

Today's Roman Catholic Mass
Its Structure, Meaning, Roots

Mary Frances Casey
April 16, 2009

Today's Roman Catholic Mass **Its Structure, Meaning, Roots**

Lord Jesus Christ, we worship you living among us in the sacrament of your body and blood. May we offer to our Father in heaven a solemn pledge of undivided love. May we offer to our brothers and sisters a life poured out in loving service of that kingdom where you live with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.¹

Eons ago, God creates the universe. In the mystery of His divine plan, God creates humans to bring creation to completion. He has a unique plan of salvation for humanity, a plan to which *all* are invited. The final goal of God's creative work is that "we, and through us the whole of creation, be taken up into the communion of the triune God."²

In the fullness of time, God chose to send his divine Son to assume a human nature in the womb of a young Jewish maiden. Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, announces the good news that the Kingdom of God is here. He proclaims that the world has an "eternal meaning" and that "our lives are destined for Life, not death."³ Jesus came that we might have Life, eternal Life. This Life is to be the fruit of a true personal relationship experienced with the triune God through Jesus Christ. Before ascending to his Father, Jesus left us a way to celebrate and experience this divine relationship through the mystery we call the Mass.

This paper will examine the way we should experience this Divine-human relationship by briefly reviewing the structure, meaning and roots of today's Roman Catholic Eucharistic Liturgy, the *Mass*. The Fathers of Vatican II called the Eucharist the "source and summit of the

¹ Opening prayer, Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ.

² Christoph Schonborn, O.P. trans. by John Saward, *Living the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Vol. 2 The Sacraments*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 15.

³ Leonardo Boff, translated by John Drury, *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments*, (Portland: Pastoral Press, 1987), 81.

Christian life.”⁴ What does this mean? What is its purpose? Why do we go to Mass, the Eucharistic Celebration?

The word *Mass*, derived from *Ite, Missa est*, the Latin words for dismissal, means “Go, we are sent forth,” – sent forth to love and serve the Lord, sent forth to proclaim the good news of salvation and the kingdom of God,⁵ sent forth to transform the world into a place more like the way God intended and Jesus preached. The Mass is designed to send us “back to our daily lives renewed and recommitted to our mission” as baptized followers of Jesus.⁶ This *sending forth* is what the entire Mass is really meant to be, the culmination of all that has happened before it. This paper will focus on the Mass through the lens of the *Dismissal*.

The mystery of God’s saving plan is “mediated in gestures, rites, or actions that incarnate, make visible, and communicate salvation.”⁷ Through these gestures, rites and actions there is a meeting – a meeting between God, who descends to the human being, and the human being, who ascends to God. As Jesus and his first followers are Jews, they draw on their Jewish religious heritage as they search for ways to bring about this divine-human experience.

Jesus gives us the Eucharist during a meal at Passover. He adapts and expands the Jewish ritual prayers that devout Jews pray at every meal. While the Mass has evolved through the centuries, it is *essentially the same* today as it was for the early generations of Christians. However, the Mass of today more closely resembles the Mass of the early Church than did the

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II. 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 1324.

⁵ Joseph Martos, *Sacraments, Celebrations of God’s Life*, (Dubuque: Harcourt Religion Publishers, 2003), 123.

⁶ Gregory F. Augustine Pierce, *The Mass Is Never Ended: Rediscovering Our Mission to Transform the World*, (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2007), 38-39.

⁷ Leonardo Boff, *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments*, 65.

Mass prior to the Second Vatican Council. The Roman Masses of 1570 and 1960 were almost identical. Today's Mass prayers are closer to its roots in the Jewish meal prayers of Jesus' time.⁸

Ritual has been defined as a pattern of behavior based on symbols. Rituals of the Mass should have a deep power to touch us, to transform us, to change us.⁹ Bodily gestures as bearers of spiritual meaning are an integral part of ritual. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XV, points out the importance of these bodily gestures.

