

Understanding the Mass

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO THE PRAYERS, MOVEMENT
AND MEANING OF THE HOLY MASS

The Mass is not a show we watch. It is the worship of the Church—and we are invited to participate with attention, prayer and our whole lives.



The Big Picture

In the Roman Rite, the Mass has two principal parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Introductory Rites gather and prepare us; Concluding Rites send us out.

Think of the movement this way: **GATHER → LISTEN → OFFER + GIVE THANKS → RECEIVE → GO.**

Introductory Rites | We Gather

Entrance: The assembly gathers as one body.

Sign of the Cross & Greeting: We begin in the name of the Trinity.

Penitential Act: We acknowledge our need for mercy.

Gloria: On prescribed days, the Church gives praise to God.

Collect: The priest gathers the prayer of the people into one opening prayer and unites us from individuals to a congregation. It serves to remind us of the need for “one body” of the Church.

Liturgy of the Word | We Listen

First Reading: Usually from the Old Testament outside the Easter season.

Responsorial Psalm: Our prayerful response to the Word that comes from the Psalmody—Jewish prayers Jesus grew up praying daily.

Second Reading: On Sundays and solemnities, usually from the New Testament letters.

Gospel Acclamation & Gospel: We stand to hear the words and deeds of Christ proclaimed.

Homily: The priest or deacon helps the assembly receive and live the readings.

Creed: On Sundays and solemnities, we profess the faith of the Church.

Universal Prayer: We pray for the Church, the world and those in need.

Liturgy of the Eucharist | We Offer

Preparation of the Gifts: Bread and wine are brought forward; our lives and work are offered with them.

Prayer Over the Offerings: The priest asks God to receive the Church's offering.

Eucharistic Prayer: The central prayer of thanksgiving and consecration.

The Church remembers Christ's saving work and the Holy Spirit is invoked as the **bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ.**

Communion Rite | We Receive

The Lord's Prayer: The family of God prays in the words Jesus taught.

Sign of Peace: We express ecclesial peace before communion.

Fraction: The consecrated host is broken.

Lamb of God: We acclaim Christ, the Lamb who takes away sin.

Holy Communion: Properly disposed Catholics receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

Prayer After Communion: The priest prays that the sacrament bear fruit in us.

Concluding Rites | We Are Sent

Announcements may be given. The priest blesses the people, and the deacon or priest dismisses us.

The word “Mass” is connected with being sent. **We leave the liturgy to live what we have received:** worship becoming witness, service, mercy, and mission.

Why We Sit, Stand & Kneel

STAND

A posture of attention, readiness, and prayer.

SIT

A posture of attentive listening and reflection.

KNEEL

A posture of adoration and humility, especially during the Eucharistic prayer in the United States.

When in Doubt

Follow the posture of the parish community and local diocesan practice. Physical limitations are always a valid reason to remain seated or choose a safer posture.

Participate More Intentionally

- Arrive early enough to become present.
- Read the Sunday readings ahead of time.
- Listen instead of racing ahead to the next response.
- Join the spoken and sung responses.
- At the offertory, consciously place your week at the altar.
- After communion, stay with Jesus instead of reaching immediately for your phone or next task.
- Leave with one sentence from the readings or homily to live.