

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOUR CHILD ATTENDS CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



Going to Mass

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WELCOME TO MASS



The word 'Mass' itself is an ancient reference to the celebration, used by everyday people, that has been carried on since the 6th century.

Welcome to Mass! We are so happy that you came to celebrate with us today. It really doesn't matter if this is your first time at Mass, or first time in a long time, what matters is that you are here and we want you to feel welcomed and comfortable.

The Catholic Mass is an ancient celebration that finds its origins in Jesus' celebration of the Last Supper with his disciples, and has grown and developed not just over centuries, but millennia, into the form that you will experience today. Even though it has grown, it has had no essential change for nearly two thousand years (see page 24).

You can see that this celebration is a rich tradition with a lot of meaning in it. Don't worry, it's okay if you don't know what to do when; this booklet will hopefully help you with that. Its goal is to help you through the Mass, but also to give you the reasons why the things around you are happening the way they are.

The basic format of the Mass is that of a meal amongst friends and family on a special occasion. People gather together, they sit and talk for a while when they arrive. Eventually the host invites them to sit down at the table together and share the food and drink there, and then when the meal is finished everyone departs to their homes. For the religious, prayer comes before any meal, and often after, and is led usually by the host. The Mass is no different.

GATHERING

BELLS

Right from the entry to the church the focus is on coming together. As you walked up to the church, perhaps you heard bells calling the community together.

Christians have used bells to sound the call to Mass since at least the 7th century when the practice was introduced by Pope Sabinian, and earlier in the 5th century to call monks to prayer by St. Paulinus.

NARTHEX

The entry of the church is known as the **narthex**. In our modern day, this part of the church serves as the gathering place and so will be filled with posters, and advertisements and registrations for coming events, and other such things. This is where you will be welcomed by greeters and met by ushers who will help you find a seat in the **nave**.

In the ancient Church this is where those who had not yet been baptized, but wished to hear the preaching would remain.



HOLY WATER

Another thing you will find is a **font** of holy water, and you will likely see parishioners touching the water with their right hand and blessing themselves with the **Sign of the Cross**. This practice serves as a reminder of baptism, when the faithful were marked with water and the **Sign of the Cross**.

At each Mass the congregation renews their promise to die to sin, and confess the same beliefs that are confessed at baptism.





*The **Sign of the Cross** has been a profession of Trinitarian belief since the 3rd century. Tertullian, a Christian writer from the 3rd century, notes rather sarcastically that Christians practically wear out their foreheads with the cross.*

CROSSES + CRUCIFIXES

Catholics and other ancient Christian traditions, like the Orthodox and Coptic churches, make the **Sign of the Cross** over their bodies or on areas of their bodies like forehead, lips, and heart.

Catholics also make use of both the crucifix, to remind us of the sacrifice of Christ, and the bare cross, in recognition of His resurrection, everywhere. You may notice the use of the crucifix more during Mass since the focus of the celebration is on the sacrifice of Christ.

NAVE

Once you leave the **narthex**, you enter into the **nave** of the church. This is the main body of the church, often in the shape of a cross, with a long aisle flanked by pews and two smaller seating locations (*transepts*) on either side of the raised **sanctuary** that holds the **altar**, **ambo**, and **tabernacle**. You will likely see other parishioners genuflecting (bending to one knee) before taking a seat in one of the pews. This custom of reverence draws from the Middle Ages, and is done toward the **tabernacle**. As people wait for the start of Mass, you may notice some people kneeling in prayer in the pew, others sitting. Regardless, the tone is one of reverent preparation for Mass.

TABERNACLE

The **tabernacle** is where the unconsumed **Eucharist** (consecrated bread and wine) from the previous Mass is reposed. Since Catholics believe that there is a substantial change in the **Eucharist** during consecration at Mass, from mere bread and wine to the body and blood of Jesus, showing respect toward where this sacrament rests is important. You can always locate the tabernacle because of a red candle, the **sanctuary lamp**, that is kept burning nearby at all times.

Catholics are not alone in this. Orthodox and some other types of Christians also believe in this substantial change and treat consecrated bread and wine with reverence.



