

## A WALK THROUGH THE MASS: A STEP-BY-STEP EXPLANATION

As Catholics, we know that the Holy Mass is the center of our faith and the source of divine life. Hence, the Church teaches us to participate in the Holy Mass regularly on Sundays and on Holydays of obligation and also on weekdays, whenever possible. If we understand the value of the Mass, we would certainly participate in it actively and regularly. I feel that a simple explanation on each part of the Mass may help you to recognize the value of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. With this consideration, I am going to explain every part of the Mass in the forthcoming bulletins, hoping that you would read and profit by it.

We Catholics know what is going to happen next. One of the basic, distinctive marks of our way of praying is **ritual**: We do things over and over. When the priest says, “The Lord be with you,” without any thought or hesitation the congregation responds, “And with your Spirit.” The priest says, “Let us pray,” and the congregation stands up.

You know, our daily lives have their rituals also: There are set ways of greeting people, eating, responding to a text. And when we are accustomed to a certain way of doing things, we seldom ask why we do it that way. In the Eucharist, too, we have many ritual actions which we perform without asking why.

### **What is the Mass or Liturgy?**

A good way to describe the Mass is to say that it is Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday made present today in ritual. It is not merely a meal which reminds us of the Last Supper, or a Passion play which helps recall Good Friday, or a Sunrise Service which celebrates the Lord’s Resurrection.

The basic “shape” of the ritual of the Mass can be described as a meal. This is not to say it is “just another meal” or that we are ignoring the Mass as sacrifice. Not at all. The point is, the shape of the Mass, even when viewed as sacrifice, is that of a meal.

When friends gather for a meal, they sit and talk: Eventually they move to the table, say grace, pass the food and eat and drink, and finally take their leave and go home. On our walk through the Mass we will follow this same map: we will see ritual acts of **1) gathering, 2) storytelling, 3) meal sharing and 4) commissioning.**

### **PART ONE: GATHERING RITES**

**Gathering:** Coming together, assembling, is at the heart of our Sunday worship. The reason behind each of the ritual actions of the first part of the Mass can be found in this word: gathering. The purpose of these rites is to bring us together into one body, ready to listen and to break bread together.

**Greeters/Ushers:** In many churches today, there will be someone at the door to greet you as you arrive for Sunday Mass: We all like to be greeted and welcomed when we gather for a celebration. When friends come for a meal or a party, we greet them at the door and welcome them into our home.

**Use of water:** One of the first things we Catholics do when we come to church is, dip our right hand in water and make the sign of the cross. This ritual is a reminder of our Baptism: We were

baptized with water and signed with the cross. At every Mass we renew our promises to die to sin.

**Genuflection:** In medieval Europe, it was a custom to go down on one knee (to genuflect) before a king or person of rank. This secular mark of honor gradually entered the Church and people began to genuflect to honor the **altar** and the presence of Christ in the **tabernacle** before entering the pew. Today many people express their reverence with an even older custom and bow to the altar before taking their place.

**Posture, song:** When the Mass begins everyone stands up. Standing is the traditional posture of the Christian at prayer: It expresses our attentiveness to the word of God and our readiness to carry it out. Often, we begin by singing together. What better way to gather than to unite our thoughts and our voices in common word, rhythm and melody? (all the parts of music, harmony, melody, different instruments-separate they are not complete)

**Procession:** The Mass begins with a **procession** of, at minimum, the priest into the sanctuary. The priest and anyone who accompanies him represents the congregation, and their journey symbolizes the Christian journey through life to the heavenly courts. Oftentimes, at the front of the procession, one of the servers (a crucifer) carries a crucifix symbolizing that Jesus is our “leader to salvation” (Heb 2:10).

**Sign of the Cross:** The Mass then officially begins with the priest and people making the **Sign of the Cross**, a gesture that dates back to the first century of Christianity and summarizes the Christian belief in a Trinitarian God who descended from heaven to earth, who is now seated at the right hand of the Father, and whose death on a cross opened heaven’s gates.

