

A Mission Church

We offer bread and wine. Symbols of creation in perfect form. Unaltered.

We believe they become for us the Bread of Life and the Cup of Eternal Salvation. Perfect form manifested in the Perfect Form of the One who reunited heaven and earth in the Perfect Act of Love.

This offering, this returning to the Father what was received from the Father, is not symbolic. In truth, spoken by the One who is Truth, it is a sign of the inner reality. Taken from ancient tradition, this offering of unstained life is our response to the One who remains always unstained.

Preparation of the Altar

This is usually seen as a “transition” from the Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It is time spent in preparing for the next activity. And sometimes we’re trying to make sure we don’t miss the collection basket, thereby missing some key meanings of this time of preparation.

1) The sacred vessels (chalice, the cups for the Precious Blood), the patens (which hold the Body of Christ), a few towels (purificators) and the Sacramentary (book of prayers) are placed on the altar.

2) Then the bread and wine are presented to the priest. In some parishes all this is delayed until the monetary collection of the people is also brought forth, symbolic of their giving and responsibility for the work of the Church.

A very small amount of water is mixed with the wine and the wine is poured into the chalice and cups at this time.

“By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.”

And the gifts are ready to be offered.

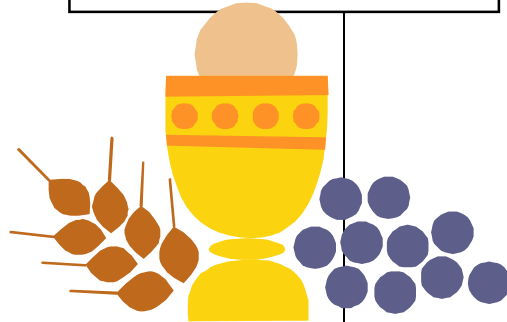
Something’s Missing

But it’s not an object, so don’t rattle your brain thinking about what we’ve forgotten. We’re offering the work of our hands in the offering up of the bread and wine.

“Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.”

“Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink.”

THE MASS Preparation of Gifts (Offertory)



Usually when these prayers are said, the people are singing (except at weekday masses). We are returning to God what God has given us — the best — the first fruits as it were, unaltered. But we’re still missing something!

Remember how many times we have had some form of reconciliation (confession and conversion) since we arrived at church? There’s good reason for this. We offer more than bread and wine. Our own lives must also be offered so as to be consecrated for the work of redemption. ***“...may we come to share in the divinity of Christ...”*** We are, as St. Paul says, ***“joined in the one sacrifice of Christ.”***

As unworthy as we may be, now we are called to join our lives as an offering with the Lord. It is, as if we were placing ourselves on the altar to be offered and consecrated for the good of the world, for all mankind as Christ did in the eternal offering of life.

Joining with Christ as Offering for Others

“Can you drink from the cup from which I am to drink?” We heard gospel passage not long ago. It now comes to life. Each of us is asked to join ourselves in the offering of self with Christ. Christ’s life will become real for us in the signs of bread and wine. Ours will become real for the world in the signs of our

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participating in the baptismal roles of priest, prophet, and king. It will be realized in our sharing of life wherever our brothers and sisters are found.

“Lord God, we ask you to receive us and be pleased with the sacrifice we offer you with humble and contrite hearts.”

This final prayer is said by the priest (usually quiet) on behalf of all those gathered together. ***“...receive us...”*** *We, a contrite people, place ourselves before you Lord. We plead, receive us even in our weaknesses. By the power of your Spirit, change us as you change the bread and wine. Bring us back to our perfection of baptismal life.*

Priest Washing of Hands

This is purely a symbolic gesture with an enormous inner reality. It is the final preparation of the priest who at the moment of consecration takes on the reality of Christ.

“Lord, wash away my iniquities; cleanse me from my sin.”

There is only one focus for the priest from this time on. He must be completely centered on the power of God consuming his very being as we move to the consecration. And yet, there are words to be said and actions to be made.

“Pray my brothers and sisters, that our sacrifice may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.”

What is this sacrifice to be offered, that we pray will be acceptable? It

is the offering from creation — bread and wine. It is the work of our hands. It is our lives being offered in faith and trust, in hope, and in love — all given through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And we pray:

With the Prayer over the Gifts, the offertory is completed. It is

as if Abraham has now prepared the altar and Isaac is ready to be offered to the Lord. But life will be given.

Priest and People

All along, the priest acts and prays on behalf of the gathered People of God. They, in turn, if not singing, should be continuing the offering of self for the sake of all, continuing that “joining with Christ, whose sacrifice brings us to this opportunity.

“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 Church.”

INCENSE — WHY?

It’s an ancient tradition older than cassocks and surplices, those vestments worn by altar servers in some parishes (like to the right). The psalmist wrote:

“Let my prayer rise like incense before you, O God.”



The idea that, if smoke rises from an offering to God it is then acceptable, goes back to Cain and Abel. Abel’s perfect gift was accepted by the Lord, and the smoke reached to the heavens. Cain kept the best — the first fruits — and offered to God the second picking. The smoke of his offering remained along the ground, and therefore was not accepted.

When we use incense in church today, we acknowledge the holiness of the object or person. During a mass when incense is used, here’s what is acknowledged as holy:

- the Altar
- the Paschal (Easter) Candle
- the Crucifix
- Easter Water (if present)
- a Creche’ at Christmas

- the Gospel prior to its proclamation

— at the Preparation of Gifts the above are incensed as well as:

- the bread and wine
- the bishop or priest
- the people

— the Eucharist may be incensed during the consecration.

NOTICE, the people are incensed. The people are “holy.” So if you’re ever at a mass with incense and the server or deacon stands before the altar and motions for you to stand, it’s because you are “Holy” standing in the presence of God.

When we pray Sunday night Vespers, the incensing of the people is one of the final actions taking place. We are reminded of the holiness that is ours through the Christ we carry in our beings. God, who is holy, wishes us to be holy. The fullness of the Mass calls us to this in union with God.

One or two charcoals are in what is called a “thurible”. The incense is found in a variety of mixtures which include myrrh and frankincense, sometimes cedar, and different fragrances.