

**NEW MISSAL HOMILY #5**  
**November 12 - 13, 2011**  
**Thirty-Third Sunday of the Year – Cycle A**  
*Pro 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31; I Thes 5:1-6; Mt 25:14-30*

*This is the slightly expanded text of the homily preached by Fr. Bernard Gaudreau at St. John Vianney Church in South Burlington, Vermont on November 12-13, 2011. This is the fifth of five instructions given in preparation for welcoming the New Roman Missal on November 27, 2011.*

“The Liturgy of the Eucharist”

**Introduction:** Over the last few months we have offered reflections on the Mass in preparation for receiving the Third Edition of the Roman Missal. This morning we offer the last of these reflections; we will talk about the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

In the light of the parable of the talents that was just proclaimed, we need to recall that the Eucharist is not just one, but the greatest, of the gifts which our Lord has given us. As the servants were called to be stewards of their master’s gifts, so the Church is a steward of the precious gift of the Eucharist, which the Lord instituted on the night before His saving death.

We all know the account of the Last Supper. Before the meal, the Lord took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying: “This is my Body.” After the supper, He took up the chalice, again He gave thanks and handed it saying: “This is my Blood.” He, then, commanded them to do the same in memory of Him. These actions of the Lord are precisely the actions of the Church at the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Eucharist is structured in a way that corresponds exactly to the Lord’s action. In the Preparation of the Gifts we “take” the bread and the wine. In Eucharistic Prayer we “give thanks” over them - that is, we “bless” the Lord and the elements. And in the Rite of Communion we “break the Bread” and bring the Liturgy to its culmination by “eating and drinking” the Bread and Wine, now the Body and Blood of Christ.

The actions are those of a meal, but not of an ordinary meal. This is the banquet in which “the mind is filled with grace” and the people of God are nourished by the Lord Himself, the Bread of Life. These actions “make present” the sacrifice of Christ by which we are saved.

In our reflections today I want to look at each part of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We will reflect on the meaning and spirit of each section. We will highlight the more significant changes that are coming within the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Please refer to the yellow sheet that we have inserted in your songbooks with the outline of the Liturgy of the Eucharist and a brief commentary on it.

1. The Preparation of the Gifts and the Altar: The purpose of this part of the Mass is simply to prepare the elements (bread and wine), the altar and the people for what follows. We have traditionally called this part, “the Offertory.” In these simple actions we offer the bread and wine that we have received from the Lord; these are the fruit of God’s creation and the work of human beings. They will become the Body and Blood of Christ, the sacrifice that is offered for the glory of God and the good of the Church. Here we prepare to offer the sacrifice.

There is an ancient axiom which says: “There is no worship without sacrifice.” To believe, to have faith, is not merely to acknowledge the existence of God, the Supreme Being; it means to

acknowledge that everything we have and are comes from God. The worship of God entails making a return to God of the gifts He has bestowed on us. Worship is not a matter of words only; authentic worship always involves our offering something to God. It's placing ourselves and all that we have at the service of God.

Sacrifice is at the heart of the meaning of worship; this is certainly true of the Sacred Scriptures. In the Old Testament the people of God offered the first fruits of their fields and their flock in sacrifice. They did this to honor God, to make reparation for sins, to establish and confirm their covenant relationship with God. The offering of sacrifice in salvation history found its perfection in the sacrifice of Christ, in the pure offering of His life to the honor of God for the salvation of all people.

In the Preparation of the Gift, we prepare ourselves to join in the Sacrifice of Christ, about to become present on the altar by making our monetary offering and by presenting the bread and wine in the offertory procession. That procession symbolizes the important truth that the sacrifice of the Mass is the sacrifice of the whole Church, of each one present for the celebration.

The one change to note here are the words of the priest inviting the people to pray that “my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God.” It's a clear reminder that every last one of us, present for the Mass, is called to offer something to God; these sacrifices are united to and perfect by the Sacrifice of Christ.