**Greeting:** This is followed by a **greeting**. The priest may echo St. Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 13:13, “The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Or, he can simply say, “The Lord be with you.” Either way, the people respond, “And with your Spirit,” acknowledging that the priest stands there in the person of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Penitential rite:** Next, following the example of the tax collector in Luke 18:10-14, who Christ commended for approaching God by first crying out, “O Lord, have mercy on me a sinner,” We Catholics acknowledge our sinfulness and ask God’s forgiveness. This can happen through the Kyrie — “Lord have mercy; Christ have mercy; Lord have mercy.” — an ancient penitential prayer with a petition for each of the Three Persons of the Trinity. It can also happen through the Confiteor, Latin for “I confess,” which calls us to admit we’ve sinned by our own free will (“through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault”).

Both expressions of contrition also call us to imitate the tax collector from Luke in another way, gently striking our breast in sorrow, demonstrating with actions as well as words, our remorse. A third option, less frequently used, is sprinkling, with the priest casting holy water upon the people as a reminder of our baptism.

**The Gloria:** Part of the Church’s liturgy since A.D. 128, the Gloria is the hymn of praise the angels sang at Christ’s birth, and that John heard in heaven (Lk 2:13-14, Rv 15:4). The hymn is a doxology, literally “word of praise,” a prayer expressing the Church’s great joy in God becoming man and revealing himself to us.

**Collect/Opening Prayer:** At the close of this first part of the Mass the priest will ask us to join our minds in prayer, and after a few moments of silence he will collect our intentions into one prayer to which we all respond “Amen,” a Hebrew word for “So be it.”

## **PART TWO: STORY TELLING**

**Liturgy of the Word:** When we gather at a friend’s home for a meal, we always begin with conversation, telling our stories. At Mass, after the rites of gathering, we sit down and listen as readings from the Word of God are proclaimed. They are the stories of God’s people.

When the Word of God is proclaimed from the pulpit, Christ is really and truly present to his people. This encounter with Christ in his Scriptures has, since the days of the apostles, occupied a central place in the liturgy, with Catholics seeking to heed St. Paul’s admonition that “Faith comes from what is heard” (Rom 10:17).

**Three readings and a psalm:** On Sundays there are three readings from the Bible. The first reading will be from the (Old Testament) Hebrew Scriptures. (except during the Easter season) We recall the origins of our covenant. It will relate to the Gospel selection and will give background and an insight into the meaning of what Jesus will do in the Gospel. Then we will sing or recite a psalm—a song from God’s own inspired hymnal, the Book of Psalms of the Hebrew Bible. The second reading will usually be from one of the letters of Paul or another apostolic writing (New Testament).

The second reading is followed by the Alleluia, the Hebrew word meaning “praise the Lord” used repeatedly in the Book of Revelation. Whether said or sung, the word calls the congregation to abandon our posture of sitting (a gesture of receptivity) and stand out of respect for Christ, who will become even more immediately present in the Gospel reading. The third reading will be taken from one of the four Gospels.

Some visitors to the Catholic Mass are surprised to find us reading from the Bible! We have not generally been famous for our Bible reading, and yet the Mass has always been basically and fundamentally biblical. Even some Catholics might be surprised to learn how much of the Mass is taken from the Bible: Not only the three readings and the psalm, not only the obviously biblical prayers such as the Holy, Holy, Holy and the Lord’s Prayer, but most of the words and phrases of the prayers of the Mass are taken from the Bible.

**Standing for the Gospel:** Because of the unique presence of Christ in the proclamation of the Gospel, it has long been the custom to stand in attentive reverence to hear these words. We believe that Christ “is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the church” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #7). The priest will again greet us with “The Lord be with you.” He then introduces the Gospel reading while marking a small cross on his forehead, lips and heart with his thumb while praying silently that God cleans his mind and his heart so that his lips may worthily proclaim the Gospel. In many places, the congregation performs this ritual action along with the priest. The Gospel reading concludes with the ritual formula “The Gospel of the Lord” and we respond, “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ,” again proclaiming our faith in the presence of Christ in the word. Then we sit for the homily.

**Homily:** In the homily, the priest follows the example of Christ on the road to Emmaus, explaining and interpreting the Scriptures. Sometimes this interpretation is biblical, sometimes theological, sometimes moral or catechetical (Lk 24:13-35). Always, however, again in imitation of the Emmaus encounter (where Christ “was made known ... in the Breaking of the Bread”), it should prepare the congregation for or point us toward what is about to follow: the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

It means more than just a sermon or a talk about how we are to live or what we are to believe. It is an act of worship rooted in the texts of the Mass and especially in the readings from Scripture which have just been proclaimed. The homily takes that word and brings it to our life situation today. Just as a large piece of bread is broken to feed individual persons, the word of God must be broken open so it can be received and digested by the congregation.