INTRODUCTORY RITES

PROCESSION

When Mass begins there will be some indication for the congregation to stand, either a direct call or the ringing of bells. Standing is a sign of respect and welcoming, just as one might stand when a dignitary or wedding couple enters. In the entrance we stand to welcome Christ as the Word of God in the Gospels that are carried to the altar as well as the presiding clergy and those who will assist in the Mass. Those who process in will be altar servers, readers, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, deacons, priests, and/or bishops. An altar server will always carry a crucifix to lead the procession, and when the procession arrives at the altar, the deacon will place the Book of the Gospels, called an **Evangelary**, on the altar, and all will reverence the altar with a bow. It is always customary for everyone to reverence the altar with a bow before entering and after leaving the sanctuary; showing respect for the table of the Lord.

The clerics (bishop, priest, deacon) will also reverence the altar with a kiss, and may also show further reverence to the Lord's table through the use of incense. All of this is done in the presence of a hymn of praise to God sung by the choir and congregation. You are most welcome to join in the singing of praise as you are comfortable.

Incense is an ancient symbol in the Christian Church. It has long been a symbol of sanctification and purification as well as the prayers of the faithful rising to heaven. Scripturally the burning of incense is a holy act of worship (Exodus 30).



GREETING

When the hymn is finished, the presider (a priest or bishop) will stand facing the congregation and greet everyone. It is an exchange of blessing and well-wishing between the presider and the congregation, just as a host would greet people before beginning the program of a formal meal. He greets the congregation with the ancient Biblical greeting, “The Lord be with you!” (Ruth 2:4, Luke 1:28) When this greeting is given by an ordained minister, the response is, since the very early days of the Church, “And with your spirit.” Here **spirit** refers to the **spiritual gifts of ministry** bestowed upon the presider at ordination.

In your pew, often in the hymnal, you should find the order of Mass with all of the responses for the various parts. We encourage you to follow along and be part of the celebration. If you are having trouble finding it, please ask someone near you. They will be very happy to help you find it. We want everyone to be a part of the Mass, you won't be troubling them at all, or seem out of place; you're just new, and new is good. (Rev 21:5)

PENITENTIAL ACT

After the greeting we move into further preparation, drawing closer together to worship in spirit. We may be called by the presider to examine our consciences and recall our need for salvation by considering our actions or inactions in recent days. A prayer is recited “I confess to Almighty God ...” and we strike our breast in sorrow for the ways in which we may have failed to live a good Christian life.



The response “And with your spirit” is found in all ancient churches, from the earliest days of the Church. One of the earlier references to its use is found in the work of Hippolytus, around 215.

KYRIE ELEISON

When the penitential act has concluded, the presider, or at times the choir, will lead a call and response for the mercy of God. **Kyrie Eleison** is Greek for **Lord, have mercy on us**. Sometimes this will serve in place of the Penitential Act.

The Kyrie Eleison chant has been a part of Christian worship since the fifth century in all ancient churches.

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

You may not hear this particular hymn when you attend a school Mass as it is only sung on Sundays outside of the seasons of Advent and Lent, and on certain solemn feast days. If you are attending a Mass where it is sung, it will be led by the presider or the choir, and the whole congregation proclaims it together, echoing the words of the angels.

THE COLLECT

The Introductory Rites of the Mass end with the presider collecting us all together in prayer. It begins with a moment of silence and then the prayer is offered by the priest. The prayer sets the tone for the whole Mass. The whole congregation responds at the end with “Amen”.

“Amen” is Hebrew for “So be it”.



*This ancient hymn, **Glory To God In The Highest**, has been part of Christianity from the sixth century, and draws from the words of the angelic host in Luke 2:13-14.*

LITURGY OF THE WORD

After the Introductory Rites we move into a time of story. This section is called the Liturgy of the Word because it is focused on the Word of God; Sacred Scripture found in the Bible. Just like any dinner party, families and friends recall stories of the past family gatherings or relatives, weddings have a number of speeches that tell stories of the bride and groom, and the meal of Christ is no different. We sit down and listen to the stories of the People of God, the tales and teachings of those who have gone before us, and, most importantly, the words of Jesus.

