

UNDERSTANDING THE CATHOLIC MASS

(Researched and compiled by Bernie Ramis for the Roman Catholic Churches of Vernon)

Delivered on August 22 & 23, 2026

VI. Parts of the Mass - Liturgy of the Eucharist (Part 1)

(Note: Due to time constraints, I will not go through every single part of the Mass. I highly recommend attending [Upon This Rock](#) for a deeper dive into the biblical roots of the Blessed Sacrament.)

Through the Introductory Rites and the Liturgy of the Word, we have been gathered and prepared, given a gift, and sent to intercede for the world. (see Talk #5)

Beginning immediately after the conclusion of the prayers of the faithful, the altar is prepared, and we enter the second major movement of the Mass – the Liturgy of the Eucharist.¹ It opens with the **Preparation of the Gifts**, often kicked-off by an offertory hymn. We stay attentive because here we are invited to gather our hearts, and lift them up alongside the gifts to be prepared at the altar.

But first, a point of clarification: The primary gifts presented here are not the money we drop into the baskets. Yes, our material gifts are needed and welcomed to support the work of the church, **but the true gifts are the simple bread and wine.**² Today, our collection basket represents that same spirit of charity.³

Our gifts are then carried down the aisle symbolizing our participation in the sacrifice. As the priest receives these gifts, **the choir winds down the hymn** so that we can actively participate in a very important dialogue that's about to happen.

Holding the bread above the altar, the presider offers a prayer of thanksgiving: **"Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you, fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life."**⁴

And likewise for the wine: **"We have received this wine we offer you, fruit of the vine and work of human hands, it will become our spiritual drink."**

Notice the vital transition happening here: we brought gifts of human labour ... ordinary bread and wine, the work of human hands ... and presented them to God. But once placed upon the altar, these gifts become offerings, set apart to be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ.⁵

The priest then invites us to unite our prayers to his: **"Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father."**⁶

We respond in unison: **"May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of His name, for our good, and the good of all His holy Church."**

Speaking directly to the priest, we affirm that we entrust to him our gifts, to offer this sacrifice on our behalf.

¹ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)*, 3rd Ed., 73; also *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, 1346, 1350.

² *GIRM*, 73.

³ *CCC*, 1350-1351.

⁴ *GIRM*, 73, 142.

⁵ *CCC*, 1350.

⁶ *GIRM*, 77.

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So having surrendered our gifts, the priest alone, he alone, prays the Eucharistic Prayer over them.⁷

On page 18, we enter the Eucharistic Prayer – the prayer at the very heart of our Mass.

You may notice that as the priest greets us with, **“The Lord be with you.”** he opens his hands with palms facing upward. This ancient gesture is known as the orans posture, from the Latin word for praying. In the liturgy, **this posture is reserved specifically for the priest.**⁸

The priest extends his hands when offering prayers on our behalf. Because this gesture signifies his distinct role as intercessor, we are encouraged to keep our hands down or joined in humble prayer;⁹ we should not raise them at any point of the Mass, and in this case, when we respond **“And with your spirit.”**

The dialogue continues when the priest invites us, **“Lift up your hearts,”** We assent, **“We lift them up to the Lord,”** leading the priest to proclaim, **“Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.”** We answer, **“It is right and just.”**

From here, Father selects from several options for the Preface (pages 18–41). Though the words vary, each follows a common structure.

He starts with the words **“It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks.”**¹⁰

At Mass, try to digest every word of the preface prayer, and notice how Father expands on our thanksgiving, recalling all the wonderful ways God has loved and guided us throughout salvation history, reaching fullness in Christ our Lord.

And overwhelmed by these blessings, our hearts naturally overflow into song, joining the company of Angels and Saints as we acclaim: **“Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory, Hosanna in the highest.”**¹¹ And then we kneel.¹²

Why do we fall on our knees after this hymn of praise? The answer is in the prayers that happen after. Listen intently to every word, watch every gesture, notice every bell. And we will explore them further next week.

Until next week, Peace be with you.

⁷ GIRM, 78; and also CCC, 1348.

⁸ *Ecclesiae de Mysterio* (1997), Art. 6 §2.

⁹ GIRM, 124, 142, 148, 216: These paragraphs direct the priest to pray "with hands extended" (*the orans posture*) during the presidential prayers. At no point does the GIRM prescribe or direct the lay faithful to adopt the orans posture.

¹⁰ GIRM, 79a.

¹¹ GIRM, 79b.

¹² GIRM, 43.