

EMBRACING THE CHANGES

Deepen Faith - Nurture Hope - Celebrate Life

Beginning Sunday, November 27, 2011, the First Sunday of Advent, there will be changes in the Eucharistic Liturgy, the Mass. Preparing for these changes will provide us with an opportunity to examine and renew our celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy that stands at the heart of Catholic Christian Life, and to deepen our understanding and appreciation of the Liturgy, nurture liturgical practices that will lead to fuller liturgical participation, and celebrate the Liturgy with renewed purpose.

The celebration of Mass is an act of the whole assembly gathered for worship. The Liturgy is designed to bring about in all those who make up the worshiping assembly a “participation of the faithful, namely in body and in mind, a participation fervent with faith, hope, and charity” (GIRM, no. 18).

LITURGICAL PARTICIPATION

Ordained Ministries in the Liturgy

Bishops and priests are called to act in the Liturgy in the very person of Christ, on behalf of his people, pronouncing the most sacred prayers of our faith, presiding over the celebration of the sacred mysteries, explaining God’s Word and feeding God’s People on the Body and Blood of Christ. By God’s grace others are ordained to the ministry of deacon. In the celebration of the Mass deacons proclaim the Gospel, occasionally preach the homily, and assist the bishop and priest in exercising their sacred duties.

Other Liturgical Ministries

In addition to the ordained ministries, some roles in the Liturgy are exercised by lay people who place their time and talent at the service of the liturgical assembly as altar servers, lectors who proclaim the Word of God, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion assisting in the distribution of the Eucharist, cantors, choir members, and musicians, and ushers. Others contribute their time and talent to planning and organizing the Liturgy; to keeping the church and the vestments, vessels, and appointments clean and well ordered; or to providing decorations that reflect the spirit of the liturgical feast or season. The practical task of assigning individuals to particular Masses and organizing the distribution of roles is another indispensable element in the fabric of well-ordered liturgical ministry in a parish.

The Role of the Baptized

Those who come together for Liturgy do not have the luxury of acting as spectators, waiting for all to be done for them. The baptized faithful who form the congregation are called to join in praise and thanksgiving in song and spoken word, to listen attentively to God’s Word, and to exercise their baptismal priesthood in prayer for the Church, the world, and all in need during the General Intercessions. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist the baptized faithful join their prayer to that of the priest celebrant, offering Christ the Victim, “not only by means of the hands of the priest but also together with him,” and offer themselves as well (GIRM, no. 95). We need to be aware, therefore, that “participation” does not refer primarily to external activity or function during the celebration of Mass; rather, it refers to a deeply spiritual, interior participation of mind and heart, filled with devotion and penetrating the very depths of the mysteries we celebrate.

The Liturgy, then, is about the action of God’s own people, each with different offices and roles. When we play our roles in the Liturgy with our bodies, minds, and hearts fully engaged, we make to God a perfect sacrifice of praise.

Based upon Roman Missal Formational Materials provided by the Secretariat for the Liturgy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2010.