The readings are read from a collection of selected passages called the **lectionary**. This book collects the readings together for each particular Sunday, weekday, or feast day Mass. The readings for Sundays are on a three-year cycle, and those for the weekdays on a two year cycle.

Catholics who attend Mass weekly on Sundays, and other days of obligation, will hear 3.7% of the Old Testament and 40.8% of the New Testament; not including psalms. Catholics who attend Mass daily hear 13.5% of the Old Testament and 71.5% of the New Testament at Church over the course of five years; not including the psalms.

*The word **liturgy** is of Greek origin and means “the work of the people”. You will see the participation of members of the whole church, clergy and congregation, since we the People of God are the Church.*



FIRST READING

We will be invited to sit and the reader will approach a podium called the **ambo**. The **ambo** can be thought of as an altar for the Word of God. The Catholic Church has a deep reverence for scripture and this place is reserved for proclaiming and expounding on Sacred Scripture. Another podium, the **lectern**, is for other prayers and announcements.

The first reading is often proclaimed by a member of the congregation. This reader will approach and reverence the altar, enter the sanctuary, and read from the **lectionary** at the **ambo**. The first reading typically comes from the Old Testament, although during the season of Easter it will be a New Testament reading. The reading ends with the reader proclaiming "The Word of the Lord," and the congregation responding, "Thanks be to God."

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Following the first reading, the reader will come down from the sanctuary, and a psalmist will take his place at the **ambo**. The psalmist will lead the congregation in their response and then begin to chant or recite the stanzas of the psalm between which the congregation responds. You will see the psalmist raise their hand as an indication of when it is time to say the response.



The psalms are ancient Hebrew hymns that are meant to be sung. The way they are sung is not similar to the other hymns at Mass. Rather the psalms are often chanted using the same tones that monks have been using for over a thousand years.

SECOND READING

If you are attending a school Mass, you will likely not hear a second reading, as it is not done with most daily Masses. If you are attending Mass on a Sunday or solemn feast day, however, you will hear a second reading following the psalm. This reading is always taken from the New Testament, but never the Gospels. This reading proceeds similar to the first, with the same ending proclamation and response.

GOSPEL READING

When the psalmist or second reader returns to the choir or congregation, the priest or deacon will rise and we all stand with them. Standing during the Gospel reading is a sign of reverence for the words of Jesus above all other words. The congregation, led by the choir, offers an acclamation for the gospel in the form of “Alleluia” and a chant of a scriptural verse. At churches where there is a separate Book of the Gospels, called an **Evangelary**, the deacon will take this book from the altar and carry it to the **ambo**. During a school Mass, when there is only a First Reading and Mass is done without a choir, the “Alleluia” acclamation may be omitted. On some occasions the deacon or priest may use incense to reverence the scriptures. The reasons are the same for the reverencing of the altar in the Introductory Rites.



The priest or deacon will again offer the greeting “The Lord be with you!” as in the Greeting, and the response is the same. When he proclaims where the reading is taken from, you will see the congregation crossing their foreheads, mouths, and hearts as a simple way of saying, “May the Lord be on my mind, my lips, and my heart,” as they hear the words of Jesus. You are welcome to do the same.

The priest or deacon will proclaim the gospel in a similar way to the readers of the first and second readings. At the end he will proclaim, “The Gospel of the Lord,” to which the congregation responds, “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.”



HOMILY

Following the gospel reading, the congregation is invited to sit as the bishop, priest, or deacon speaks to the Word of God we have just received in what is known as a **homily**. A homily focuses on explaining the meaning of the readings, and seeing how Christ is present, and God speaks to the people today, right here at Mass, from His living Word. (Isaiah 55:11, Matt 18:19-20).

