

# The Order of Mass—with comments from Pope Francis'

## Wednesday Catecheses

### Introductory comments about the Mass:

- We cannot forget the great number of Christians who, throughout the world, in 2,000 years of history, have died defending the Eucharist; and how many, still today, risk their lives in order to participate in Sunday Mass. In the year 304, during the Diocletianic Persecution, a group of Christians from North Africa was surprised as they were celebrating Mass in a house, and were arrested. In the interrogation, the Roman Proconsul asked them why they had done so, knowing that it was absolutely prohibited. They responded: "Without Sunday we cannot live", which meant: if we cannot celebrate the Eucharist, we cannot live; our Christian life would die.
- I would like to begin with a very simple aspect: Mass is prayer; rather, it is prayer *par excellence*, the loftiest, the most sublime, and at the same time the most "concrete". In fact it is the loving encounter with God through his Word and the Body and Blood of Jesus. It is an encounter with the Lord.
- Praying, as every true dialogue, is also knowing how to be in silence — in dialogues there are moments of silence — in silence together with Jesus. When we go to Mass, perhaps we arrive five minutes early and begin to chat with the person next to us. But this is not the moment for small talk; it is the moment of silence to prepare ourselves for the dialogue. It is the moment for recollection within the heart, to prepare ourselves for the encounter with Jesus. Silence is so important! Remember what I said last week: we are not going to a spectacle, we are going to the encounter with the Lord, and silence prepares us and accompanies us. Pausing in silence with Jesus. From this mysterious silence of God springs his Word which resonates in our heart. Jesus himself teaches us how it is truly possible to "be" with the Father and he shows us this with his prayer.
- Do we allow ourselves to be surprised by God who is always the God of surprises? Because the encounter with the Lord is always a living encounter; it is not a museum encounter. It is a living encounter, and we go to Mass, not to a museum. We go to a living encounter with the Lord.
- We can ask ourselves: what essentially is the Mass? The Mass is the *memorial of Christ's Passover*.
- Every celebration of the Eucharist is a ray of that never setting sun that is the Risen Jesus. Taking part in the Mass, particularly on Sunday, means entering the victory of the Risen One, being illuminated by his light, warmed by his compassion. Through the Eucharistic celebration the Holy Spirit makes us participants in the divine life that is able to transfigure our whole mortal being. In his passage from death to life, from time to eternity, the Lord Jesus also draws us with him to experience the Passover. In the Mass we celebrate Passover. We, during Mass, are with Jesus, who died and is Risen, and he draws us forth to eternal life. In the Mass we unite with him.
- This is the Mass: to enter this passion, death, resurrection, ascension of Jesus; when we go to Mass it is as if we were going to Calvary itself. But consider: whether at the moment of Mass we go to Calvary — let us ponder this with the imagination — and we know that that man there is Jesus. But will we allow ourselves to chat, to take photographs, to put on a little show? No! Because it is Jesus! We certainly pause in silence, in sorrow and also in the joy of being saved. As we enter the church to celebrate Mass, let us think about this: I am going to Calvary, where Jesus gave his life for me. In this way the spectacle disappears; the small talk disappears; the comments and these things that distance us from something so beautiful as the Mass, Jesus' triumph.
- Thus, it is the Mass that *makes* Sunday Christian. The Christian Sunday revolves around the Mass. For a Christian, what is a Sunday in which the encounter with the Lord is lacking?
- Some secularized societies have lost the Christian sense of Sunday illuminated by the Eucharist. This is a shame! In these contexts it is necessary to revive this awareness, to recover the meaning of the celebration, the meaning of the joy, of the parish community, of solidarity, of the rest which restores body and soul (cf. ccc, nn. 2177-2178). Of all these values, the Eucharist is our guide, Sunday after Sunday. For this reason the Second Vatican Council wished to emphasize that Sunday "is the original

feast day, and it should be proposed to the piety of the faithful and taught to them so that it may become in fact a day of joy and of freedom from work" (Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 106).

- Without Christ we are condemned to be dominated by everyday weariness, with its worries, and by fear of the future. The Sunday encounter with the Lord gives us the strength to experience the present with confidence and courage, and to go forth with hope. For this reason we Christians go to encounter the Lord on Sunday, in the Eucharistic celebration.
- How can we respond to those who say that it is of no use going to Mass, even on Sunday, because the important thing is to live well, to love our neighbour? It is true that the quality of Christian life is measured by the capacity to love, as Jesus said: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35); but how can we practice the Gospel without drawing the energy necessary to do so, one Sunday after another, from the inexhaustible source of the Eucharist? We do not go to Mass in order to give something to God, but *to receive what we truly need from him*.

