

QUESTIONS REGARDING THE MASS

Questions Regarding the Mass: Here's one question I am often asked, "Why, during the Eucharistic Prayer, do you **not** 'show' the big host only by itself?" Blame it on my schooling and Eucharistic theology, what current Eucharistic theologians teach, how I was trained and what I strongly believe! Let me explain a few things about "why I do what I do."

First, I wish we still made our own **bread** for Mass. For centuries, the assembly brought the bread we used for Mass. This practice stopped when people stopped receiving communion regularly. With only religious or consecrated persons (sisters, nuns, brothers, monks and priests) receiving Holy Communion regularly, they made the bread, or later on, individual hosts for Mass. They still do today for income, and our hosts come from the Poor Clare nuns on Euclid Avenue in downtown Cleveland.

When we already have the hosts already "pre-cut" or made into hosts, we lose the sense of the "one bread, one body." It lessens the importance of one of the most important moments of the Mass: The Fraction Rite (or the breaking of the bread). That's why we sing the litany, "Lamb of God," to accompany the breaking of the bread. This special ritual action reminds us of the Risen Christ's presence. We hear in Luke's Gospel the story of Emmaus, and how the disciples recognize Jesus: **In the breaking of the bread.** Having pre-made hosts reduces the fraction rite to a mere distribution into bowls. Like the Litany of Saints, the litany "Lamb of God" used to be quite lengthy to accompany the ritual of breaking bread and pouring the cups/chalices of blessing.

In order to not take away from the symbolism of the "one bread, one body," I hold **all the hosts** together in the **one** vessel and fulfill the "one bread, one body" until the Fraction Rite moment when the bread is broken or now, distributed into the other bowls for the reception of Holy Communion.

Thirdly, one host is not more important than the other. I once had a parishioner (not in our parish) say, "Why don't you hold up **my** host? Why is yours so special?" I realized quite quickly the "individualist" thought behind this and that every host is special and represents Christ – not just the priests or other liturgical ministers. One host is not more special than the other, whether because of size or who is holding it.

Furthermore, the question reminded me of what my teachers encouraged priests to do during the Eucharistic Prayer: show **all the hosts**. Once the bread is broken, then we show the one piece of bread with the chalice, that which the priest will consume. This is recognizing Christ and showing Christ in the broken bread, for a broken world that needs Christ's nourishing and healing. The Fraction Rite sometimes is lost in its importance due to the placement of the "Sign of Peace." Both are quite significant moments

in the Mass, not to be missed, which is why in 1970 they were both brought back to prominence within the Mass.

Another Question: I have also been questioned many times over the years, "Why don't we do what Jesus did at the Last Supper?" You may have noticed by now, we do not follow the exact Last Supper ritual from scripture. Our rituals and Mass have evolved through the centuries. Our last update or major overhaul of our worship was in 1970 with the *Missal of Paul VI*. (We have had minor tweaks in 1975 and 2011.) If we followed Christ's words to the exact way, we would be distributing the bread during the Eucharistic Prayer, waiting for everyone to eat, then sharing the cup, and waiting for **everyone** to consume the Precious Blood. We do not follow every practice that we read in Sacred Scripture, nor have we ever done this in the ritual tradition of the church. We have always said the Eucharistic Prayer as **one** prayer and then distributed Holy Communion – an interesting trivia point that does make us think.

I hope this explanation gives you a better sense why some priests follow this practice, encourage this Eucharistic theology, and hope for a more traditional ritual practice to shape our understanding of the scripture passages that shape our Eucharistic practices. There is more to come in the following weeks, and if you have additional questions, about the Mass, please do not hesitate to write, call or tell me in person. As you know by now, I love teaching about the Eucharist, for it helps me live the charism of the Eucharist that Saint Peter Julian Eymard founded in our order, the SSS.

Questions about the Mass: Continuing my question series about the Mass: The dialogues! As you may have noticed, the Mass is very much a "call and response" experience. We "dialogue" back and forth with liturgical greetings that are quite important and date back to the beginning of the rites for the church's worship. They are essential for our participation in the Mass – the priest can't preside at Mass without a person to respond; it is important to have a "community" sharing and "acclaiming" God **together**. With the recent update of the Mass in 2011, I learned more about these dialogues but especially about two important ones: The Mystery of Faith & Great Amen. Did you know that the priest is not to sing or say these two responses? That was something that was made clearer to me, like the other "call and responses" of the Mass. The People of God, the participants in the Mass, have these **key phrases** to sing (or say) and expressing faith and acknowledging what the priest proclaims during the Mass. The priest celebrant is the leader of the dialogue, but not the responder to the phrases.

Even the cantor leads us in "calls and responses," such as for the Dismissal of the Children ("Go in peace."), the Dismissal of the Catechumens, Litany of Saints at baptisms, the Universal Prayers, Lamb of God Litany, etc. These are key moments for the congregation/assembly to express themselves and

praise God. At each Mass, remember how important the respective parts are to the Mass and boldly proclaim that which is ours to speak – and may your “Amen” proudly express your inner acceptance and belief in who we say we are, “The Body of Christ,” especially at the end of the Eucharistic prayer, our great prayer of thanksgiving.

Questions/Catechesis of the Mass – Part 5: We continue to fulfill our Pastoral Plan dream to learn more about the Eucharist and Mass with explanations of “why we do what we do.” This week we reflect on standing during the Mass, especially the Communion Rite.