*In many Christian traditions this part of the service is called a **sermon**, but there is a distinct difference between the two. A **sermon**, unlike a **homily**, is a talk about religious topics that use Scripture as evidence to explain the topic. A **homily** is more focused on how to live out the meaning of the readings.*

CREED

On Sundays and solemn feasts, following the homily, the presider invites all to stand to profess the creed. The creed is the profession of the Trinitarian belief of the Church. There are two different creeds that are commonly professed in Catholic Churches: The Apostles' Creed, and the Nicene Creed. Which will be said depends on the time of year and on the choice of the presider. Both can be found in the books in the pew. As the creed is professed only on Sundays and on certain feast days, you will likely not encounter its profession if you are attending Mass with the school.

*The word **creed** comes from the Latin word **credo**, which means "I believe". The Apostles' Creed dates back to the second century where it was a profession of faith by those to be baptized in the ancient Roman Church. The Apostles' Creed is typically said during Lent and Easter.*



The second creed was composed in two ancient councils of bishops in Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381). The Nicene Creed is named after the council where it was begun, and is a longer and more complete detailing of the foundational beliefs of Christianity. It is said during the seasons of Advent and Christmas and Ordinary Time.

UNIVERSAL PRAYER

What follows the profession of the creed is known as the universal prayer for this reason. It is the prayer of all of us; the prayer of the Church. Also known as the Prayer of the Faithful, these prayers are petitions brought forward from the people and offered by the deacon or reader. They will instruct the congregation with a response to say after each petition is invoked; it is usually “Lord, hear our prayer.”

One of the last parts of the profession of the Nicene Creed is that we believe in “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church”.

*The word **catholic** has been used to describe the Church established by Jesus since the first century. It is a word of Greek origin and it means “according to the whole” or “universal”. It means that the Church of Jesus Christ was made for everyone, no matter their origins or where they are in life.*



LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Sharing food has been an important part of human life from its inception. We are communal creatures, and family is our fundamental unit. Christianity has expanded that fundamental unit across the world; we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. After the stories have been shared to remind us of this family, it's now time to eat. Just like sitting down to any table, there are preparatory steps that occur. The table is set, grace is offered over the meal, and everyone shares the food.

*This section is called a **liturgy** for the same reason as the former section; it is the work of the people even though it may seem like only a few are doing the work. Like any meal, there are only a few who prepare the food, but everyone comes together to do the eating, and it would not be a shared meal if it weren't for those who were also partaking in it.*



In the Church in Ancient Rome, people would come together and bring food from their homes; each a bit of bread and wine as they could to be used at Mass and given to the poor. In the modern day, we give money so that what is needed can be purchased and given out.

PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS

As the priest, deacon, and/or altar servers bring out the wares used to set the altar, ushers will collect this offering from the congregation. These offerings and the bread and wine that will be used for this part of the Mass will be brought up by members of the congregation to be received at the altar. If it is not a Sunday, then the bread and wine will often already be at the altar and there will be no procession of offerings. During this time there will be a hymn sung by the choir which the congregation is invited to join in singing.

When the bread and wine are placed on the altar, at times incense may be used to reverence the gifts and the altar for the same reason as during the Introductory Rites and the Liturgy of the Word. The priest and congregation may also be revered with incense in recognition of priestly ministry for the priest, and baptismal dignity for the congregation. This likely won't happen during a school Mass, but on some special occasions it may.

The bread and wine are prepared for offering, the bread placed on a gilded plate and the wine poured into a gilded chalice where it is mixed with a small amount of water. Both bread and wine are placed on a piece of linen called the **corporal** which is used to ensure that spills and crumbs are captured and not lost. After everything is set, the priest will wash his hands as anyone would do before eating, but this has a symbolic meaning as well, that of a desire for internal purity to match the external.



The priest will then invite the congregation to stand and pray that the sacrifice we are to offer will be acceptable to God. The congregation's response is "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." The priest will then offer a prayer over the gifts, and the congregation responds with "Amen."

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

The prayer that follows the Preparation is the heart of both the Mass and the Christian faith for thousands of years. It is traditional that this prayer is sung by the presider, but most often only some parts are sung in most celebrations. Parts of the prayer vary from Mass to Mass depending on the day, but there are parts that are constant and the general structure is the same.

