

Roman Catholic Mass Explained

The Mass is the sacrifice of Christ. He offered Himself once and forever on the cross. The Mass is the Center of our Christian life and the thanks offering that we present to God for His great love toward us. It is not another sacrifice. It is not a repetition. It is the sacrifice of Jesus made present. It is a re-presentation of Calvary, memorial, and application of the merits of Christ. The difference between Calvary and Mass is that Jesus offered himself visibly on the Cross but on our altar, He offers himself invisibly and in an unbloody manner, hidden under the appearance of bread and wine.

The Mass has two parts: the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the Eucharist, which is an offering to the Father by Jesus and by us because we are also children of God.

To take advantage of the great spiritual fruits that God gives us through the Eucharistic Celebration, we should know it, understand the gestures and symbols, and participate in it with reverence.

Entering the Church

Greeters/Ushers

When we usually gather for any celebration or when friends gather together for a meal, they are greeted at the door and welcomed into the house. The Ushers, who are also called greeters are our volunteers, who do this great job in the vestibule, as you enter the Church.

Use of Holy Water

One of the first things Catholics do when they enter the Church is to dip their right hand in the Holy water and make the sign of the Cross. This ritual is a reminder of your Baptism; we were baptized with water and signed with the cross.

Genuflection

It has been a custom in medieval times to go down on one knee or genuflect before a king or a person of high rank. This secular practice of honor has gradually entered the Catholic Church, in order to honor the presence of Jesus Christ present in the Tabernacle. Today many people express their reverence by bowing as an accepted practice.

Entrance Song

We prepare to begin the mass with the entrance procession. It is a song that unites all of us because people come to Mass from different places, cultures, ages and together **sing with one voice, as the body of Christ.** We unite to celebrate one of the greatest gifts that Jesus left us: the Eucharist. The congregation should not be seen as a group of individual people but rather as a people gathered together as one.

The Liturgy of the Word

Introductory Rites

Greeting

While the entrance hymn is sung, the priest kisses the altar, which represents Christ, as a sign of surrender and adoration. Following the hymn, the Mass begins with the sign of the Cross and greeting. This greeting is significantly for wishing well, to all present, in the name of the Triune God.

Sign of the Cross

The mass itself begins with the sign of the cross and will also end in the same way, when we receive the final blessing. **Making the sign of the cross reminds us that we belong to Christ.** There is great power in this short prayer. We begin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit not only to mention the name of God, but to also to put us in His holy presence.

Priest: *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Penitential Rite

In the presence of God, the Church invites us to recognize with humility that we are sinners. Because as Saint Paul says: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." (Rm 7:15). We can all echo the words of Paul in our own lives... Therefore, at the beginning of the Eucharist we humbly recognize along with all our brothers and sisters in Christ, that we are sinners. To ask for God's forgiveness, we use the words of the blind man who heard that Jesus passed by and knew that he could not be cured himself, but needed the help of God as he began to shout in the middle of the crowd: "**Lord, have mercy on me**". Thus, with trust in God's mercy, we also pray "*Lord have mercy*".

Priest: *Brethren [brothers and sisters], let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries. (Pause)*

All: *I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-virgin, all the angels and saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.*

Priest: *May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life.*

All: *Amen.*

All: Lord have Mercy, Christ Have Mercy, Lord have mercy.

All: Kyrie, eleison. Christe, eleison. Kyrie, eleison. (Alternative Latin)

Gloria

“Be holy as your heavenly Father is holy” was the instruction of Jesus to his disciples. We, as God’s children, gathered in his House to offer the Sacrifice of Christ and to receive the heavenly gifts, we need to be worthy of presenting ourselves. Hence, we pray for inner purification. Immediately after asking for pardon, we sing the “Gloria”, a traditional hymn of praise and glory to Jesus, our Redeemer. On Sundays and solemnities, we sing this hymn of praise that truly gives glory to God:

All: Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth. Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God, and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect (Opening Prayer)

The opening prayer is the moment in which the priest invites the community to pray. At the beginning of the prayer, the priest says: “*Let us pray*” and extends his hands as a sign of appeal. **This is a time to gather us all in silence and ask the Lord to help us.** At the end of the prayer, all join what the priest asked, responding together: Amen! As the Lord tells us in the Gospel: “*Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*” (Mt 18: 19-20). The opening prayer unites us with the universal Church, reminding us that in every corner of the world in which Mass is said our brothers and sisters in Christ will be doing the same thing.