**Creed:** Now we stand and together recite the creed. The creed is more than a list of things which we believe. It is a statement of our faith in the word we have heard proclaimed in the Scripture and the homily, and a profession of the faith that leads us to give our lives for one another as Christ gave his life for us. We do so as a testimony to our personal faith, as well as to the unity of the Faith across space and time. It is a sign of communion with Catholics in the next pew, in fourth-century Antioch and in the heavenly courts.

Notably, in the middle of the Credo, at the words, “and by the power of the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,” the congregation solemnly bows, acknowledging the pre-eminent importance of the Incarnation.

**Universal Prayer:** The Liturgy of the Word (our “storytelling” part of the Mass) comes to an end with the intercessions. The intercessions help us become who God is calling us to be. We are the Body of Christ by Baptism. Now, as we prepare to approach the table for Eucharist, we look into the readings, like a mirror, and ask: Is that who we are? Does the Body of Christ present in this assembly resemble that Body of Christ pictured in the Scripture readings? Usually not! And so we make some adjustments; we pray that our assembly really comes to look like the Body of Christ, a body at peace, with shelter for the homeless, healing for the sick, food for the hungry. We pray for the Church, nations and their leaders, people in special need and the local needs of our parish—the petitions usually fall into these four categories. A minister will announce the petitions, and we are usually given an opportunity to pray for the intentions in our heart, making some common response aloud like, “Lord, hear our prayer.”

### **PART THREE: MEAL SHARING/ LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST**

After the readings, we move to the table. As at a meal in the home of a friend, we 1) set the table, 2) say grace and 3) share the food (we eat and drink). At Mass these ritual actions are called 1) the Preparation of the Gifts, 2) the Eucharistic Prayer, 3) the Communion Rite.

**Preparation of the Gifts:** The early Christians each brought some bread and wine from their homes to the church to be used for the Mass and to be given to the clergy and the poor. Today a similar offering for the parish and the poor is made with our monetary contributions. Members of the parish will take up a collection from the assembly and bring it to the priest at the altar with the bread and wine to be used for the sacrifice. The priest places the bread and wine on the table.

When all is ready, he elevates first the bread, then the wine, pronouncing a blessing over each. The blessing, which begins, “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation,” echoes the blessing Jesus pronounced at the Last Supper, the blessing of the Passover meal, “Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.” It also echoes the blessing of Melchizedek in Genesis 14: 19-20.

Importantly, before pronouncing the blessing over the wine, the priest mixes into it a small amount of water. He does this in continuation of the custom of Jesus’ time, where wine was diluted before it was drunk, and as a symbol of the blood and water that gushed forth from Christ’s side on the cross (Jn 19:34).

Next, the priest washes his hands, following St. Paul’s advice in 1 Timothy 2:8, that when praying, men should lift up “holy” or “clean” hands.

Finally, he invites us to pray that the sacrifice be acceptable to God. We respond “Amen” to the Prayer Over the Gifts and stand to participate in the central prayer of the Mass.

**The Eucharistic Prayer:** The long prayer which follows brings us to the very center of the Mass and the heart of our faith.

For this prayer, the priest has four options: Eucharistic Prayer 1, published in 1570 but virtually identical to the Eucharistic prayer used by St. Ambrose in the fourth century and St. Augustine in the fifth century; Eucharistic Prayer 2, drawn from the Greek liturgy of St. Hippolytus in 215; Eucharistic Prayer 3, an abbreviated twentieth-century version of Eucharistic Prayer 1; and Eucharistic Prayer 4, a 20th-century prayer adapted from the ancient liturgies of the Eastern Churches.

Although the prayers differ in length and phrasing, they all have the following structure: 1) We call upon God to remember all the wonderful saving deeds of our history. 2) We recall the central event in our history, Jesus Christ, and in particular the memorial he left us on the night before he died. We recall his passion, death and resurrection. 3) After gratefully calling to mind all the wonderful saving acts God has done for us in the past, we petition God to continue those deeds of Christ in the present: We pray that we may become one body, one spirit in Christ.