The prayer begins again with the greeting, "The Lord be with you," and the congregation responds as it always does to this greeting, "And with your spirit." He then asks the congregation to lift up their hearts to God, to which they respond, "We lift them up to the Lord." All are then invited to give thanks to God, to which they respond, "It is right and just." This conversation between the priest and the congregation is to show the willingness and readiness to come to the table of God, which we approach in thanksgiving.



The mixing of the water with the wine is a common Mediterranean practice, however in the Church this is symbolic of the divinity and humanity of Christ. The priest will offer a quiet prayer as he mixes the two that we might be able to share in the divine life of Christ.

Eucharist means a giving of thanks in Greek. After baptism, a Christian's whole life is supposed to become a big "thank you" for the great gift of salvation from Jesus. It's no wonder that the high point of Mass is that very sacrifice which we call the "thank you".



EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

Following this the priest offers a prayer to prepare all present to come before God. The congregation on earth responds, together with the angels and archangels and all the host of heaven, with the heavenly words from Isaiah 6:3, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord, God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory." and earthly words from the crowds in Matthew 12:9 and Mark 11:10, "Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." At this point, everyone other than the priest at the altar, kneels for the next part of the prayer.

As the congregation kneels, the priest prays that the gifts of bread and wine be blessed by God, and that the whole Church; clergy and laity, living and dead, angels and saints, be redeemed by the sacrifice of the Mass, who is Jesus Christ. The priest then, invoking the Holy Spirit, recalls the Last Supper and speaks the words of Jesus onto the bread and wine:

"Take this, all of you, and eat of it: for this is my body which will be given up for you."

"Take this, all of you, and drink from it: for this is the chalice of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me."

This is the pinnacle of Mass. At each declaration, the priest holds the bread and cup high for everyone to see, and then sets each down and genuflects, just as one does toward the tabernacle upon entering. There will often be a bell to attract attention to the altar at each presentation. It is at these words of consecration that Catholics, Orthodox, and other Christian traditions believe that the bread and wine are substantially changed, even though their outward appearance remains the same, into the body and blood of Jesus. This is the sacrifice of the Mass; Jesus Christ.

The congregation is then invited again to stand in prayer and profess the mystery of Christian faith. The mystery is expressed in three different ways, but each points to the reality of salvation by the death and resurrection of Jesus:

“We proclaim your death, O Lord, and profess your resurrection until you come again.”

“When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your death, O Lord, until you come again.”

“Save us, Savior of the world, for by Your cross and resurrection You have set us free.”

Mystery in this sense does not mean something inexplicable, but rather something that we could never know on our own, that was revealed to us by God.

The priest then continues by recalling the command to celebrate a memorial of the death and resurrection of Jesus' by doing just this. He then calls up on the Holy Spirit to draw all of us together as both heaven and earth partake in the sacrifice of the cross. This is followed by prayers of intercession for the Church across the world and in heaven, clergy and laity, living and dead, angels and saints, that this sacrifice was and continues to be offered for.

*The Eucharist is often called **communion** by Catholics because it is during these prayers that the whole Church is brought together to God through Jesus.*

The priest then raises the body and blood of Jesus so that all might see and declares the words of Paul in Romans 11:36, “Through Him, with Him, and in Him.” and follows with glory to the Trinity, which the congregation responds, often in song, “Amen.”



Catholics do not believe that this is a new sacrifice, or that we are sacrificing Jesus again.

*Likewise, Catholics do not believe that the bread and wine are merely symbolic of the sacrifice of Jesus. Rather Catholics, and other Christians, take Jesus at His word and believe that this is the same sacrifice that was offered on the cross thousands of years ago for the redemption of **all** sin, throughout **all** time.*

COMMUNION RITE

As the congregation prepares to eat from the table of God, they pray together the **Our Father**; the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples. After the prayer is prayed as presented in Luke 11:2-4, the priest offers a prayer of anticipation for the return of Jesus. The congregation then responds with the end of the prayer as presented in Matthew 6:13, "For yours is the kingdom, power, and glory, now and forever."