Liturgy of the Word

The Lord Jesus, **before feeding us with His body and His blood at the table of the sacrifice, feeds us first with the Word of God.** Through the readings, we hear directly from God who speaks to us. Hence, the reader, at the end of the reading, announces “This is the Word of God”. Having heard God speaking to us, we all respond saying “Thanks be to God.”

Reader: This is the Word of God

All: Thanks be to God.

The Readings

The first reading is taken from one of the books of the Old Testament. It is important to meditate on these books because by these words, God was preparing His people for the coming of Christ,

as well as preparing us to listen to Jesus. The first reading is always directly related to the Gospel reading.

After the first reading, we read **the Psalm**. The Psalms have always been very important in the history of the Church. When we pray with the Psalms, we pray with the words of God. These are the words that He puts in our mouths so that we know how to express ourselves in prayer. With the Psalms we learn to pray, we learn to speak with God.

The second reading is taken from the New Testament: the letters of Saint Paul, or the Catholic Epistles or the book of Hebrews, or the Apocalypse. They are the writings of the Apostles. We hear the preaching and writings of the men that Jesus instructed to minister to us when He left. These men were filled with the Holy Spirit and committed to spreading the Good News. There is much insight and wisdom to be gained from these books of the Bible.

Gospel

In the first reading, God speaks through His prophets, in the second through His Apostles, and now **in the Gospel, He speaks directly through His Son Jesus Christ. It is the most important aspect of the liturgy of the word.** We hear directly from Jesus' speaking, teaching, and healing. The word Gospel means "good news" and this good news is not just a message, it is Jesus Himself! The best news that ever existed! It is a very important moment, which is why we stand and we sing with joy the Alleluia.

We all remain standing while the Gospel is read because Jesus speaks to us and so we show our attentive reverence. The priest greets the people, then introduces the Gospel writer and makes the sign of the cross on the forehead, lips, and heart, in order to clean his mind, lips and heart and thus enable him to proclaim the Gospel in a worthy manner. Following the priest, the people also make the sign of the cross for cleansing them and to enable them to listen with faith.

To begin, we make the sign of the cross on our forehead, mouth, and chest to symbolize that we receive the Word of God in our mind, we confess it with our mouth, and we keep it in our heart.

Priest: *A Reading from the Gospel according to St_____.'*

All: *Glory to You Oh Lord*

The Gospel is proclaimed by the priest. The Gospel concludes with the response of the people, saying: "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ", and thus praise Him for having spoken to us

Priest: *The Gospel of the Lord*

All: *Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ*

The Homily

It is not enough to hear the word of God, but that we also need to adequately understand what has been said to us. Homily comes from a Greek word that means "dialogue", "conversation". It is the moment in which the priest explains the proclaimed scripture readings and we are able to delve into them. Its purpose is for "breaking the Word of God" and applying it to our life situation today. Unlike a talk or speech given in a meeting, the homily is an interpretation and application

of God's Word to our personal life. Hence the assembly is expected to keep the heart and mind open and personalize God's message. Just like a large piece of bread is broken to feed individual persons, the Word of God is broken, so that it could be received and digested by the People of God.

The Creed

What we recite during the Holy Mass is known as the Nicæan Creed. This is longer than the Creed we use at the beginning of reciting the Rosary, which is known as the Apostles' Creed. The Apostles' Creed is the one, said to have been composed by the Apostles; whereas the Nicæan Creed was composed in the 4th century at the Council of Nicæa. It encompasses all that we as Catholics should believe. By reciting it during the Mass we proclaim our faith.

All: I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose

again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

When we proclaim our belief that God's Son was "born of the Virgin Mary and became man," We bow out of reverence for the mystery that made our salvation possible (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #461). These words recall the moment when Mary became the mother of Jesus, who would, "save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). This is an amazing truth – out of love of us, God became man, died for our sins, and rose from the dead.

Prayer of the Faithful (General Intentions)

The Liturgy of the Word comes to an end with the Prayer of the Faithful (General Intentions). The intercessions enable us, as the Body of Christ, to pray for the Church, the nation & the leaders, for the people in special need, the local needs and for one another. Thus, we show our fellowship and universality in the Church.

