

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

Last week, we finished looking at the Liturgy of the Word, by examining the Creed and the Prayers of the Faithful (the Universal Prayer). This week, we begin looking at the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist draws us into the incredible experience of God's enduring Presence in the Eucharist. In the Letter to the Hebrews, we are told that we are part of the New Covenant. We must no longer be afraid to approach God, as the Israelites in the time of Moses were afraid to approach the mountain of God. Rather:

you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel. (Hebrews 12:22-24)

We enter into the very heart of the mystery of God at the Mass! And we are not alone. No, the Angels (in festal gathering) and Saints (the spirits of the just made perfect) are with us at Mass, if only we had eyes to see!

We begin the Liturgy of the Eucharist with the Preparation of the Altar and the Offerings. First the Altar is prepared for the meal (which is also a sacrifice). The Corporal is opened on the Altar. Its purpose is to catch any crumbs or particles that may fall from the Eucharist, so that due care, reverence and devotion may be given to the Precious Body of the Lord. The chalice (the sacred vessel that will be filled with the wine which becomes the Blood of Christ), the purificator (a cloth which is used to wipe the chalice), and the pall (literally "cover," a square linen covered piece of cardboard which is placed on the chalice to keep bugs out) are also placed upon the Altar, along with the Roman Missal (the book with all of the prayers for Mass).

During this time, a collection is taken up. A lot of times we look at this as: "Oh yeah, we have to support the Church – after all, we like to have lights, heat, and air conditioning." While this is an important part of the collection, it is not the most important part. No, this is the opportunity for each person to offer a part of themselves to God. Money represents so much: time, energy, intellect, security, etc.. When we give our offerings, and they are brought forward with the gifts of bread and wine, we are giving *ourselves* to Almighty God. We should pray offering Him all of our needs and intercessions for others. We should also offer Him the sacrifices we have made and our hearts. If we make this offering, our Guardian Angels will bring this offering to Almighty God, and as the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ, so we also will be changed!

The gifts are brought to the Altar and offered to God with a prayer of thanksgiving that, even while we offer these gifts to God, we have first received from God. You may have notice that before the wine is offered, a drop of water is poured into the wine. The priest or deacon quietly 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." As water is mixed with the wine and so becomes wine, so as Christ took on our humanity, he transformed our human nature so we can become a part of God's nature!

After the bread and wine have been offered, the priest then prays quiet prayers of humility, including asking God to wash away all of his sins, as he washes his hands. Then the priest prays that "my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the almighty Father." Hmm... two different sacrifices? Yes. The priest's sacrifice is the sacrifice of Christ – the bread and wine becoming the Body and Blood of Christ, the saving sacrifice which transforms the whole world. "Yours" refers to all that was offered at the offertory, as mentioned above – our money, our intentions, our hearts, our sacrifices we have made, our whole selves. Then we pray that the Lord accept this sacrifice.

May our sacrifices we offer at Mass truly be worthy, as was Abel's (Genesis 4:4), and brought by our Guardian Angels into the presence of Almighty God!