The body is required to become "capable of resurrection", to orient itself toward the resurrection, toward the Kingdom of God, in a word: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Where God's will is done, there is heaven; there earth becomes heaven. Surrendering ourselves to the action of God, so that we in our turn may cooperate with him—that is what begins in the liturgy and is meant to unfold further beyond it... The body has a place within the divine worship of the Word made flesh, and it is expressed liturgically in a certain discipline of the body, in gestures that have developed out of the liturgy's inner demands and that make the essence of the liturgy, as it were, bodily visible.¹⁰

The Mass ritual incorporates the bodily gestures of silence, standing, sitting, kneeling, orans, and bowing.

The gesture of *silence* is not to be a period of waiting for something to happen but a conscious action that inwardly corresponds to what is going on outwardly. Silence is an integral part of the liturgical action, a summons to contemplate the greater mystery that surpasses all words. It is in silence that we "touch the eternal," that we enter into "God's being-with-us," that we come into his Sacred Presence.¹¹

The gesture of *standing* is an expression of reverence, a prayer of anticipation of the future, of the glory that is to come. Standing for the proclamation of the Gospel should express both

⁸ *God's Word Today: The Mass and the Eucharist*. (Mystic, CT.: Bayard, 2001), 5-8.

⁹ Lawrence E. Mick, *Understanding the Sacraments Today*, revised edition, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006), 52.

¹⁰ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, translated by John Saward. *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 176.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 209-213.

reverence and courage, when God “calls us to set off in some new direction, to do his will, and to carry it into our lives and into the world.”¹²

The gesture of *sitting* is meant to relax our bodies to better hear, reflect and understand the action unfolding before us.¹³

Kneeling is considered a gesture of adoration and humility. The Hebrews regarded the knees as a symbol of strength. Therefore, to bend the knee is “to bend our strength before the living God,” to be “oriented toward the One who looks upon us and toward whom we try to look.”¹⁴ *Bowing* low is also a gesture that expresses reverence and humility.

The *orans* posture, the gesture of praying with arms extended, is one of the oldest gestures of prayer. It is seen as a gesture of seeking and hoping, of reaching out to God and a reminder of the extended arms of Jesus on the cross.¹⁵

How many times does *Amen* come to our lips so automatically that we are hardly aware that we are saying it? What should an “Amen” response mean? *Amen* is a Hebrew word that remained unchanged in the Greek New Testament, as well as unchanged in the Latin and English translations. “Its nearest cousin in Hebrew is a word that conveys constancy, reliability, trustworthiness, sureness, truth.”¹⁶ When we respond with Amen, we are concurring with what has been said or prayed, thus making it our own personal affirmation, “Yes, so be it!”

The Mass begins with the gathering of the *assembly*, those called by God in this time and in this place to unite in worship as the Body of Christ. This assembly, “warts and all,” gathers around the altar-table so that God can form them into what they already are, the Body of Christ

¹² Ibid., 195-196.

¹³ Ibid., 196.

¹⁴ Ibid., 191, 197.

¹⁵ Ibid., 203.

¹⁶ God’s Word Today: The Mass and the Eucharist. (Mystic, CT.: Bayard, 2001), 57.

even as they are *becoming* the Body of Christ.¹⁷ In this assembly the whole Church has gathered: Christ who promised to be present when two or three are gathered in his name, the Church in heaven and on earth, the Church across the world and across the centuries.¹⁸ The gathered assembly should now be ready to encounter the living God in Jesus and to enter sacramentally into the New Covenant in this celebration of the Mass.¹⁹

The structure of today's Mass is divided into four main rites: Introductory Rites, Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Concluding Rites.

Introductory Rites

As an assembly convoked by God, the *introductory rites* should help the assembly become a unified community in worship.²⁰ Basil Pennington writes that these rites are a movement toward a "fuller conversion through a participation in the mystery to be celebrated."²¹

The *entrance procession* is a visual expression of the people becoming a worshipping community. The priest presider makes visible and concrete for us what our bodily eyes cannot see, namely, Christ himself as the head of our assembly and the one who will lead us in prayer. "This procession acts out and actually causes to happen what it signifies. Christ is coming and standing in the midst of his people."²² The assembly rise to their feet as the first liturgical action of a people among whom Christ is active and present. The procession is frequently accompanied by a song meant to create an atmosphere of celebration, to intensify the unity of the gathered

¹⁷ Whitney Wherrett Roberson, *The Mass in Our Lives, part one: What's It All About?*, (Los Angeles: Franciscan Communications, 1992), 6.