The prayers will proceed from the general to the specific. Thus, the series of intentions is always: (1) for the needs of the universal church, (2) for the public authorities and the salvation of the world, (3) for those burdened by any kind of difficulty, (4) for the local community, and (5) the other necessity.

A period of silence will follow at the end, when the faithful (you) can make their prayer.

Responses will vary by parish, but the most common response is:

All: Lord, hear our prayer

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is the most important moment of the Mass. At any meal in the home, there are three actions: we set the table, say grace and share the food. Just like this, we have at Mass, three rituals known as 1) The Preparation of the Gifts 2) Eucharistic Prayer and The Communion Rite.

Presentation of the Gifts

During the early history of Christianity, each brought from their homes bread and wine to be offered in the Church and subsequently to be distributed for the participants and the poor. Similarly, today, bread and wine, as the fruit of people's hard-work, are brought to the altar, to be offered to God. Besides, members of the parish take up a collection from the assembly and bring it to the altar, as a sign of their sacrifice, to be used for the pastoral needs and the poor. The bread and wine and the monetary offering are the symbols of our hard work, our studies, our needs, our struggles and even our own weaknesses.

This is the moment in which the bread and wine are brought to the altar, two very simple foods that the priest will offer to God in order that Christ makes Himself present in the Eucharist. The simplicity of these foods reminds us of the child who brought Jesus his offerings, five loaves and two fish. It was everything he had, but this smallness, placed in the hands of Jesus, was converted into abundance and sufficed to feed an immense multitude, there were even leftovers.

In this way, our simple offerings of bread and wine, placed in the hands of the Lord, will also be converted into the greatest abundance, into the Body and Blood of Christ to feed a great multitude who are hungry for God. In every Mass, we are this multitude. Together with this bread and wine, we also present ourselves to God. We offer him our efforts, sacrifices, joys, and sufferings. We offer him our frailty so that he may do great things with us. When God converts the bread and wine into the Body and Blood, he also converts us, making us better, more like him.

Prayer over the Offerings

The priest, then, mixes a drop of water with wine, reciting a prayer, "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". Having offered the bread and wine and prior to consecrating them, so that they may be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, the priest washes the fingers, praying to God for his purification, "Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin". Finally, he invites the assembly to pray that the sacrifice might be acceptable to God.

It is an important moment because it manifests that when the priest celebrates the Mass, he is praying, not just repeating mechanical gestures, but rather he is speaking with God.

Eucharistic Prayer

The long prayer forms the heart of our faith; it is a thanksgiving prayer, the Church's great "grace before meals". There are four Forms of the Eucharistic prayer, with the second form being usually used for the sake of time.

Preface

The Eucharistic prayer begins with the Preface,

***Priest:** The Lord be with you. Lift up your hearts*

***All:** We lift them up to the Lord*

Priest asks the people to give thanks to the Lord

***All:** It is right and just*

Preface comes from two Latin words "pre" "factum", which literally means "before the act". It is called this because it is immediately before the most important act of the whole Mass: the Eucharistic Prayer, all the prayers which surround the moment of consecration. In the preface, we give thanks to God, we recognize His acts of love and we praise him. All of this truly elevates our hearts. **That is the interior attitude to which the liturgy guides us, elevating the heart to be ready for the most important moment: when Christ makes Himself present with His Body and Blood.**

Sanctus

The Preface ends with this song of praise to God. The lyrics are taken entirely from the Sacred Scriptures. The first part is a song which we heard from the choir of angels that the prophet Isaiah heard singing to God besides His throne. Repeating "Holy" three times reminds us of the three divine persons in the Holy Trinity. The second part is the acclamation of the crowd as Jesus entered Jerusalem mounted on a donkey on Palm Sunday: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna is the highest." They happily greeted Jesus, the long-awaited king entering His city. **In the Mass, we also greet Christ who is about to make Himself present before us.** Because of this, we can say that **the Sanctus is a song of men and angels, which unites us in praise of God.** With faith and fervor we join the Angels and Saints in praising God with these words, for the marvelous gift He is going to give us at the Eucharistic table.

***All:** Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.*

Consecration:

The most solemn moment of the Holy Mass is the consecration. Up to this moment, what was on the altar is merely bread and wine. Giving praise and thanks to God; the priest, then, prays imposing his hands over the gifts. He calls upon the Holy Spirit to come down and transform the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ by making the sign of the cross over the gifts.