### **Greeting**—*marked by the sign of the Cross*

- Mass begins with the sign of the Cross, with these Introductory Rites, because there we begin to adore God as a community. And for this reason it is important to make sure you do not arrive late, but rather early, in order to prepare the heart for this rite, for this community celebration.
- Normally, while the entrance hymn is sung, the priest, with the altar servers, approaches the altar in procession, and salutes it with a bow and, in a sign of veneration, kisses it and, when there is incense, incenses it. Why? Because the altar is Christ: it is the figure of Christ. When we look at the altar, we are looking exactly at Christ. The altar is Christ. These gestures, which could pass unobserved, are highly significant, because they express from the very beginning that the Mass is an encounter of love with Christ, who, by offering his Body on the Cross, became "the Priest, the Altar and the Lamb" (cf. *Preface v of Easter*). The altar, in fact, as a symbol of Christ, is "the center of the thanksgiving that is accomplished through the Eucharist" (*General Instructions of the Roman Missal*, n. 296); and the whole community [gathers] around the altar, which is Christ, not to look at each other, but to look at Christ, because Christ is at the centre of the community; he is not distant from it.
- Please, mom and dad, grandparents, teach the children, from the beginning — from a tender age — to make the sign of the Cross properly. And explain to them that it is having Jesus' Cross as protection. The Mass begins with the sign of the Cross. The whole prayer moves, so to speak, within the space of the Most Holy Trinity.
- Thus, the priest offers the *liturgical Greeting* with the expression: "The Lord be with you" or something similar — there are several; and the assembly responds: "And with your spirit". We are in a dialogue; we are at the beginning of the Mass and we must think about the significance of all these gestures and words. We are entering a "symphony", in which various tones of voice resonate, including moments of silence, in view of creating "harmony" among all the participants, which is to acknowledge that they are animated by a unique Spirit and for the same aim.

### **Penitential Act**—*confessing our sins to prepare ourselves for worthy participation*

- All of us are sinners; and for this reason at the start of Mass we ask forgiveness. It is the *Act of Penitence*. It is not a matter of only thinking about the sins committed, but much more: it is the invitation to confess our sins before God and before the community, before our brothers and sisters, with humility and sincerity, like the tax collector at the Temple.
- Quietly listening to the voice of our conscience allows us to recognize that our thoughts are far from divine thoughts, that our words and our actions are often worldly, guided, that is, by choices contradictory to the Gospel. Therefore, at the beginning of Mass, as a community, we perform the Penitential Act through a formula of *general confession*, recited in the *first person singular*. Each one confesses to God and to his brothers and sisters to having "greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do". Yes, even in omissions, that is, in having neglected to do the good I could have done. We often feel that we are good because — we say — "I did no harm to anyone". In reality, it is not enough to refrain from doing harm to our neighbour; we must choose to do good, by seizing opportunities to bear good witness that we are disciples of Jesus.

- The words we say with our mouth are accompanied by the *gesture of striking our breast*, acknowledging that I have sinned through my own fault and not that of others. Indeed, it often happens that, out of fear or shame, we point a finger to blame others. It costs us to admit being at fault, but it does us good to confess it sincerely.

### **Kyrie**—*calling on the mercy of God (Greek)*

- It is also possible, as part of the Penitential Act, to sing the *Kyrie eleison*: with the ancient Greek expression, we praise the Lord — *Kyrios* — and implore his mercy.

### **Gloria**—*the ancient praise of God*

- It is in the very encounter between human misery and divine mercy that the gratitude expressed in the “Gloria” comes alive; “a very ancient and venerable hymn in which the Church, gathered together in the Holy Spirit, glorifies and entreats God the Father and the Lamb” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 53).
- The beginning of this hymn — “Glory to God in the Highest” — recalls the song of the Angels at Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem: a joyful heralding of the embrace between heaven and earth. This song also engages us, gathered in prayer: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will”.