2. The Eucharistic Prayer: The prayer is the great prayer of thanksgiving. It is the high point and center of the whole Eucharistic gathering. It is a prayer of thanks and consecration. In this prayer the priest gives voice to the Church's prayer. He speaks the prayer of the Church that is gathered and acts in the name of Christ whom he represents. The people's participation happens through their attentive listening to the prayer spoken by the priest and by their adoration of Christ at the consecration. Their participation is expressed audibly as they join in the acclamations that punctuate the prayer: the Holy, Holy, the Memorial Acclamation and the Great Amen.

The Church offers us ten different Eucharistic Prayers. All of them include the same elements: the Thanksgiving expressed in the Preface; the Invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the gifts, the Institution Narrative we call the Consecration, the Memorial, the Offertory, the Intercessions and the Final Doxology (word of praise).

**The changes to note in the Eucharistic Prayer are the following:**

a) At the start of the Preface we will have changes in the dialogue: Again, we respond “And with your spirit” when the priest says “The Lord be with you.” At the third exchange we find a small change. When the priest says “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” All respond with new words “It is right and just.” This expresses that offering the Mass is the “right” thing to do; it is an act of justice toward God. We truly **owe** God our worship for everything we have and are is from God.

b) The Preface which follows expresses why it is “right and just” to give thanks. Some 85 prefaces are available to us. They articulate the many reasons we have for celebrating the Eucharist through the seasons and feasts of the year. You will note new words used at the end of the preface. Several of them will mention Angels and Archangels, Thrones and Dominions, the host and Powers of

heaven. Older Catholics will recognize that these are the choirs of angels; we join them in offering our praise to God.

c) The end of the Preface leads directly into the “Holy, Holy” as the assembly joins in the song of the heavenly hosts; the words are taken from the book of the Prophet Isaiah (Is 6:3) and Psalm 118: 26. Only one word is new here. From now on we will sing (or say): Lord God of “hosts.” The Lord we honor is the God of the choirs of angels.

d) The next most important change occurs in the Consecration over the bread and wine. I will just note the new words to be spoken over the chalice. That brings up the first noticeable change. Instead of using the word “cup” we will now speak of the “chalice,” a word which had a specific meaning. This word reminds us that a special cup or “chalice” was used for the Passover and for special ceremonies. In Latin the word is “calix” and it was normally a cup with two handles, one on each side. This enabled the participants to pass the chalice easily from one person to the next during great feasts. This sharing of a common chalice expressed the bonds that unite the participants in the banquet. The cup we use at Mass is not an ordinary cup but the chalice of the Lord’s Blood; in now way is it anything ordinary.

e) Perhaps the change that has raised the most questions is the next one. In the consecration of the chalice we will use the words that our Lord speaks at the Last Supper as they are recorded in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark: “This is the chalice of my Blood ... which will be shed for you and for **many**.” The question that is raised, of course, is this: Did not Christ die for all. Yes, our faith has not changed on that; the Scriptures are clear about it. The new translation is simply closer to the Latin and to the Scriptural text but it does not change our faith. However, it causes us to pause and to remember that although Christ poured out his blood for the forgiveness of all sins, it is not necessarily effective in the lives of all people. Many reject Him or will not repent; thus His death is not effective for their salvation. Salvation is not automatic. One must believe in Christ; one must be Baptized and eat His Body and drink His Blood to have eternal life.

f) The other change I would point to is the “lead-in” to the Memorial Acclamation. We will no longer say, “Let us proclaim the mystery of faith.” Rather the priest will simply say: “The mystery of faith.” The Eucharistic Prayer is addressed to God the Father; the current practice which is about to end breaks the flow of the prayer as the priest addresses the people at this point, thus breaking the flow of the prayer addressed to the Father. The new introduction to Memorial Acclamation is in a form that is similar to the words at the end of the Scripture Readings or at the distribution of Holy Communion: “The Word of the Lord,” or “The Body of Christ.” These are in the form of a statement which invites a response in faith.