Following this, he recalls the events of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. From this moment, what is on the altar is the Body and Blood of Christ in the appearance of bread and wine. With this transformation, Jesus, the Son of God is truly, substantially and really present on the altar.

One might ask, whether it is possible. Yes, it is possible, because this is done by the power of God. The priest, standing at the altar is only a minister of God, who acts visibly in the person of Jesus Christ. The ONE, who sacrificed himself on the Cross and offered his body and blood as our food has the power to transform the simple bread and wine into his Body and Blood and offer the same as the food for our spiritual life.

After this, the priest pronounces the words of consecration **“This is my Body ...”** and **“This is the cup of my Blood...”** and raises high for the people to look at the marvelous and memorable Sacrament and adore Jesus Christ. With our physical eyes we see just bread and wine, but with the eyes of faith, we can recognize Our Lord himself. While it is being raised, having recognized Him, we are expected to express our faith in the words of St. Thomas, **“My Lord and my God”**. I have seen many people utter these words of faith either quietly or calmly in their mouth during the elevation.

It is worth remembering what Jesus told St. Thomas, when he proclaimed his faith, after having seen and touched the Risen Lord: “Thomas, you believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

Priest: *“Let us proclaim the mystery of faith”*

All: *We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again.*

Concluding Doxology

The word “doxology” comes from the Greek “doxa” which means “glory”. Doxology, therefore, means glorification. This is the moment of the Mass, we are to put our heart and soul into acts of faith, love and adoration, because Jesus Christ is substantially present on the altar. Yes, Jesus Christ, with his divinity and humanity, is really present, just as he was present and offered himself for us on the cross. We should love to be beside him, just as Our Blessed Mother, St. John were present beside the cross on Calvary.

The Holy Mass is never a private action, even if a very few people or even if only one person or not even one person is present. It is a celebration of the entire Church. The prayer brings to our mind the presence of the communion of saints, which includes the angels, saints.

We also pray that we may be gathered into one Body and Spirit by the Holy Spirit. We pray for the Pope, for the bishop of the local diocese, we pray for the living and deceased members. We pray especially for ourselves that through the intercession of the saints, we may one day arrive at the heavenly table, of which this table is only a foretaste.

Priest: *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.*

All: *Amen.*

Communion Rite

Our Father

Before receiving communion, the Church invites us to recite the prayer which Christ taught us. Saint Cyprian said, "What prayer would the Father hear more gladly than that in which he hears the voice of his only Son, Jesus Christ?" **When we pray the Our Father, the Father recognizes the voice of his Only Begotten Son in us.** When we pray the Our Father, we are not praying with our words, but rather with the words of God, with the same words with which Jesus taught us to pray. The prayer is not my Father, but OUR Father. It is an invitation to love between us, to brotherhood, to sisterhood, to reconciliation. Pope Francis has said it very clearly: "This is a prayer which cannot be recited with enemies in one's heart, with hatred for another." **It is a prayer that prepares our hearts because it invites us to communion.**

All: *Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

Priest: *For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and glory, forever.*

All: *Amen*

The Rite of Peace

The celebrant prays that the peace of Christ will fill our hearts, our families, our Church, our communities, and our world. We continue to pray that we may be freed from every evil and that Jesus may consider favorably our faith, rather than our sinfulness and fill us with his peace, which he imparted to his disciples, after his resurrection. Prayer for peace is important at this juncture, because the word "Communion" means "union with" God and with one another. Having prayed for peace, as a sign and gesture of our union, we offer the sign of peace with each other.

All: *Peace be with you.*

The Fraction Rite

The celebrant breaks the consecrated bread as the people sing the *Agnus Dei* or "Lamb of God." John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). The action of breaking the bread recalls the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper, when he broke the bread before giving it to his disciples. One of the earliest names for the Eucharistic celebration is the breaking of the bread. Because sharing at the Eucharistic

Table is a sign of unity in the Body of Christ, only Catholics may receive Communion. To invite all present to receive Communion implies a unity which does not exist.

All: Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Have mercy upon us.

Communion

How many times have we said, "I am dying of hunger!" Our body rejects the experience of having an empty stomach so strongly that we express ourselves this way. But we have an even more profound hunger: the hunger for God. Christ makes Himself food because He does not want to leave us empty. He has come that we might have life and have it abundantly. It is the moment of Communion. It is when the priest comes forward to distribute the Eucharistic food. It is also called communion because upon receiving the Body of Christ, we enter into an intimate and profound communion with Him. When someone eats something, that which is eaten becomes part of the body and becomes one with the person and no one can separate the two. **When we receive the Body of Christ, something different occurs, not only does the Eucharist become part of us, but above all, we become what we eat, we become Christ-like, we become more like Jesus.** This is true food, the food of eternal life, he who receives it will live forever.