The priest then reminds the congregation of the words of Jesus in John 14:27, that He left us His peace. The congregation responds with "Amen" and then the priest offers the peace of Jesus from the altar by saying "The peace of the Lord be with you," and the congregation responds with, "And with your spirit." The priest or deacon will then invite everyone to offer a sign of peace before joining in the meal of the Lord. This is often as a hymn is played by the choir with a handshake with the words "Peace be with you," but you can offer a peace sign and a smile if you feel more comfortable this way.

Peace is offered prior to partaking in the meal because we recall what is taught in Matthew 5:24 and Ephesians 4:26-27, that our communion with each other must come first.

Once the congregation returns their attention to the altar, the priest raises the body and blood again for all to see. You will notice that the bread is visibly broken now to represent the broken body of Jesus in sacrifice. The priest will speak the words of John the Baptist from John 1:29, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world," and then from Revelation 19:9 "Happy are those called to the supper of the Lamb." The congregation responds with the words of the centurion from Matthew 8:8, putting themselves in the place of the centurion's servant, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed." The priest will then say, "May the body and blood of Christ bring us to everlasting life," to which the congregation responds, "Amen."



COMMUNION

The congregation is invited to approach the altar to receive communion. At most school Masses this will only be in one form, the bread, however there may be times when both bread and wine are offered to the congregation.

Communion is offered to all, but only those who are Catholic and have gone to confession recently should receive it. This is so for a few reasons: First, we are to receive Jesus into our bodies in a worthy manner as Paul told us in 1 Corinthians 11:30. This means that we are not to be carrying sin on us. Second, when we are offered the body or blood of Jesus the minister will say “The Body of Christ” or “The Blood of Christ”. We have to respond with “Amen,” which means that we agree and believe that we are receiving the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ. For those that do not believe this, they shouldn’t say that they do. Finally, partaking in communion is saying that you are in communion with, or part of, the Catholic Church and hold what she teaches to be true.

It does not matter if a person receives both forms of communion. Catholics believe that it is impossible to separate body and blood, and this is even symbolized by the priest breaking off a small portion of the bread and putting it into the chalice with the wine. Both the bread and the wine are each the body and blood of Jesus. No one is missing out if they receive only one form.



COMMUNION

If you are not Catholic, or you are Catholic and need to receive reconciliation, then you should approach the altar with an arm across your chest to indicate that you cannot receive and the priest or extraordinary minister of communion will give you a blessing. It is better that you come forward for the blessing than remain in your pew. We want you to be part of our celebration! There's absolutely no shame in receiving a blessing instead. Actually it shows that you understand what communion means and just how important it is to so many Christians. Also remaining in place can make it difficult for people to move past sometimes, particularly the elderly or people with small children. If you feel more comfortable remaining in the pew, however, you are welcome to stay seated.

The Catholic understanding of the Eucharist is shared by the Orthodox and Coptic churches as well, and is similar to what Anglicans and Lutherans believe. It can be difficult to understand why these churches believe what they do. If you have questions, you will find contact information at the end of this booklet where you can learn more.

As you process up to the altar with the rest of the congregation, you will see some people perform acts of personal piety when they receive the Eucharist. It may seem strange to someone not familiar with the practice, or who has not seen these acts of piety before, but rest assured that they do so because they recognize the significance of what has happened on the altar, and again have 1 Corinthians 11:30 on their minds. Some will refrain from touching the bread with their hands and open their mouths or stick out their tongues to receive. They do this to avoid dropping the body of Jesus, or having crumbs lost as the bread is handed to them. Others will drop to their knees to receive, because they recognize the significance of who they are receiving. The typical practice, which is what most will do, is to approach with their hands presented, and let the minister place the body on their hands, where they will pick it up and consume it. It is important that the Eucharist is consumed, then and there, and not brought back to the pew. If the cup is offered to the congregation, they are typically handed the chalice and drink from it when they approach, however at times some will kneel and have the minister tilt the chalice for them.