### **Opening Prayer (Collect)**

- After the “Gloria” or in its absence, immediately following the Penitential Act, prayer takes on a particular form in the oration known as the “collect”, through which the very character of the celebration is expressed, with variations according to the days and time of the year (cf. *ibid.*, 54). With the invitation “let us pray”, the priest encourages the people to recollect themselves with him in a *brief silence*, so that they may be conscious that they are in God’s presence and so that all can formulate within their own heart the personal petitions with which they are participating in the Mass (cf. *ibid.*, 54).
- The silence is not confined to the absence of words but rather to preparing oneself to listen to other voices: the one in our heart and, above all, the voice of the Holy Spirit. In the Liturgy, the nature of sacred silence depends on the moment in which it takes place: “within the Act of Penitence and again after the invitation to pray, all recollect themselves; but at the conclusion of a reading or the homily, all meditate briefly on what they have heard; then after Communion, they praise and pray to God in their hearts” (*ibid.*, 45). Thus, before the opening prayer, silence helps us to recollect ourselves and to contemplate why we are there.
- And this is the purpose of the brief silence before the priest; *collecting everyone’s petitions*, he expresses aloud to God, on behalf of all, the common prayer, which concludes the Introductory Rites by offering the “collect” of the individual petitions. I strongly recommend that priests observe this moment of silence and not rush: “Let us pray”, and let there be silence. I recommend this to priests. Without this silence, we run the risk of neglecting the recollection of the soul.
- The priest recites this plea, this collect prayer, with outstretched arms. It is the prayerful manner practiced by Christians ever since the first centuries — as attested in numerous frescoes in the catacombs in Rome — to imitate Christ with his arms outstretched on the wood of the Cross.
- Prayers in the Roman Rite are concise but rich in meaning. One can have beautiful meditations on these prayers. Very beautiful!

### **Liturgy of the Word**

- Today we continue the catechesis on the Holy Mass. After pausing to reflect on the Introductory Rites, let us now consider the Liturgy of the Word, which is an integral part because we gather precisely to listen to what God has done and still intends to do for us. It is an experience which occurs

“live” and not through hearsay because “when the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 29; cf. Const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7, 33).

### **First Reading**—“writings of the prophets”

- The pages of the Bible cease to be writings and become living words, spoken by God. It is God, who through the reader, speaks to us and questions us, we who listen with faith.
- We need to listen to him! It is in fact, a question of life, as we are reminded by the profound expression that “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). Life which gives us the Word of God.

### **Responsorial Psalm**—*same as Jesus read in the Temple!*

- Here I wish to also recall the importance of the Responsorial Psalm whose function is to foster meditation on what was heard in the reading that precedes it. It is preferable that the Psalm be enriched by song, at least in the response (cf. GIRM, 61; *Lectionary*, Introduction, 19-22).

### **Second Reading**—“memoirs of the apostles”

- The Liturgical proclamation of the very same readings with the songs derived from Sacred Scripture expresses and fosters ecclesial communion by accompanying the journey of each and every one.
- We know that the Word of the Lord is of indispensable help so as not to get lost, as is clearly recognized by the Psalmist who, speaking to the Lord, confesses: “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119[118]:105). How can we face our earthly pilgrimage with its difficulties and its trials without being regularly nourished and enlightened by the Word of God which resounds in the Liturgy?
- The action of the Holy Spirit which renders the response effective needs hearts that allow themselves to be fashioned and cultivated in such a way that what is heard at Mass passes into daily life, according to the admonishment of the Apostle James: “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (Jas 1:22). The Word of God makes a pathway within us. We listen to it with our ears and it passes to our hearts; it does not remain in our ears; it must go to the heart. And from the heart, it passes to the hands, to good deeds. This is the path which the Word of God follows: from our ears to our heart and hands.

### **Alleluia and Gospel**—“the word of God is living and effective”

- The dialogue between God and his people, developed in the Liturgy of the Word of the Mass, culminates in the proclamation of the Gospel. It precedes the chanting of the *Alleluia* — or, during Lent, another acclamation — with which “the assembly of the faithful welcomes and greets the Lord who is about to speak to it in the Gospel”.
- We stand up to listen to the Gospel: but it is Christ who is speaking to us, there. And this is why we are attentive, because it is a direct conversation. It is the Lord who is speaking to us.
- We listen to the Gospel in order to realize what Jesus once did and said; and that Word is living, the Word of Jesus that is in the Gospel is alive and touches my heart. Therefore, listening to the Gospel is very important, with an open heart, because it is the living Word. Saint Augustine writes: “The Gospel is the mouth of Christ. He is seated in heaven, but he has not stopped speaking on earth.” If it is true that in the liturgy “Christ is still proclaiming His Gospel,” it follows that, by participating in the Mass, we must give him a response. We listen to the Gospel and we must give a response in our life.

### **Homily**—*calling us to reflect upon the Word and put it into practice*

- The homily is not a trite discourse — nor a catechesis like the one I am giving now —, nor is it a conference nor a lesson. The homily is something else. What is the homily? It is taking up “once more the dialogue which the Lord has already established with his people”, so it may find fulfilment in life.
- I have already addressed the subject of the homily in the Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, where I recalled that the liturgical context “demands that preaching should guide the assembly, and the preacher, to a life-changing communion with Christ in the Eucharist.”
- The homilist — the one who preaches, the priest or the deacon or the bishop — must carry out his ministry well, by offering a real service to all those who participate in the Mass, but those who listen to it must also do their part. Firstly by paying proper attention, that is, assuming the right interior disposition, without subjective pretexts, knowing that every preacher has merits and limitations.
- For this reason, please, make the homily brief, but prepare it well. And how do we prepare a homily, dear priests, deacons, bishops? How should it be prepared? With prayer, by studying the Word of God and by making a clear and brief summary; it should not last more than 10 minutes, please.
- When we go to Mass, each of us has the right to receive in abundance the Word of God read well, said well and then, explained well in the homily. It is a right!
- Therefore, after the homily, a moment of silence allows the seed received to settle in the soul, so that intentions to heed what the Spirit has suggested to each person may sprout. Silence after the homily. A good moment of silence must be observed there, and each one should ponder what he or she has heard.