The soul needs its nourishment just like the body. While the body feels the appetite spontaneously, the appetite of the soul is voluntary, in the sense that the need is felt based on one's faith. If one would stir up his/her faith in the words of Jesus: "Anyone who eats this bread will live forever" (John 6:68), then it is possible to feel the need for the Holy Eucharist.

All: Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

It is possible that we may not realize the significance of this response, because we recite this during every Mass, which we participate in. We may be led to say this prayer as a habitual act. Let us remember that it is exactly the words which the centurion, a Roman military officer, pronounced to Jesus, before receiving him into his home to heal one of his servants, who was sick. Imagine, how humbly this officer has invited The Lord, in spite of his power and authority! What are we, after all! Let us welcome The Lord with the same feeling and attitude of this officer. Since God comes into our soul with immense love, let us actually receive him into our soul with love and joy.

At the same time, since God comes into our soul, it is very important that we keep our soul pure. We must never receive unworthily with a mortal sin. If one is stained with a mortal sin, and there is no opportunity to go for Confession, then he/she should sincerely feel sorry and ask internally for forgiveness from The Lord, before going to receive the Body and Blood of Our Lord into his/her soul. Nevertheless, at the next opportunity, it is better to go for Confession and be cleansed through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

For those who think, why one should go for the Mass and receive the Body & Blood of The Lord, let me remind what Jesus has declared: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you" (John 6:53). "... he who eats this bread will live forever" (John 6:58).

Other Notes on Communion

On November 14, 1996, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops approved the following guidelines on the reception of Communion.

For Catholics - As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. We are encouraged to receive Communion devoutly and frequently. In order to be properly disposed to receive Communion, participants should not be conscious of grave sin and normally should have fasted for one hour. A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord without prior sacramental confession except for a grave reason where there is no opportunity for confession. In this case, the person is to be mindful of the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, including the intention of confessing as soon as possible (canon 916). A frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance is encouraged for all.

For our fellow Christians - We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this Eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions which separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21).

For non-Christians - We also welcome to this celebration those who do not share our faith in Jesus Christ. While we cannot admit them to Holy Communion, we ask them to offer their prayers for the peace and the unity of the human family.

Final Blessing and Dismissal

The Mass ends as we begin it, with the Sign of the Cross. We are able to go in peace because we have seen God, we have encountered Him and we are renewed to continue with the mission which God has given us. At the end of Mass, the priest gives us the Final Blessing, the Benediction. The word "Benediction" comes from two Latin words "bene" and "dicere" which mean "to speak well" of someone. Generally, when someone speaks well of us, it neither makes us better nor worse persons. But when God speaks well of us, His Word does change us distinctly. It gives us the grace to fight the good fight. Thus ends the Mass, and we are ready to continue forward in our Christian lives.

Additional Information

Meaning of the colors in the Mass

The colors of liturgical vestments, such as the cope, chasuble, dalmatic and the stole, refer to the liturgical season or the current festive occasion. There are four liturgical colors used that were coded by Paul VI in the Roman rite in 1969: white, green, red and purple. In addition to these, there are other colors, such as pink, light blue, gold and black, used in liturgical vestments only on some special occasions or as an alternative to canonical colors. Let us examine one by one.

White - symbolizes joy and purity resulting from Faith. It is one of the most common colors in liturgical vestments that are used every day by priests, regardless of the current liturgical season or celebration. It is particularly related to the worship of Jesus and Mary for Easter and Christmas. It also symbolizes the resurrection, Christ rising in exaltation of the Faith.

After white, the most used color in Sunday Masses and weekdays outside of defined holidays is **green**, a symbol of hope, perseverance and continued listening. It accompanies the daily path of priests and the faithful who turn to them.

Purple is linked to penance, waiting and mourning. It is particularly used during Advent and Lent. Purple liturgical vestments characterize Mass for the dead, and can be replaced by black vestments.

