

# V. Preparing Gifts & Hearts

The *Liturgy of the Eucharist* follows immediately after the *General Intercessions*. During the *Preparation of the Gifts*, designated ministers set the Altar/Table with corporal, Missal, chalices, and purificator. The deacon receives the gifts of bread, wine, and water for priest to pray over them. This rite includes also collecting monetary gifts from the faithful, a song during the preparatory rite, and, as above, receiving bread and wine for prayerful preparation for *Liturgy of the Eucharist*.

## The Preparation of the Altar / Table

“At the beginning of the liturgy of the Eucharist the gifts, which will become Christ’s Body and Blood, are brought to the altar.

***First the altar, the Lord’s table, which is the center of the whole liturgy of the Eucharist, is prepared:***

The offerings are then brought forward. It is praiseworthy for the faithful to present the bread and wine, which are then accepted at an appropriate place by the priest or deacon who carries them to the altar.” (GIRM 73)

Members of the faithful “set the table” with ritual vessels. The corporal is a relatively small white cloth that sits beneath the chalice (cup with water and wine) and paten (plate with bread). The presider, deacon, and ministers of the Body and Blood of Christ use the purificator (napkin) to wipe the chalice between communicants.

## An Aside: Practical Reverence for the Altar

GIRM2003 makes special provision for reverence to be shown to the Altar as the presider reaches the table during the entrance song and before the concluding procession. It is good for us to recall that that, since the Altar has been anointed, it signifies Christ, “the Anointed One.”

GIRM sets forth the following norms regarding the Altar/Table:

- The Altar should be approachable from every side, not fixed against a wall. (GIRM 299)
- Candles (two are required) should be placed on or next to it. (GIRM 117, 307)
- Also on, or close to the Altar/Table, there is to be a cross with a figure of Christ crucified (It may also be carried in the Entrance Procession. GIRM 117, 308).
- Finally, the new directions also require the top Altar cloth to be white. This change does not mean that other colored cloths are prohibited but that the one on top needs to be white.

Because the minister places the Book of Gospels on the Altar at the conclusion of the entrance procession, some have suggested that the cloth to be used at the Liturgy of the Eucharist should *not* be laid on the Altar until the Preparation Rite. This notion implies that a more formal “setting of the table” is apropos for the Preparation Rite

## The Preparation of the Gifts or Offertory?

The Latin Mass had an Offertory. GIRM from the Mass of Paul VI called it Preparation of the Gifts, as did GIRM2003. The *Roman Missal* (2011) uses neither, though it refers to an Offertory chant. “Jesus took the bread... wine” is the scriptural warrant for what we do.

### ***“At the Last Supper***

Christ instituted the paschal sacrifice and meal.

Through this meal, the sacrifice of the cross is continuously made present in the Church...

***For Christ took the bread and the cup*** and gave thanks; he broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying: ‘Take, eat, and drink: this is my Body; this is the cup of my Blood. Do this in memory of me.’”

(GIRM 72)

That is why I find *Preparation of the Gifts* to be more theologically compelling – because the central offering occurs during the Eucharistic Prayer.

### ***The Liturgy of the Eucharist includes:***

Preparation of the Altar and Gifts

Presentation of Gifts

Prayer Over the Gifts

The Eucharistic Prayer

The Communion Rite

The Prayer After Communion

## The Presentation and Preparation of the Gifts

The ancient notion of “the Great Exchange” will help us understand better what takes place in the presentation of the gifts by the faithful.

***“The Great Exchange”***: God first blessed us by creating everything. Humans take those gifts given, wheat and grapes, and make bread and wine from them. Next, we bring those gifts we first received and then labored over to present them at the Altar/Table that they might be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. Finally, we receive them back in Communion. The procession of the gifts says, in essence, “Behold the work of human hands from the gifts God first gave! Blessed be God forever!”

The priest says the proper prayers aloud *only* if there is no music during the preparation rite. Ideally at Sunday Mass there should be a hymn sung by the all or an anthem by a choir at this time. Thus, the only prayer that is usually audible at this part of

the Mass is the invitation of the presider, "Pray my brothers and sisters..." followed by response of the faithful, "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands..." The rite closes with the Prayer over the Offerings.

### A Brief Word about the Collection

The Collection is something more than a necessary evil, a practical response to the needs of the poor and needy, or a pragmatic activity to keep the parish and / or school running financially.

But, what is its spiritual connection to Mass? Certainly, more mature theological reflection needs to be brought to bear on this important action of the community to highlight its connection to the paschal mystery, the outpouring love of Christ before God.

*This is also the time to receive money or other gifts for the poor or the Church brought by the faithful or collected in the church. (GIRM 73)*

### Assembly Stands at Prayer Over the Offerings

The GIRM instructs the assembly to stand *at the beginning* of the priest's invitation, "Pray my brothers and sisters that our sacrifice..." The people respond, "May the Lord accept..." It is appropriate to stand here, for every dialogue between presider and faithful in the liturgy, being one of mutuality and reciprocity, occurs as all stand. (GIRM 146)

### Points to Ponder about the Preparation Rite

1) Is it an altar or a table? Well, yes. GIRM uses the term, "altar" more often than "table." Still, it does use both terms to bring out different meanings of the altar/table's meaning in liturgy. Notice the following statement:

"The *altar* on which the sacrifice of the cross is made present under sacramental signs *is also the table* of the Lord at which the people of God are called together to participate in the Mass." (GIRM 296)

a) "Altar" focuses our attention on Jesus as the Passover Lamb sacrificed for Israel. "Table" underscores Jesus table fellowship with sinners *then and now*, and points to the Great and Final Banquet with God in heaven we share *now*.

2) The Western Church mandated the use of unleavened bread from around the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Such usage connects the church with its roots in the Jesus' Last Supper, a Passover Meal employing unleavened bread as commanded in Exodus 12.

a) The Eastern Orthodox Church continues to use leavened bread, signifying how Christ's death and resurrection has replaced the demands of the Law. Christ is our New Leaven. This difference is still a sticking point between East and West.

3) GIRM insists that 1) bread should be recently baked; 2) have the appearance of bread; and 3) be able to be broken. The use of unleavened bread helps the Church maintain a symbolic connection with our Jewish brothers and sisters who use such at Passover.

The bread for celebrating the Eucharist must be made only from wheat, *recently baked*, and, according to the ancient tradition of the Latin Church, be unleavened. (GIRM 320)

a) GIRM's instructions appear to leave parishes in a conundrum – if hosts don't look like bread and some attempts to make bread for Mass aren't totally unleavened... What's a body to do?

The meaning of the sign demands that the material for the eucharistic celebration *truly have the appearance of food...* [yet] small hosts are in no way ruled out. *The action of the breaking of the bread, the simple term for the Eucharist in apostolic times, will more clearly bring out the force and importance of the sign of unity of all in the one bread and of the sign of charity,* in that the one bread is distributed among brothers and sisters. (GIRM 321)

### For discussion/reflection:

- Who sows the wheat? Who gathers the grain? Who crushes it into flour? Who makes the dough? Who bakes the bread? Who cuts the bread into useable sized pieces? Bread and wine relate your community to the whole of our economic world.
- How do the actions of the Preparation of the Gifts prepare you for what follows? What might help you better enter into the action?
- What does the Collection of monetary gifts mean to me? To my community? How do you support the mission of your parish? What does giving have to do with the paschal mystery?

This is the fourth in a series of articles about the liturgy. Article #6 will present *Lift Up Your Hearts*.