**Invitation:** The prayer begins with a dialogue between the leader and the assembly. First, the priest greets us with “The Lord be with you.” He then asks if we are ready and willing to approach the table and to renew our baptismal commitment, offering ourselves to God: “Lift up your hearts.” And we say that we are prepared to do so: “We lift them up to the Lord.” We are invited to give thanks to the Lord our God. And we respond: “It is right and just.”

This dialogue has remained virtually unchanged for the past 1800 years. In the early 200s, St. Hippolytus’ account of the Mass in Rome included the dialogue between priest and people that enjoins the congregation to “Lift up your hearts to the Lord” and “Give thanks to the Lord our God.” His contemporary in North Africa, St. Cyprian, records the same dialogue in his description of the liturgy, a dialogue intended to remind Christians that “wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mt 6:21).

**Preface and Acclamation:** The priest enters into the Preface, a prayer which prepares us to come before the face of God. We are brought into God’s presence and speak of how wonderful God has been to us. As the wonders of God are told, the assembly cannot hold back their joy and

sing aloud: “Wow! Wow! Wow! What a God we have!” In the ritual language of the Mass, this acclamation takes the form: “Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of hosts. / Heaven and earth are full of your glory.”

This is a reminder that we are praying “with the angels and saints”. And it is taken from Isaiah 6:2-3 and Revelation 4:8. This hymn, as we know from a letter from Pope St. Clement (martyred in A.D. 99), has been sung in the Mass since at least the first century of Christianity.

**Consecration:** After the Sanctus, the congregation kneels, assuming a posture of reverence in preparation for the central act of the Mass. The priest continues the prayer, giving praise and thanks, and calling upon the Holy Spirit, *the Epiclesis*, to change our gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, for nothing in the Eucharistic sacrifice happens by man’s effort alone.

**Institution Narrative:** He then recalls the events of the Last Supper—the institution of the Eucharist, taken from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as well as 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. This also includes the elevation, first the sacred Host, then the sacred Chalice, often to the sounds of ringing bells, proclaiming that a great miracle has occurred: Bread and wine are no longer bread and wine. Christ is now present in the Eucharist, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.

At this important moment in the prayer, we proclaim the **mystery of faith:** a summary of the paschal mystery, which affirms the reality of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection, the saving power of the mystery unfolding before us, and the anticipated second coming of Christ.

**Prayer for unity and intercessions:** The grateful memory of God’s salvation leads us to make a bold petition, our main petition at every Eucharist: We pray for unity. To this petition we add prayers for the Bishop of Rome and for the bishop of the local Church; we pray for the living and the dead and especially for ourselves that through the intercession of the saints we may one day arrive at that table in heaven of which this table is only a hint and a taste.

We look forward to that glorious day and raise our voices with those of all the saints who have gone before us as the priest raises the consecrated bread and wine and offers a toast, a doxology, a prayer of glory to God in the name of Christ: “Through him, and with him, and in him, / O God, almighty Father, / in the unity of the Holy Spirit, / all glory and honor is yours, / for ever and ever.” Our “Amen” to this prayer acclaims our assent and participation in the entire Eucharistic Prayer.

### **The Communion Rite**

The Liturgy of the Eucharist continues with the Communion Rite when the faithful immediately prepare themselves to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. The Lord’s Prayer is offered, signs of peace and reconciliation are made, the consecrated Host is broken and prepared for distribution.

**The Lord’s Prayer:** The Gospels illustrate that Jesus was a person of deep prayer and his disciples were amazed at his ability to pray. After being asked to teach them how to pray, Jesus gives them his own prayer.

The Lord's Prayer is the perfect prayer: offering praise to God, imploring surrender to God's will, petitioning for our daily bread (signified by the Eucharistic Bread), forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of the soul against temptation and evil.

**“Deliver us, O Lord...”:** Following the Lord's Prayer, the priest prays that the entire community may be delivered from every evil and all distress as it awaits the second coming of Christ. This prayer is called the “embolism” as it develops the last petition of the Lord's Prayer.

This prayer is based upon Titus 2.13 which is the second reading for Christmas Midnight Mass. It reminds us that Jesus will come again and until that time, he will protect us from the dangers and temptations that we encounter in life.

