



## THE MASS

### I. INTRODUCTORY RITES

- Entrance
- Veneration of the Altar
- Greeting
- Penitential Rite
- "Lord, Have Mercy"
- "Glory to God in the Highest"
- Opening Prayer

### II. THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

- Scripture Readings
- Homily
- Profession of Faith
- Prayers of the Faithful

### III. THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

#### PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS<

- Eucharistic Prayer
  1. Preface
  2. Acclamation Sanctus
  3. Epiclesis
  4. Consecration
  5. The Mystery of Faith
  6. Anamnesis
  7. Offering
  8. Intercessions
  9. Final Doxology & Amen
- Communion Rite
  1. Lord's Prayer
  2. Rite of Peace
  3. Breaking of Bread
  4. Communion
  5. Prayer After Communion

### IV. CONCLUDING RITES

- Announcements
- Blessing
- Dismissal
- Veneration of the Altar
- Personal Thanksgiving

# The Preparation of the Gifts (part 3 of 3)

## HAND WASHING

In every Mass, a liturgical act is performed which originally was a response to a practical necessity. The celebrant *washes his hands*, which have touched the sundry offerings, before taking up the bread about to become the body of Christ. The Church has kept this ceremony of the *Lavabo* to express the desire of interior purification. This mystical meaning was emphasized by St. Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century, when he wrote: "This action shows that we must be free from all sin. We perform actions with our hands; to wash our hands is the nearest thing to purifying our deeds."

This is the way the celebrant understands it. To express his desire to be cleansed within, he washes his hands at the side of the altar while he says a prayer taken from Psalm 51:

*Lord, was away my iniquity; cleanse me from my sin.*

## OUR OFFERING

The priest then returns to the center of the altar and begs us to unite ourselves with him in the sacrificial act as it draws nearer. He seems to pause in what he is doing, extending and then joining his hands, to make a last pressing appeal for unity, before he proceeds to the Consecration. He does this by using the words of a medieval prayer which is a sort of long-drawn "Let us pray":

*Pray, brethren, that our sacrifice  
may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.*

## OUR RESPONSE

In the original Latin text, the priest stresses that the sacrifice is *mine* (i.e., Christ offers himself--the aspect of ministerial priesthood) and *yours* (the entire Church offers the sacrifice--the aspect of common priesthood). Our answer expresses with the same simplicity the intentions of the Mass:

*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 Church.*

It is good to spend a few moments reflecting on the posture of this response. We stand in response to the priest's invitation, but we approach God tentatively, asking Him to accept our sacrifice, for the praise of His name (as we are His creation), that it might be for our salvation and for the salvation of all.

It is a prayer we should say with much reflection.

## PRAYER OVER THE GIFTS

The preparation of the gifts concludes with the Prayer over the Gifts that the priest addresses to God in the name of all of us present and the entire holy people. We stand up at this presidential prayer to signify our unity in faith and worship.

In the Prayer over the Gifts, we usually acknowledge our incapacity to offer to God gifts adequate to his goodness and power. We ask God to accept what we offer with sincerity. We ask some grace in connection with the mystery celebrated on that particular day, in return for the material gifts. We notice an ascending or upward-striving rhythm in the progress of the liturgical action. If we contrast this prayer with the Collect, we can perceive an increase in fervor and assurance. We know that our gifts to God will be returned to us multiplied a hundredfold.

We should not forget that the only worthy offering is that of the body and blood of Christ. Our inward gift of self to God consists in a life lived in a state of grace; it means fleeing from sin and being faithful to our ordinary duties.

We respond with an "Amen!"