¹⁸ Jeremy Driscoll, O.S.B., *What Happens at Mass*, (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2005), 10.

¹⁹ M. Basil Pennington, *The Eucharist: Wine of Faith, Bread of Life*, (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2000), 11-18.

²⁰ Lawrence J. Johnson, *The Mystery of Faith, A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of the Mass*, (Washington, D.C.: Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, Revised 1994), 4.

²¹ Pennington, *The Eucharist: Wine of Faith, Bread of Life*, 146.

²² Driscoll, *What Happens at Mass*, 18.

people and to lead their thoughts to the mystery of the season or feast. (GI 25).²³ If the assembly truly recognizes what is happening, how intense will be their voices as they join as one voice with the heavenly choir of angels! It's time to join in the celebration! Lawrence Mick goes so far as to say that "to refuse to sing or take part is a rejection of Christ's call to share in this great act of worship and thus expresses a lack of reverence."²⁴

Upon entering the sanctuary the priest *reverences the altar* with a kiss. This practice has its roots in an ancient custom in which a kiss was a sign of greeting used to show reverence for temples and images of the gods. Christians appropriated this sign of reverence for the altar, considered to be a symbol of Christ. Christ is the priest and the victim of the Eucharistic sacrifice.²⁵

The priest invites the assembly to prayer and worship with the *Sign of the Cross*. The assembly responds, "Amen." This gesture and accompanying words summarize all that is about to happen. It reminds us that the body of Christ that was crucified on the cross "touches my body and shapes it now for what is about to happen."²⁶ Making the sign of the Cross should also signify that we accept again our Baptism in the name of God: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The *greeting* that follows is among the most ancient elements of the introductory rites. The traditional formula "*Dominus vobiscum*, The Lord be with you" (Ruth 2:4, Judges 6:12) and the response "*Et cum Spiritu tuo*, And with your Spirit" (Galatians 6:18) are of Biblical origins. More than a friendly "Good morning" greeting, it is a formalized wish that the assembly actually experience the presence and power of God as it begins to celebrate the "source and summit" of

²³ Johnson, *The Mystery of Faith, A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of the Mass*, 7-9.

²⁴ Mick, *Understanding the Sacraments Today*, 38.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁶ Driscoll, 21-23.

its life. This greeting by the priest, in his sacramental role of representing Christ, should be a reminder to the assembly, that it is Christ who is leading this assembly in prayer.²⁷

The *penitential rite* of the Mass allows us to acknowledge our sins and ask for God's forgiveness as we come into his presence. It is a time to acknowledge how we have failed in our mission since the last time we were together. And so we proclaim God's loving mercy, "Lord, have mercy."

God rebuked the Israelites for their ritual sacrifices without offering their lives to God. For God, the life lived and the sacrifice are not separable from each other. Today's ritual sacrifice is not the gift of an animal offered to God but the gift of oneself and one's life to God. The Psalmist writes, "Offer to God praise as your sacrifice and fulfill your vows to the Most High." (Psalm 50:14) Ritually, the Israelites act meticulously but their sacrifices are not acceptable because they are not offering themselves. NOW is the time to prepare ourselves to make a conscious offering of ourselves.

The *Gloria*, sometimes known as the *greater doxology*, is a joyful ancient hymn of praise. It has come down to us from the early Christian hymns modeled upon the psalms and canticles of the Bible. The angels sang "Glory to God in the highest..." to the shepherds after Christ's birth.²⁸

The *opening prayer*, the *collect*, dates from at least the fifth century. This is the prayer of the assembly whose members should now be aware that they are in the presence of God. (GI 32) The invitation to pray may be expanded to focus upon the specific character of this celebration. The assembly silently expresses its needs and desires which are then "gathered up" by the

²⁷ Johnson, 13-14.