**“For the kingdom...”:** The embolism prayer ends with a doxology that is well known among Protestant Christians, but that Catholics did not retain as the conclusion to the Lord's Prayer. This doxology “For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for ever” was in use as a conclusion to the Lord's Prayer in the early Church and it was restored to the Mass for several reasons: this prayer was part of the early tradition of the Catholic Faith, it is biblical in nature, for ecumenical reasons and to add another element of participation for the people.

**The Rite of Peace:** The Rite of Peace begins with the priest asking Jesus, the Prince of Peace, to bestow his peace on the community just as he once did upon the Apostles when they were gathered in the upper room (see John 20.19-23). While the priest says this prayer alone, the people assent to it by their “Amen.”

**The Exchange of Peace:** The sign of peace is then exchanged by all present. This practice comes directly from Scripture (Matthew 5.23-24) where Jesus admonishes his followers to be reconciled with one another before offering their gift at the altar. From the very beginning, this practice was a very important element of the Mass. In the early Church, individuals that had a grievance with one another went and asked for forgiveness. It was only after everyone was reconciled that the Mass continued.

The exchange of peace is a serious moment of reconciliation and preparation to receive Holy Communion. It is to be carried out in a respectful and appropriate manner either by a handshake or a bow of the head.

**The Fraction Rite:** During the Fraction Rite, the priest breaks the consecrated Host over the paten, places a small piece in the chalice and offers a prayer that “this mingling will bring eternal life to those who receive it”. This is a reminder of the shared communion held throughout the entire scattered community around the world.

**“Lamb of God”:** During the Fraction Rite, the people sing or say the “Lamb of God.” When the first Christians gathered for Mass, they called this action “the breaking of bread” (see Acts 2.42). The significance of this activity gave its name to Eucharistic worship. The breaking of the bread symbolizes the suffering that Jesus endured for us, while sharing it recalls the Last Supper. In the breaking of the bread the many individuals who have gathered are made one body by receiving Communion from the one bread that is broken and shared for the life of the world.

**The Preparation Prayer of the Priest:** The priest says a private prayer to prepare himself for receiving Holy Communion. And this prayer alludes to 1 Corinthians 11.29, where Saint Paul warned the faithful not to receive Holy Communion unworthily. The people after singing the

Lamb of God, also pray silently preparing their hearts to receive the Lord present in the Eucharist.

**“Behold the Lamb...”:** Prior to receiving Holy Communion, the people express their unworthiness and pray for healing. The priest invites them to make this statement of faith by showing them the consecrated Host, now broken in two, above the chalice as he says “Behold the Lamb of God...” This statement is taken from two passages of Scripture. First, the priest quotes John the Baptist, who points out the Lamb of God to his disciples (see John 1.29), then he quotes Revelation (19.9), that those invited to the supper of the Lamb are blessed. This text reminds us that those who faithfully gather around the Lord’s altar and receive his Body and Blood in this life, will hopefully be gathered together one day to share in the rich fare in the banquet halls of heaven.

**“Lord I am not worthy...”:** The priest and the people then express their unworthiness to receive so great a Sacrament. This text originates in the story of the healing of the centurion’s slave (see Matthew 8.8 and Luke 7.6). The biblical words “my child” become the liturgical words “my soul” since the congregation seeks a general spiritual healing more than a specific physical one.

**The Communion Prayer of the Priest:** The priest receives Holy Communion while reciting prayers quietly. The prayers (“May the Body/ Blood of Christ keep me safe for eternal life.”) accompany the receiving of Holy Communion.

**The Communion Chant:** The people sing a hymn for the Communion procession. It begins when the priest receives Holy Communion in order to unite his communion with that of the rest of the assembly. Evidence for singing hymns during Holy Communion is quite ancient going back as far as the 4th century.

**Holy Communion:** As the Communion chant is sung, the faithful process to the altar and receive Holy Communion. The deacon and other ministers, if required, assist the priest. In USA, the faithful make a simple bow of the head before receiving Holy Communion. The priest and other ministers say “The Body (Blood) of Christ” and each person answers, “Amen.” The communicant is not to add anything to their response, for in answering “Amen” each person affirms his/ her belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The formula “The Body (Blood) of Christ” and the response “Amen” have been in constant use since the time of Saint Ambrose in the 4th century.

**The Purification of the Vessels:** Following the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest or deacon reposes the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle. The priest then purifies the chalice and the paten, or may do so after Mass. As he dries the chalice, the priest quietly says this prayer: “What has passed our lips as food, O Lord, may we possess in purity of heart, that what has been given to us in time may be our healing for eternity.” The words of this prayer have remained unchanged since the 6th century.

