

Questions about the Mass

Pastor's Column

18th Sunday Ordinary Time
August 1, 2021

What do we mean by the *fraction rite* and the *co-mingling*?

The celebrant of the Mass performs both of these actions during the communion rite, while the people are saying or singing the "Lamb of God." **The priest breaks or fractions the host** into two or more pieces in view of the people. St Paul expresses the theology well: "The bread we break, is it not a participation in the Body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16). This action symbolizes the fact that Christ's body was *broken* for us, as well as that the Eucharistic Body of Christ is to be *broken* or *fractioned* and shared with the people of God. Thus the *fraction rite* also symbolizes the fact that we, though many, are "one body in the Lord" (1 Cor 10:17) because of the Eucharist.

Then the priest drops a bit of the *fractioned* host into the chalice of Christ's blood. **This action is called the *co-mingling*.** Here the priest prays (quietly), *"May this mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to those who receive it."* This ancient practice originated in the custom of the priest breaking off a piece of the consecrated host during mass to be sent to another congregation as a sign of unity.

Why does the priest pour water into the wine during the offertory?

This practice, like so many of our Mass rituals, also originated in ancient times, when it was necessary to dilute wine with water before it could be palatable. Wines have changed since then, but this practice has continued, with a change in its significance. The priest prays (again quietly) as he performs the co-mingling, *"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."* This action, then poignantly symbolizes the fact that when we consume the Body and Blood of the Lord at communion (or even if we receive a spiritual communion), our own mortal body and blood are thus joined to Christ's immortality in a sacramental way.

What is a corporal and why is it placed on the altar?

The corporal is a large square of white cloth that is unfolded and placed near the center of the altar before the chalice and paten are set upon it during the presentation of the gifts. By placing the bread and wine on this piece of cloth during the Eucharistic prayer we are indicating that they are to be consecrated and will become the Body and Blood of Christ. Its purpose is also in order to catch any crumbs of consecrated bread or drops of the precious blood wine that may fall on it. It also symbolizes the burial shroud of Christ.

What is a purifier?

Purifier is the name given to the small rectangular piece of cloth that is folded like a napkin. It is used when distributing the Precious Blood at communion and for cleansing the sacred vessels after communion is finished. Purifiers also have special laundry instructions because they have been used in connection with the Body and Blood of Christ.

Why does the priest wash his hands at Mass?

The Latin term for this action is the lavabo. The priest prays the following prayer quietly, "Lord, wash away my iniquities, cleanse me from my sins" while the server pours water over his hands or he dips his hands into a bowl filled with water. By this symbolic gesture the priest indicates to God that he/we are unworthy to celebrate the Eucharistic mysteries. It is in fact only by God's mercy and love that both he and the people are able to participate in the greatest of all prayers, the Sacrifice of the Mass.

Why are bells sometimes used during the consecration?

Bells have always been optional – even before Vatican II. It used to be that when the priest faced away from the people and prayed in Latin, people generally followed along and prayed from their missals. The bells were rung to remind people to "look up!" while the chalice and host were held up so the people could adore Him. Today bells can still function as a reminder to avoid distractions and to focus more intently on Christ in the Eucharist

Why does the priest kiss the altar at the beginning and end of Mass?

Before Vatican II, the priest kissed the altar many times during Mass. The new liturgy preserved the essential meaning of this gesture, while at the same time eliminating unnecessary duplications. Reverencing or kissing the altar is a sign of deep respect for that place where heaven and earth meet, the altar on which Eucharist is celebrated. The Mass is full of just such wordless gestures, which taken together constitute a language of their own.

Is this why the priest or deacon kisses the Book of the Gospels?

The essential meaning of this gesture is the same as that of kissing the altar. The book of the gospels is raised at the end of the proclamation (when the priest or deacon says "The Gospel of the Lord!"), which he does, not to show the book to the people, but in order to kiss the book. As he does so, he prays silently, "May the words of the gospel wipe away our sins." Since it is not possible for all of the people to physically kiss the book, the priest performs this act of reverence toward our Lord Jesus Christ in the name of all the people.

Father Gary