Red symbolizes the passion of Christ and the blood spilled in martyrdom by Him and Saints. This is used for liturgical vestments on Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Pentecost, in the celebrations dedicated to the Passion of the Lord, in the feasts of the Apostles, the Evangelists and the Holy Martyrs.

As for non-codified colors, **blue** is used especially for celebrations in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, mostly in countries of Spanish or Portuguese culture, **pink**, which indicates joy and solemnity for the Third Sunday of Advent and the fourth Sunday Lent, and finally **gold** symbolizes royalty and can replace all colours at every opportunity, although usually is only used in certain very important Solemnities.

Usage of Bells, Incense or Holy Water in the Mass

Bells

The custom originated during the 11th through the 13th centuries, when theologians were attempting to define more precisely the way in which Christ is present in the Eucharist. As Catholics continued to meditate on this profound mystery, various liturgical practices were introduced in order to signal His presence on the altar under the appearance of bread and wine. For example, in the 12th century, priests began the practice of elevating the host following the

consecration. In France and England, a dark curtain was sometimes drawn to create a background against which the Eucharistic host could be seen more clearly. At early morning Masses, when it was still dark, a candle was often lit to illuminate the Eucharist at its elevation. Altar servers were even warned not to use too much incense at this part of the Mass so that the faithful's view of the Eucharist wouldn't be obstructed.

In some places, in addition to the ringing of an altar bell after the consecration, the large bells of parish churches were also rung so that those throughout the town or in the fields could pause from their work to kneel and pay honor to the Eucharistic Lord.

Today, the ringing of a small bell or bells at Mass remains a custom in many of our parishes. According to the Church's liturgical books, the first ringing may take place prior to the consecration, as a sign that this important moment in the Mass is about to take place. Typically, this pre-consecratory bell is rung when the Holy Spirit is called upon to sanctify the bread and wine, just before the celebrant begins the Institution narrative, in which Jesus' words at the Last Supper are recounted. Following this, there are usually two more times when the altar bell is rung: after the consecration of the bread and of the wine. In some parishes, the bell is not sounded before the consecration. The bells after each consecration may be rung once or three times.

Incense

In the Old Testament, God gave Moses instructions on how to build the tabernacle — the traveling temple of God. The Book of Exodus recounts the instructions to build an altar of incense to stand to the side of the altar of sacrifice (see 30:1-10). When the priest enters the tabernacle each morning and evening to tend the perpetually burning lamps he is also commanded to offer incense.

God even gives Moses a recipe for making the incense: "Take these aromatic substances: storax, onycha and galbanum, these and pure frankincense in equal parts; and blend them into incense. This fragrant power, expertly prepared, is to be salted and so kept pure and sacred. Grind some of it into fine dust and put this before the covenant in the tent of meeting where I will meet with you. This incense shall be treated as most sacred by you" (Ex 30:34-36).

John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, was a priest of the Jewish religion. He was taking his turn serving in the Temple when the angel Gabriel appeared, informing him of the pregnancy of his wife, Elizabeth. The Temple duty he was performing at the time was the evening offering of incense. As he did so his actions echoed Psalm 141:2: "Let my prayer be incense before you; / my uplifted hands an evening offering."

The psalmist expresses the true meaning of the offering of sacrifice. It is not to appease angry false gods or to drive away the fearsome demons. Instead, the rising smoke is a symbol of prayer. The wafting smoke and the lifting up of one's hands in the traditional gesture of prayer provides a most powerful and poignant symbol of pure and heartfelt prayer to the true God.

This beautiful prayer action is seen at the announcement of John the Baptist's birth. That a priest of the Old Covenant was offering incense when the birth of the forerunner of the New Covenant is announced links the use of incense as a prayer offering to the worship of Christ the Lord.

The servers at Catholic Mass kneel before the altar during the Sanctus — when the faithful sing with the angels, “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory.” As they do so they echo the angels in heaven. Then the server swings the incense as the priest offers up the Lamb of God on the altar. At that point in the Mass heaven's doors are opened, earth and heaven are met, and we get a little glimpse of glory.

The offering of incense at Mass is therefore an important part of Catholic worship. It is at that moment that our worship on earth becomes connected with the worship of heaven.

Also, the prophecy of Malachi is fulfilled. He spoke the Lord's words, saying, “From the rising of the sun to its setting, / my name is great among the nations; / Incense offerings are made to my name everywhere, / and a pure offering” (Mal 1:11).