²⁸ Johnson, 22-23.

presider. The priest then presents these prayers to the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. The assembly makes this prayer their own by responding “Amen.”²⁹

Liturgy of the Word

Today’s *Liturgy of the Word* is patterned after the Jewish morning temple or synagogue prayer services which the first Christians regularly attended. (Acts 2:46) As opposition to the presence of these Christians in the Temple grew, they began to gather separately on Sundays for morning prayer, using the synagogue format but adding their own readings. In the beginning these services were independent of the Eucharist, the Breaking of the Bread, which was celebrated during the evening meal.³⁰

Basil Pennington reminds us that we have “had our say in penitence, praise and prayer. Now it is time to sit and listen and give God a chance to have his say.”³¹

The *Word of God* is powerful and should transform those who receive it. God’s Word always speaks in the *present tense*, to the time and circumstances of the listeners. The purpose of God’s revelation in his Word remains the same for all generations, past, present, and those to come: “to interpret life, to give meaning to daily happenings, and to show the interconnectedness of peoples and events.”³² In actively listening as Christ himself speaks the Word, we should search for the connection between our lives and the events of Scripture, as our lives are part of the larger story. In the Catechesis we call this part of salvation history the *blank page*.

²⁹ Ibid., 25.

³⁰ Whitney Wherrett Roberson, *The Mass in Our Lives, part two: The Roots of the Mass*, (Los Angeles: Franciscan Communications, 1992), 5.

³¹ Pennington, 24.

³² Whitney Wherrett Roberson, *The Mass in Our Lives, part three: The Liturgy of the Word*, (Los Angeles: Franciscan Communications, 1992), 8.

The *lectionary*, the book containing the Scripture readings proclaimed at Mass, arranges the Sunday Mass readings in a three-year cycle. The gospel cycle is arranged as: Year A, Matthew; Year B, Mark; Year C, Luke. John's gospel is proclaimed during the Easter season and certain Sundays during cycle B. The Weekday readings are arranged in a two-year cycle.

The *first reading* is usually taken from the Old Testament. The reading of the Law and the Prophets was an integral and primary element of the Jewish synagogue service. As a rule, the Old Testament text is chosen to prepare for the gospel, following such principles as prophecy-fulfillment or thematic continuity/contrast. St. Augustine wrote that "in the Old Testament the New is hidden, in the New Testament the Old appears."³³ In keeping with ancient tradition, the first reading during the Easter season is taken from Acts, which shows how the early church gave witness to the Paschal Mystery.

The *responsorial psalm* follows the first reading, continuing the practice of the Jewish synagogue when the first Christians sang a psalm or biblical canticle after the first reading. The words written in the psalms were fulfilled by Jesus even as he prayed them during his earthly existence, "Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and psalms had to be fulfilled." (Luke 24:44) The responsorial psalm serves as a "meditative prolongation of the reading."³⁴

The *second reading* used on Sundays and major feasts is taken from the New Testament letters of Paul and other early Church leaders. In this reading the assembly encounters the early Church living its faith.³⁵ The choice of texts was made independently of the first reading and the gospel. During certain seasons passages have been selected to correspond with the mystery being celebrated at a particular time of the liturgical year.

³³ Johnson, 36.

³⁴ Ibid., 39.

³⁵ Ibid., 40.

The *gospel acclamation* precedes the proclamation of the gospel. The assembly stands and greets the Good News with *Alleluia*, a word that means “Praise God!” During Lent the acclamation does not include the word *Alleluia*. In the Old Testament this joyful expression appears at the beginning or end of certain psalms used in liturgy. The proclamation of the gospel is the joyful climax of this part of the liturgy.

