

Three Minute Liturgical Catechesis

Article 15: Preparing the Gifts and Ourselves

What do you call the part of the Mass that includes the collection? Many people still use its old name and talk about the Offertory of the Mass. The current liturgical books, on the other hand, call this part of the Mass the Preparation of the Gifts. This change in terminology was a deliberate one, as was noted by the pope's representative when the new missal was released in 1969.

The reason for changing the name of this section of the liturgy is that the real offertory of the Mass occurs in the Eucharistic Prayer. The sacrifice we offer is the sacrifice of Christ. No other sacrifice is acceptable and no other sacrifice is needed, as the Letter to the Hebrews insists. It is Christ who offers himself, and we join in that offering as we proclaim the Eucharistic Prayer.

So, then, what are we doing during the Preparation of the Gifts? The key word is preparation. In this part of the Mass, we are preparing for what is to come. This is symbolized by our preparation of the gifts of bread and wine that will become Christ's body and blood. In these few moments between the Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharistic Prayer, we make the preparations for the Eucharistic Meal and the great prayer of thanksgiving over the meal.

The key action during the Preparation of the Gifts is the procession to bring the gifts to the altar. This procession, though brief and generally simple, is more than merely a practical matter of getting the bread and wine to the altar. It is an expression of our own preparation for entering into Christ's sacrifice. On Holy Thursday, the rubrics suggest that the whole assembly process to the altar with gifts for the poor. Even when only a few members of the assembly form the procession, they represent all of us. Their movement to the altar suggests the movement of our hearts toward the Lord and our willingness to share in the sacrifice offered on that altar.

Senior members among us may remember being taught to place themselves on the paten with the host when it was offered to God during the Offertory. The only problem with that approach is that the bread is not being offered to God. Only after it becomes the body of Christ is the sacrifice offered. Yet the image still has value. As the bread and the wine are prepared and placed on the altar, we can mentally place ourselves there, too, prepared to give of ourselves as Christ did, ready to share in his sacrificial offering.

This time to prepare ourselves during Mass can bring to completion our efforts to prepare ourselves all week. We are continually called to give of ourselves as Christ did, in loving service to our neighbors. We might begin each day with a prayer that we will always be ready to link ourselves to Christ's sacrifice, whether in church or wherever we happen to be.