria (singular: ciborium), which are the bowl-like or chalice-like vessels that contain the Hosts. The purificators are the altar linens that accompany the Chalice and Communion Cups. The Missal is the priest's prayer book for the Mass.

Regarding the collection, we are called not only to give of ourselves to God and to others, but to give the very *best* of ourselves. The bread, we might say, symbolizes the fruit of our labors, and the wine symbolizes the joy of our lives. The financial gifts represent our earthly treasures that ultimately we offer up to the Lord and His Church to do with as He wills; they go to serve the ministries of the Church and the needs of the poor.

The procession of the gifts. Those who bring the gifts forward to the altar represent the entire community of believers, the entire family in faith, who give of themselves to God. That the gifts are brought to the foot of the altar (where the Sacrifice is made present) demonstrates that the people, the Church, participate wholeheartedly in the Sacrifice, seeking to offer themselves likewise as a living sacrifice to the Father.

The preparation of the altar. With the bread, the priest prays, "Blessed are You, 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." And with the wine: "Blessed are You, 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." When the priest mixes water with the wine, he prays, "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." Regarding this mixing, it is an historical fact that this was the custom for most Mediterranean peoples living in the time of Jesus; they stored wine in a concentrated form, then mixed it with water to dilute it and make it drinkable for meals. The symbolic significance is that the wine and water mixed represents the union of the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ; like water and wine, the human and the divine in Jesus are so close as to be inseparable. Also, blood and water flowed from pierced side of Jesus; wine (which becomes the Precious Blood of Christ) is mixed with water in the Chalice.

The *lavabo*. The word *lavabo* ("I will wash") is when the priest washes his hands before beginning the Preface. Just before the *lavabo*, the priest prays, "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." And with the *lavabo*, he prays, "Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." This is a baptismal image, signifying the priest's wish to be cleansed of his sins so as to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass worthily and well.

The Preface, which follows the Prayer Over the Gifts. Like the Entrance Antiphon (or the Processional Hymn) at the beginning of Mass, the Preface is a sort of summary statement regarding what our celebration is about. There is a Preface that is proper to the particular Eucharistic celebration of the given day or season. For example, if we are celebrating a Marian holy day, the Preface used is proper to Marian celebrations. During the liturgical seasons (Lent, Easter, Advent, Christmas, Ordinary Time), there is a Preface (or several Prefaces) proper to that season.

~ Fr. Lewis