So after the silence we rise to our feet and sing not once but many times the one word most closely associated with the Lord’s Resurrection: *Alleluia!* It is a shout of praise... We sing this word now because *in the proclamation of the gospel our risen Lord intensifies his presence in this assembly.*³⁶

We stand for the *gospel*, a custom dating from the fourth century and indicating our respect, alertness and readiness to listen. In our culture the summons to stand at attention is a call to be attentive to an especially significant moment.³⁷

Earlier it was noted that the purpose of the Mass is to transform us, and through us, the world into which we are sent. This transformation is the fruit of a loving relationship with our Creator. A loving relationship is built on communication and communication calls for a response, even if this response is only *active listening*. What did God say to you the last time you were at Mass? Basil Pennington suggests that we pick a single word, a phrase, a thought, or idea to carry with us. In the silence after Communion reflect upon this word, phrase, thought, or idea that we will carry with us as we go forth into the activities of our daily life.³⁸ Think of the transformation that could take place in the world if each member of the assembly would truly assimilate and act upon even one word!

³⁶ Driscoll, 47. (Emphasis writer’s)

³⁷ Pennington, 25.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

The practice of making three small crosses on the forehead, lips and heart began in the Middle Ages. It signifies our willingness to open our mind, lips and heart to receive and witness the gospel message.

The homily flows from the Word that has been proclaimed. In the synagogue service the readings from the Law and the Prophets were concluded by an explanation given by one of those present. The homilist “breaks open” the Word of God, the mysteries of our faith and the guiding principles of Christian life by placing the message in the context of the here and now, making the connection between the readings and the mission on which we are going to be sent once again.

The assembly stands and proclaims the *Creed, the Profession of Faith*. The Creed originated in the early Church as a profession of faith in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, usually as part of the baptismal rite. Over a period of time it was introduced into the Mass. The Creed identifies the basic beliefs of the Church community from which we will soon be sent forth again “to love and serve the Lord.”

In the *Prayers of the Faithful, the General Intercessions*, the assembly prays for the whole Church. The synagogue liturgy, the antecedent for this part of the rite, had a series of eighteen blessings containing requests for individual and universal needs. Since the Church is both local and universal, at least one intention is offered for the needs of the Church, public authorities and the salvation of the world, those oppressed by any need and the needs of the local community.³⁹ From the viewpoint of the *Dismissal* these prayers are to ask for help on the mission to which we are being sent.⁴⁰

³⁹ Johnson, 52.

⁴⁰ Pierce, 52.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Word of God and the Bread of Life are two aspects of the same mystery. Jesus is the living Word, the revelation of the Father. Jesus is also the Bread of Life, the nourishment of the People of God. The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist “form but one single act of worship.”⁴¹ It is not surprising then, that the Eucharistic prayer is also of Jewish origins. It is only natural that Jesus and his followers, faithful to their Jewish religious heritage, would have used prayers from the meal celebrated at the Passover. The prayer that we offer today evolved from the meal prayers prayed at the time of Jesus.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the *preparation of the altar and the gifts*. Today the altar is prepared at the beginning of the preparation rite when the corporal, purificator, chalice, paten and sacramentary are placed upon it. Just as the ambo was the focal point of the liturgy, so the altar-table is the center of the Eucharistic liturgy.

Gifts of bread and wine, and money that has been collected for the needs of the Church, are presented to the presider by representatives of the gathered assembly. These gifts are the fruit of the earth and the work of human hands, products of cooperation between the Creator and human beings. Through these gifts we are offering ourselves and all the imperfect work that we have done since the last time we were sent forth.

The action of the *mingling of the water and wine* was an ancient practice meant to dilute the heavy wine. In the West, the action has come to represent the union of Christ (wine) with those present (water). Just as the wine receives the water, so Christ takes us into himself and we are one with him. In the East, the mingling represents the divine and human natures of Jesus. The presider prays over the gifts using prayers modeled on ancient Jewish table prayers.

⁴¹ Johnson, 33.

The *washing of the hands* follows the presentation of the gifts. Both in Judaism and in early Christianity this action was a sign of inner purity, a reminder of our need to be cleansed from sin if we are to worship well.⁴²

The opening dialogue of the *preface* is a Christian reformulation of how Jewish grace after special meals began.⁴³ The preface itself is from ancient times. Taken from *prae-fari* meaning “to do in front of” or “proclaim in the presence of,” the preface begins what will be the entire Eucharistic prayer: a proclaiming before God the Church’s prayer.⁴⁴ Today’s missal contains over eighty prefaces for feast days, liturgical seasons and special occasions.