Holy Water - Traditionally, we have placed fonts of Holy Water near the entrances of our Churches. This placement and usage corresponds actually to Old Testament Jewish practices of purification: The Book of Leviticus prescribed various ritual purifications using water to remove the “uncleanness” associated, for instance, with coming into contact with a dead body, menstruation, childbirth, or leprosy (cf. Leviticus 12-15). A person also purified himself with water before entering the Temple precincts, offering prayer and sacrifice, and eating. For this reason, in the Courtyard of the Priests (the area before the actual Temple building) was the Laver, an immense bronze basin filled with water. Here the priests purified their hands and feet before offering sacrifices at the nearby altar, bathed before entering the Temple itself, and also drew water for other purifications prescribed in Jewish rituals.

Interestingly, the Qumran community, located near the Dead Sea and responsible for producing the Dead Sea scrolls, also had purification pools for the cleansing not only of external “uncleanness” but also of sin.

We too have fonts filled with Holy Water for blessings for three reasons: as a sign of repentance of sin, for protection from evil, and as a reminder of our Baptism. The repentance of sin symbolized in the washing with water is reflected in Psalm 50: “Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense. Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me. Cleanse me of sin with hyssop that I may be purified; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (3-4, 9). (Hyssop is a small bush used for sprinkling water). Remember too how St. John the Baptizer called all to conversion used a ritual washing of water to signify the repentance of sin and purification.

These actions have been incorporated into our own Mass. In the Penitential Rite, one of the options is the Asperges, which includes the Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling with Holy Water. As

the priest passes through the congregation sprinkling them with the Holy Water, they customarily chant the *Asperges Me*, which is based on Psalm 50. In all, each person again makes an act of repentance of sin.

Second, the Holy Water protects us against evil. In the prayer of blessing of water in the *Sacramentary*, we read: “Lord, God Almighty, creator of all life, of body and soul, we ask you to bless this water: as we use it in faith forgive our sins and save us from all illness and the power of evil. Lord, in your mercy give us living water, always springing up as a fountain of salvation; free us, body and soul, from every danger, and admit us to your presence in purity of heart.”

Finally, Holy Water reminds us of our Baptism, when by the invocation of the Holy Trinity and the pouring of Holy Water, we were set free from Original Sin and all sin, infused with sanctifying grace, incorporated into the Church, and given the title Son or Daughter of God. In making the sign of the cross with the Holy Water, we are mindful that we are called to renew those baptismal promises of rejecting Satan, all His works, and all his empty promises, and to profess our credal faith. Once again, we repent of sin, so that we can offer our prayers and worship to God with pure and contrite hearts. Just as water and blood flowed from the Sacred Heart of our Lord as He hung upon the cross—signifying the great sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist, the taking of Holy Water and making the sign of the cross remind us of our Baptism in preparation for the reception of the Holy Eucharist.

Meaning of the word “Amen” in the Mass

The word “Amen” is not a strange word for any Catholic, because it is used as a concluding-response to all the prayers we recite. It is also used during the Holy Mass as people’s response to the prayers offered by the priest as the president of the assembly. What does this word mean? What is its significance?

Etymologically, the word “Amen” is a Hebrew term. It signifies trustworthiness and faithfulness. Hence, the Catechism of the Catholic Church inculcates that this Hebrew word expresses both God’s faithfulness towards us and our trust in him (cf. CCC 1062). It is also used to affirm, approve and emphasize something that is said. Jesus uses this word often, in order to affirm his statements: “Amen amen, I say to you...” This Hebrew word would also mean “truly”. Thus, the double “Amen” Jesus uses is sometimes translated as “truly, truly or verily, verily”. The statement “Amen, amen, I say to you...” is used, in order to emphasize the trustworthiness of his teaching and his authority founded on God’s truth (cf. CCC 1063).

When we say “Amen”, in response to a prayer, it affirms the content of the prayer as an expression of faith that God will hear and act on the prayer. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: “... after the prayer is over you say ‘Amen’, which means ‘So be it’, thus ratifying with our ‘Amen’ what is contained in the prayer...” (CCC 2856).

When we receive the Holy Communion, our response to the statement “The Body of Christ” implies God’s faithfulness towards us and our trust in Him (cf. CCC 1062). Thus, it is an act of our faith in God’s trustworthiness and our trust in His love. The word “Amen” precisely means that we believe in the reality of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.