### **Profession of Faith (Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed)**

- After this silence, how does the Mass continue? The personal response of faith is integrated in the Church’s *Profession of Faith*, expressed in the *Creed*. We all recite the *Creed* in the Mass. Recited by the entire assembly, the *Symbolum* manifests the common response to what is heard together from the Word of God (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 185-197). There is an essential nexus between listening and faith. They are linked. Indeed, this — faith — does not arise from human imagination, but, as Saint Paul recalls, “comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ” (Rom 10:17). Thus, faith is nourished by what is heard and leads to the Sacrament.

### **Prayer of the Faithful/Intercessions—cf. 1 Tim. 2: 1-2.**

- The response to the Word of God heard with faith is then expressed in the common petition, called the *Universal Prayer*, because it embraces the needs of the Church and of the world (cf. GIRM, 69-71; *General Introduction to the Lectionary*, 30-31).
- The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council wished to restore this prayer after the Gospel and homily, especially on Sundays and feast days, so that, with the participation of the people, “intercession will be made for holy Church, for the civil authorities, for those oppressed by various needs, for all mankind, and for the salvation of the entire world (Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 53; cf. 1 Tim 2:1-2).
- Worldly demands, however, do not ascend toward heaven, just as self-referential requests remain unheard (cf. Jas 4:2-3).

### **Liturgy of the Eucharist**

- Following the Lord’s command at the Last Supper to “do this in memory of me”, the Church at every Mass makes sacramentally present the sacrifice of the New Covenant sealed by Jesus on the altar of the cross.

### **Offertory—echoes the gesture of OT Melchizedek, who offered bread and wine**

- The rite of the Preparation of the Gifts invites us to present our own lives as a spiritual offering together with the gifts we bring to the altar.

## Prayer over the Offerings

- The Prayer which concludes this rite voices our confidence that the Church's offering will be transformed by the Holy Spirit and become a sacrifice pleasing to the Father, in union with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. At every Mass, may we experience the Preparation of the Gifts as an invitation to offer our lives completely to the Lord, in order to receive from him the grace to live ever more fully our vocation to grow in holiness and to serve the coming of his Kingdom.

**Eucharistic Prayer**—the *anaphora* (prayer of thanksgiving and consecration; the heart and summit of the Mass)

*Preface*—Church gives thanks to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, for all works: creation, redemption, sanctification.

*Epiclesis*—Church asks the Father to send the Holy Spirit on the Eucharistic elements (priest places his hands over the bread and wine) so that they may become the body and blood of Jesus.

*Institution Narrative*—words of consecration; the moment at which the whole substance of the bread and wine becomes the whole substance of the body and blood of Jesus.

*Anamnesis* (remembrance)—begins with memorial acclamation; calls to mind the Passion, death, resurrection, and glorious return of Christ Jesus.

## The Lord's Prayer

### Sign of Peace

### Breaking of the Bread/Lamb of God (Agnus Dei)

**Communion**—*we receive "the bread of heaven" and "the cup of salvation".*

- St. Thomas Aquinas' Prayer of Thanksgiving after Communion:  
*I thank You, Lord, Almighty Father, Everlasting God, for having been pleased, through no merit of mine, but of Your great mercy alone, to feed me, a sinner, and Your unworthy servant, with the precious Body and Blood of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that this Holy Communion may not be for my judgment and condemnation, but for my pardon and salvation. Let this Holy Communion be to me an armor of faith and a shield of good will, a cleansing of all vices, and a rooting out of all evil desires. May it increase love and patience, humility and obedience, and all virtues. May it be a firm defense against the evil designs of all my visible and invisible enemies, a perfect quieting of all the desires of soul and body. May this Holy Communion bring about a perfect union with You, the one true God, and at last enable me to reach eternal bliss when You will call me. I pray that You bring me, a sinner, to the indescribable Feast where You, with Your Son and the Holy Spirit, are to Your saints true light, full blessedness, everlasting joy, and perfect happiness. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## Concluding Rites

### Blessing

Dismissal—*"The Mass is ended. Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life."*