We join our voices to the voices of heaven, as we enter with the eyes of faith into the awesome presence of God, “Holy, holy, holy Lord... .” This *acclamation* is inspired by Isaiah’s vision in the Temple and was used in Jewish liturgy. (Isaiah 6:2-3) The second half, “Blessed is he...,” comes from the acclamation of the people during Christ’s entry into Jerusalem. (Matthew 21:9) With one voice, then, the whole communion of saints gives glory to God.⁴⁵

At this moment in time Christ makes the hands of the priest his own. There is only *one* priest, and the hands that takes these gifts, transforms them, and offers them to the Father, are the hands of Christ. The prayer that follows “transcends all time and place and makes present the greatest act of all creation as it abides forever in the eternal NOW of God... We offer now his sacrifice as ours to be sanctified by his Spirit and carry on the work of his redemption.”⁴⁶

The final part of the Jewish table prayer over the cup contains a petition, an *epiclesis*, a calling upon, an invocation. In the epiclesis of the Mass, the Father is called upon to send the

⁴² Mick, 43.

⁴³ *God’s Word Today*, 31.

⁴⁴ Driscoll, 77.

⁴⁵ Johnson, 83-84.

⁴⁶ Pennington, 54, 90.

Holy Spirit on these gifts to make “them holy” so that they may become the Body and Blood of Christ to be received in Communion.⁴⁷

It is important *not* to make Christ’s presence in the Eucharist a matter of magic but rather of *mystery*. It is not human words but *God’s action that brings about Christ’s presence* in the bread and wine, for the priest speaks in the person of Christ as he pronounces Christ’s blessings over the gifts. At the heart of the mystery, what happened over 2,000 years ago at the Last Supper yet happens today in God’s eternal NOW.

All that God has accomplished in creation and salvation history is fulfilled, signified, and made present in the person of the crucified and risen Christ. Christ’s words are a promise, and through the power of the Holy Spirit they accomplish what they signify: his Eucharistic Body and Blood, his *real presence* with all the riches of the kingdom.⁴⁸

The *memorial acclamation* should be a manifestation of the assembly’s active participation and an affirmation of the wonder and awe of the Paschal Mystery that is present and alive in God’s eternal NOW.

The *anamnesis*, Greek for memorial, is a living memory of Christ’s saving deeds. “It is a making present, a re-actualizing for ‘today’ of something that occurred in the past... an actual making present of God’s saving deeds in Christ so that their fullness and power take effect here and now.”⁴⁹

Concluding as it began on a note of praise, the *final doxology* and the *Great Amen* bring the Eucharistic Prayer to a close. At this moment we can make Christ’s offering our own, while we offer ourselves and our lives as a holy and living sacrifice. We do this by offering *through* Christ, who is the Priest, *with* Christ, who is really present in this sacrificial memorial, and *in*

⁴⁷ Johnson, 85-86.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 88. (Emphasis writer’s)

⁴⁹ Ibid., 91.

Christ, who gives himself to us, the assembled, in the Eucharist. The assembly confirms, approves and makes this action their own by responding, “Amen!”

This Amen contains all others... This is an Amen echoing round the globe, echoing through centuries, echoing in the halls of heaven. This Amen never ends. *In the Mass, from our own place and time, we are spliced into this eternal Amen*, and we shall sing forever what we are singing now. Amen!⁵⁰

The purpose of the *Communion rite* is to prepare the assembly for receiving the Body and Blood of Christ. St. Augustine wrote that praying the Our Father “is like washing our face before we go to the altar.”⁵¹ In this moment we ask for our daily bread, the work each of us is given to do, the “work of human hands” that we will bring back to the next Mass and offer as our gift.⁵²

Among the early Christians the *kiss of peace* was a seal placed on prayer. It was also a sign of the mutual love and forgiveness required by Christ before offering sacrifice. (Matthew 5:23-24) A kiss on the cheek is a greeting of friendship and respect used both in the ancient world and many cultures today.⁵³ The peace of Christ that we offer each other will be with us as we go to bring that peace to others in our being sent forth on our mission.