The Memorial Acclamation is then addressed to Christ directly, in words that are drawn from the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians in that famous passage on the Lord’s Supper. (cf. I Corinthians 11:26). “We proclaim your death, O Lord; and profess your resurrection, until you come again.

Again, I want to emphasize the importance of the people’s acclamations during the Eucharistic Prayer. In this way the whole assembly participates in the central and most important prayers of the Church.

3. The Rite of Communion: The third and last part of the Eucharistic Prayer is the Rite of Communion which completes the Sacrifice. Ultimately, Christ our Lord offers the Sacrifice of the Mass in order that we might participate in His very life. The purpose of the Eucharist is fulfilled in the reception of Holy Communion, the food for everlasting life.

A recurring theme in the Rite of Communion is the connection which the prayers and actions make between Sacramental Communion and the communion we share in the Church. In receiving Christ in the Sacrament we are incorporated more fully into the mystery of His Body, the Church.

The Lord's Prayer prepares us for Communion as it prays for the gift of our daily bread, a petition answered most perfectly in the gift of Christ, the Bread of Life. The Lord's Prayer also makes clear that the forgiveness of our trespasses (our sins) demands mutual forgiveness.

Next is the Sign of Peace. Again, we will say the new response: "And with your spirit." This sign makes very clear that Sacramental Communion is essentially connected to our living at peace with one another. The sign is offered only to the people standing by us in church; but it symbolizes the need to live in harmony with one another. This unity is the gift of Christ which He made possible in the mystery of redemption.

And then we have the Breaking of the Bread which is accompanied by the "Lamb of God." The large Host is broken into smaller pieces and the Hosts are placed in a sufficient number of vessels for Holy Communion. In this rite we recall the words of St. Paul who says: "The Bread we break is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf." (I Corinthians 10:16-17).

The only changes I wish to point to in the Rite of Communion Rite are those at the invitation to Communion as the priest holds up the Host. The priest will say: "Behold the Lamb of God..." The word "behold" alerts us to something special and out of the ordinary. This is no ordinary bread or ordinary cup that are held up before us; it is the Body of Christ and the Chalice of His Blood. The priest will also say: "Blessed are those called..." The Eucharist brings us more than happiness; it brings us blessedness, a blessing that is given even in our sorrows and trials. The priest's part ends with the words "the Supper of the Lamb." These words are drawn from the book of Revelation and refer to the Banquet feast of the Kingdom. The Eucharist is received in anticipation, a foretaste, of the Banquet of Heaven.

Then we will all respond: "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof." These are words, as you know, of the Roman centurion who had sent word to Jesus to ask for the healing of his servant. The words express the great faith and humility of this Roman soldier. We are called to assume the same attitude in the presence of Christ. We end by asking for the healing of our souls. With this word we make clear that the purpose of Christ's death and our sharing in Holy Communion is that our souls may be healed of the stain of sin and have life eternal.

The Rite of Communion then reaches its climax as we come forward to receive Holy Communion. We remind everyone of the reverence we offer to the Lord, making a bow of the head before receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord. We sing during the Communion procession; in this way we once again express that Christ whom we receive makes us one in his Body. We complete the rite in silent prayers of thanksgiving and the Prayer after Communion which asks that this Sacrament may have an effect in our daily lives.

4. The Mass then ends very quickly, almost abruptly, with the Concluding Rite, which consists mainly of the blessing and the dismissal. With the blessing the priest invokes the graces of God upon the assembly that they might be strengthened as they go. Then, we are dismissed by the deacon or, in his absence, by the priest. We do not simply leave at the end of Mass; we are sent out by Christ himself. We leave church but we enter the world with a mission, a purpose.

The new translation provides new texts for the dismissal. I am especially pleased with the third one: “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.” It’s quite a commissioning, isn’t it? And as we have been accustomed, the people respond with “Thanks be to God.” We end on the keynote of the whole Mass, that of thanksgiving. Always we give thanks; we are a grateful people for we are greatly blessed by God in the gift of his Son in whose Sacrifice we have taken part.