Every form of posture is noted in the Bible and has been part of the tradition of the church. A common posture symbolizes our togetherness and unity with God. With the 1970 *Roman Missal*, the church went back to the early church again for why we stand – the posture of the Resurrected Christ. We call this prayer position “orans,” that is standing with arms extended in prayer. At one time, everyone would stand in this prayer position mimicking Christ, hoping to ascend like Christ did. The early church was concerned about standing and being ready for the LORD to come again, for we hear this especially in some of the letters of the New Testament. After Vatican II, the church wanted to better capture this key element – that we wait in joyful hope for the coming of the Savior. This is said at every Mass during the “embolism” or prayer part after the “Lord’s Prayer” or “Our Father.” That is why in this diocese especially, we stand (for those who are able) with our hands extended in prayer in this gesture.

For communion, again, it was recapturing the importance of reverence. For two centuries kneeling for Communion at a rail was the norm. However, the rail was not required anymore, nor kneeling after its removal. We stand – and sing – to symbolize our common unity as the Body of Christ, with Christ as the head. Have you noticed we have always stood for the proclamation of the Gospel to show reverence to Christ who is speaking to us? This is the same reason we stand for communion – being fed by God’s Word and Sacrament, and showing reverence to Christ in one another. Again, this posture is for those who are physically able to do so. Thanks for observing this church rubric, adapting and changing, as Christ is always to grow in holiness and a better understanding of the Eucharistic mystery.

Why We Do What We Do at Mass: Part 6: We continue to fulfill our Pastoral Plan dream to learn more about the Eucharist Mass with explanations of “why we do what we do.” I am happy to hear, especially from our Prayer Shawl Ministry and others this past week, that you have found this series of

columns helpful. (The past 5 columns in the series are online). So with that in mind, I'll go to another question: Why are there two creeds? And why do we rotate which one we say?

From Saint Ambrose, who died in 397 as Bishop of Milan (now Italy), we hear of the older "*Apostles Creed*" coming from the mouths of the early apostles, especially Peter and the Church of Rome. It was used in a baptismal "question/answer" form that we still use today. In fact, when I baptize or during the Easter Season, we sing: "Credo Credo Amen" – or "I Believe, I Believe. Amen." As we have been discussing in this column, at one time everyone sang everything, or chanted, for as Saint Augustine reminds us, "singing is praying two times over." This formula was written in a "non-question/answer" way and summarized the faith of the early church as it was being handed down.

The second creed we use for Mass comes from two ecumenical councils, held in 325 and 381. It is said in all Christian churches; whereas the Apostles Creed is only said in Latin Rite or Western churches. As you may recall, there were a lot of theologies and issues about Christ and his humanity and divinity. The church bishops argue about this and settled the matters by having these meetings or council in Nicea (Greece today) and Constantinople (Istanbul, Turkey today). The creed grew in word and meaning and eventually became mandated to proclaim it during the Mass through the French and German bishops in the 11th century. It was not a universal liturgical part of the Mass until the *Roman Missal* of 1570.

We alternate during liturgical seasons (like colors and other Mass parts being sung) to highlight their importance for certain times of the year (for as you may have read in missalettes or the hymnal certain seasons are more appropriate for the Apostles Creed). Also, many times, while we are still learning the new updated words, we have chosen to focus on one (Apostles – used during the recitation of the rosary) over the other (Nicene).

A question I had recently, "Why did Jesus have to descend to the dead or descend into hell?" From the Letter to the Ephesians 4: 9 – 10, this notion and reality is that Jesus went into the earth to bring back all that had died or is dead to bring new life and light on all humankind (see the *Roman Missal*, Easter Vigil 18, *Exulted* for the full text of what we sing this holy night). Being in the realm of the dead wanted to prove Jesus' resurrection – the worry that he didn't really die. This was placed in the creeds to state he did die for us. At the Council of Rome in 745, the church leaders also clarified that Jesus descended to free the just who had gone before him. Jesus Christ went to open the gates of heaven to all the just who had gone before him. (See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 631 – 637 for a complete study.)

Why We Do What We Do at Mass: Part 7: This leads me to reflect on what Bishop Lennon asked each parish to do 6 years ago, at the same time I was installed as pastor at SPB: Commission the Ministers to the Homebound at the End of the Communion Rite. I have been saddened to hear that not all parishes implemented this special part of the Mass that bishops across the country, requested. When we call forward the Communion Ministers who are going to the homebound, hospice, nursing homes and hospitals, we share with them the Eucharist, bless them and send them forth to minister. This is an important reminder that our "communion" just does not just stay here, but goes out and ministers to those in need. This has always been part of the church's ministry, for we have read about it in the Acts of the Apostles and other early church documents. If you need a pyx, we have some to borrow if someone in your family becomes ill and needs this ministry. You come forward with your pyx (it's always nice and helpful when you let the priest know who you are ministering to this Sunday and/or weekday.) Then you minister to those in need, sharing the Word of God, at least the reading of the Gospel with the other person, praying for the intercessions of the church, reciting the LORD's Prayer and "Behold the Lamb of God," and sharing communion, meditation time, a prayer or song or two. We have a special blue ritual book in the sacristy if you would like one for this ministry.