When we receive the Body and Blood of Christ in *Communion*, we become the body and blood of Christ to the world. We are going out into the world to continue his mission to inaugurate the Kingdom of God.

For eight centuries Communion was received in the hand. Christians were told, “make the left hand into a throne for the right which shall receive the King and then cup your open hand and take the Body of Christ reciting ‘Amen.’”⁵⁴ In the Middle Ages this custom was abandoned to reception on the tongue.

⁵⁰ Driscoll, 108. (Emphasis writer’s)

⁵¹ Pennington, 153.

⁵² Pierce, 57.

⁵³ God’s Word Today, 47.

⁵⁴ Pennington, 165.

Basil Pennington writes that the tongue has not received any consecration over and beyond that received by the hand. Like “the hemorrhaging woman, ritually unclean, we need to reach out and touch the Lord.”

There is something beautifully humble and reverent about the way we take Communion in the hand... Who holds out their hands? The humble, the dependent – children and beggars – those who long for something and desire it. And they hold out their hands as long as they can expect to receive or at least have some hope... We hold out our hands, humble, poor, needy, expecting and receiving All... Christ comes to rest for a moment on the throne of our hands before entering the inner chamber of our being... we see him... we feel him.⁵⁵ 5259

Concluding Rites

Ite, Missa Est. Strengthened by the Word and nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ, *Go, take this infinitely empowering experience to be the Body of Christ to the world.* The Eucharist is “not confined to the Mass but involves what we do before and after the Mass.”⁵⁶ It is Christ-in-us that is being sent forth to transform the world. It is not so much what we do, as how we do it and why we do it that makes our work holy and transformational. Somehow, collectively, in all this sending forth, God’s kingdom will come “on earth as it is in heaven.” As humans called to be a part of God’s Plan of salvation, we encounter God’s presence – active and alive, in the Mass and in the routines of our daily life. With Romano Guardini let us pray: “Bring the ‘Amen’ to life within us – as truth deeply rooted; fidelity which does not waver; resolution which does not tire!”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Martos, 138.

⁵⁷ Romano Guardini, Robert A. Krieg, ed. *Proclaiming the Sacred in a Modern World*, (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1995), 84.

Bibliography

- _____. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II. 2nd ed. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997. CCC#31.
- _____. *God's Word Today: The Mass and the Eucharist*. Mystic, CT.: Bayard, 2001.
- Boff, Leonardo, translated by John Drury. *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments*. Portland: Pastoral Press, 1987.
- Driscoll, Jeremy, O.S.B. *What Happens at Mass*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2005.
- Guardini, Romano. Robert A. Krieg, CSC, ed. *Proclaiming the Sacred in a Modern World*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1995.
- Johnson, Lawrence J. *The Mystery of Faith, A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of the Mass*. Washington, D.C.: Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, Revised 1994.
- Martos, Joseph. *Sacraments, Celebrations of God's Life*. Dubuque: Harcourt Religion Publishers, 2003.
- Mick, Lawrence E. *Understanding the Sacraments Today*. revised edition. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006.
- Pennington, M. Basil. *The Eucharist: Wine of Faith, Bread of Life*. Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2000. (Revised edition of *The Eucharist: Yesterday and Today*, Crossroads, 1984)
- Pierce, Gregory F. Augustine. *The Mass Is Never Ended: Rediscovering Our Mission to Transform the World*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2007.
- Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal, translated by John Saward. *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000.
- Roberson, Whitney Wherrett. *The Mass in Our Lives, part one: What's It All About?* Los Angeles: Franciscan Communications, 1992.
- _____. *The Mass in Our Lives, part two: The Roots of the Mass*. Los Angeles: Franciscan Communications, 1992.
- _____. *The Mass in Our Lives, part three: The Liturgy of the Word*. Los Angeles: Franciscan Communications, 1992.
- Schonborn, Christoph, O.P. trans. by John Saward. *Living the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Vol. 2 The Sacraments*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000.