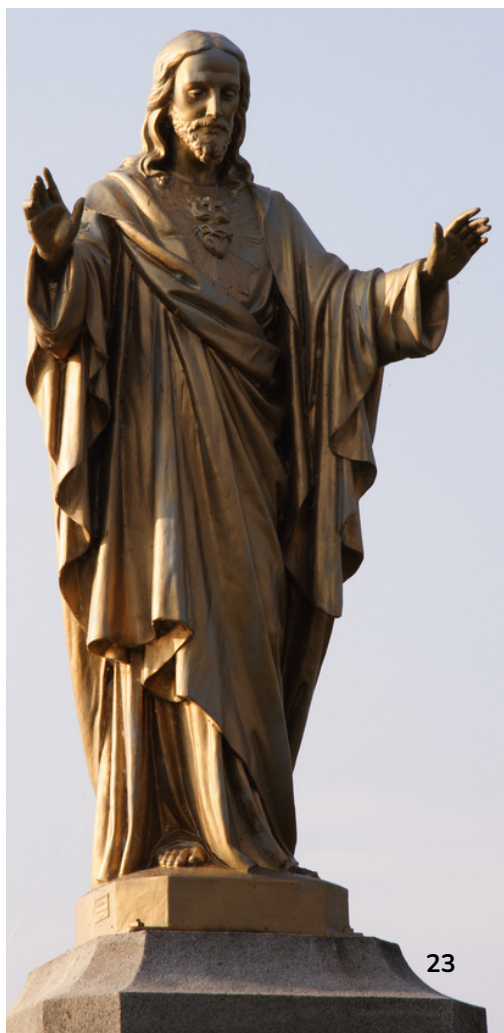
Once people receive communion they return to their seats and some will kneel or sit, while others stand. It is a time to pray having consumed the body and blood of Jesus, and most do so. You are encouraged to enter into prayer at this time, whether or not you have received the Eucharist.

COMMISSIONING

After everyone has consumed, the priest, deacon, or altar servers will clean up the altar. You will notice how meticulous they are so as not to lose any part of the Eucharist. Once this has been completed, the priest will invite the congregation to stand and offer a blessing, again with the words “The Lord be with you,” to which all respond “And with your spirit.” He will then bless the congregation in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit and all make the Sign of the Cross again. The priest or deacon will then give a dismissal by saying “Go in peace,” to which all respond, “Thanks be to God.”

The presider is essentially reminding us that we came together today, partook in the feast of God, not just for ourselves, but for the whole world. It is the Christian’s work to take what they receive from the altar, into themselves, and bring it to the world; to be a light to the world and the salt of the earth. The Church has done this for millennia by feeding the poor, building hospitals to care for the sick, standing with those who are treated with injustice, and, of course, building schools to teach children not only about Creation, but about the salvation offered through Jesus Christ.

*It is from this last dismissal that Catholics acquire the word “Mass” for their celebration. In Latin the dismissal is “**Ite, missa est.**” which means “Go, you are sent.” It is the same word that we obtain **mission** from and even the word **dismissal**.*



MASS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the presider verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things...

...Having ended the prayers, we salute one another with a kiss [of peace]. There is then brought to the presider of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands. And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying Amen. This word Amen answers in the Hebrew language "so be it". And when the presider has given thanks, and all the people have expressed their assent, those who are called by us deacons give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine mixed with water over which the thanksgiving was pronounced, and to those who are absent they carry away a portion.

And this food is called among us "Eucharist", of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ has enjoined. For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.

For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them; that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, said, "This do in remembrance of Me, this is My body"; and that, after the same manner, having taken the cup and given thanks, He said, "This is My blood"; and gave it to them...

...and they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the presider, who succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need.

But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn; and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration...

St. Justin Martyr, The First Apology (155 A.D.)

Sources

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 2011 Canadian Edition,
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A Walk Through the Mass: A Step-by-Step Explanation, Presentation
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THANK YOU

We hope that this guide to Mass has been helpful for you. It may have brought about more questions than it answered, and that is perfectly all right. If you have more questions, we are always happy to help you get the answers. Please contact your principal or the Director of Catholic Education who are more than happy to help you.



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