**The Silent Prayer of Thanksgiving:** The priest returns to his chair and all observe a time of silent prayer; praising and thanking the Lord for his many gifts, especially for receiving him in the Eucharist. This period of silent prayer is not to be rushed nor is it a time of “dead air.” During this time, you can reflect on the following questions: What are you most thankful for? Having

been nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ, in what areas of your life do you need the Lord's help this coming week? How can I be more like Christ to others in my life?

**The Prayer after Communion:** The Prayer after Communion concludes the Communion Rite and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, summing up its purpose in a single prayer to God. The priest leads the prayer and the people respond "Amen." Together with the Collect and Prayer over the Offerings, the Prayer after Communion forms the presidential prayers. This prayer has existed as a part of the Mass since the earliest of times.

#### **PART FOUR: THE CONCLUDING RITES - COMMISSIONING**

The fourth part of the Mass is the Concluding Rites which consist of announcements (if required), the final or solemn blessing, the dismissal, the procession and recessional chant.

The Concluding Rites prepare us to be sent back out into the world to live the Gospel. We prepare to go back to that world in which we will live for the coming week. The burdens we have laid down at the door of the church for this Eucharist, we know we must now bear again—but now strengthened by this Eucharist and this community.

**The Announcements:** A parish community gathers for more than the celebration of Sunday Eucharist. Prior to be dismissed, announcements can be made to inform the congregation of various events and activities taking place in the parish. The announcements are to be brief, made only when necessary and usually by the priest. In most parishes, general announcements are made as part of the welcome at the beginning of Mass, while more important announcements are made by the priest following the Prayer after Communion.

The priest again says, "The Lord be with you"—the ritual phrase serves now as a farewell.

**The Final or Solemn Blessing:** Before dismissing the people, the priest offers them God's blessing. A blessing is a sign of God's protection over our lives and activities for the coming week. It is also a reminder that God walks with us in our journey of life. On Solemnities, the final blessing takes a more solemn form when the deacon invites the people to bow their heads and a threefold blessing is prayed over the people by the priest. When a Bishop offers the blessing, he always makes the Sign of the Cross three times as he mentions the Persons of the Trinity.

**The Dismissal:** The Dismissal is the final dialogue of the Mass and is begun by the deacon if present, who sends the people forth from Mass into the world. We leave the assembly and the church building—but we carry something with us. What happens in our lives during the week gives deeper meaning to the ritual actions we have celebrated at Mass, whether it's family, work with poor or just plain work. It is only in relation to our daily lives that the full meaning of the ritual actions of the Mass becomes clear to us.

**The Procession:** Following the dismissal, the priest and deacon once again show reverence for the altar by kissing it, just as they did upon entering the sanctuary at the beginning of Mass. The kissing of the altar is a sign of honor to the Lord for the sacrifice he made upon the cross, which is now made present to us on the altar. They then genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle and process down the aisle with the altar servers.

Just as in the procession at the beginning of Mass, this procession reminds the people that the priest is the shepherd of the parish community, who journeys with them in the struggles and joys of life. Out of respect for the priest who represents Christ the Good Shepherd and to maintain order and decorum in the church, the faithful never leave before the altar servers and priest have first exited the church.

**The Recessional Chant/Hymn:** Although a recessional chant is not necessary, when it is sung, it does form the final part of the Mass and accompanies the procession of the servers and the priest out of the church, therefore none of the faithful should ever leave the church before the recessional chant/hymn has concluded so that they may fully participate in the celebration of Mass.

**Personal Prayer:** Following the conclusion of the recessional chant, it is customary for all the faithful to kneel and pray silently in thanksgiving for God's blessings and for the grace to live the Gospel during the coming week. After this time of personal prayer, the faithful depart the church to joyfully live out the Gospel with renewed faith, hope and charity.

During Jesus' walk to Emmaus with two disciples, they invited him to come and stay with them. He did. During their meal together, "their eyes were opened" and they recognized who he really was—the risen Messiah. Later when he disappeared from their midst, they said to each other: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened for us the scriptures?" (Lk 24:13-32). May our hearts burn within us as we listen to God's Word, and the eyes of our souls be opened so that we recognize the awesome gift we receive at Mass.