

The Greetings and Responses in the celebration of the Eucharist

A guide for Teachers and Catechists

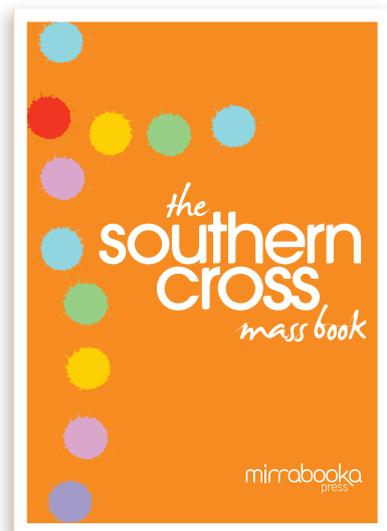
If we look at the greetings and responses the Catholic Church employs in the Mass we gain a valuable insight into the theology and spirituality of the celebration. One useful activity is to study these texts and explore the meaning behind the words. Our Eucharistic celebration emerges from the Last Supper encounter of Christ by the disciples. This liturgy has seen many developments during its two thousand year history of the Mass and today's celebration adheres to the basic structure of the rite and includes many of the ancient responses.

In these greetings and responses that are found in the Mass Booklet we can note the disposition that one requires for a full, conscious and active participation in the Eucharist. Some of these responses are self-evident others require some explanation. These study sheets looks at several of the responses that are found in the Mass Booklet and suggests some teaching elements for the instruction of students.

Why explore these texts?

The reason for offering an analysis of the texts is simply that our Eucharistic Spirituality is enhanced by our knowledge of the responses. The Church at the Second Vatican Council called for the liturgy to be full, active and conscious. By exploring the responses at Mass, and by learning them by heart, we will better be able to celebrate this liturgy and our lives will be enriched. Christian spirituality is deepened by incorporating into our story the encounter we have with God in the Mass. This search to find Christ in our lives and prayer gives direction and meaning to our journey. Our Christian spirituality is the search to integrate this vision into our lives. By studying the responses at Mass we can enter more deeply into the celebration and thereby deepen our association with our loving and saving God.

The liturgy has a flow from the welcome at the start of the celebration, through the prayer and readings. The flow then leads to a sharing of symbolic action and gifts then concludes with the dismissal and farewell. The responses give us the appropriate attitude we need for the conscious participation in the Mass, they enable us to pace our prayer and focus our attention upon the different parts of the liturgy.



Introductory Rites

1

Mass Text

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.



Interpretation and Teacher Instruction

The introductory rites gather the group of believers together. The statement *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit* by the priest states that God is with us in this mass. The group that gathers are more than a collection of individuals: we make up the Body of Christ. We read in the Gospels the importance of names: the naming of John the Baptist was a surprise, people possessed by demons would call Jesus by name. Saying a person's name designates a certain relationship with them. Naming God as a Trinity of persons orients us for the Mass.

The Christians gathering for prayer sign the cross over themselves the commencement of the liturgy. This gesture remembers the first time we were "signed" with the cross at our baptism. The priest, our parents and God parents all marked a cross on our forehead. We will start and conclude this Mass with the sign of the cross. This formula locates us clearly in a conversation with our loving God and we can see from this signing that the Mass involves both words and actions. We will need to attend carefully to these as we pray.

Notice especially

The formula of praying to the Trinity is the key one at Mass. We have no doubt about what we are doing in this liturgy: we are praying to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We are praising God who created us, saved us and loves us still.

2

Mass Text

Amen

Interpretation and Teacher Instruction

We sign ourselves with a cross and say Amen. This Hebrew word that we employ many times in the mass says yes to all that is prayed. It is like saying "and so say all of us". Amen means that I believe what has been said in this prayer. I give my assent to these words, I believe these things and shall live by them. Many times in our lives we are asked if we will do something, sign an important document or solemnly swear that we will tell the truth. In the Eucharistic celebration we say yes to God many times throughout the liturgy. The Hebrew word for yes is Amen. We do not say this lightly, it means that we believe totally with our heart, and soul and mind all that is stated in the prayer.

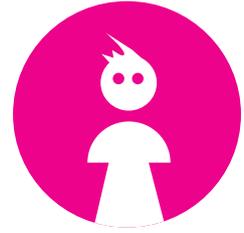
Notice especially

The *amen* is used throughout the mass as our agreement with the prayer.

3

Mass Text

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy



Interpretation and Teacher Instruction

There are many themes that comprise our prayer: thanksgiving, praise, petition, remembering the saving deeds of God. One of the repeated prayers in the mass is the call for mercy. This is said at the commencement of almost every mass, is repeated in the Gloria and is always prayed just before we receive Holy Communion.

This call for mercy echoes the many prayers and stories in the Old and New Testament that have mercy as the key theme. The psalms are filled with prayers for God's forgiveness <psalm 50 is the classic>. The parables and stories of Jesus' ministry are filled with accounts of God's mercy toward humankind. The prayer for mercy is at the start of the mass says that we are not perfect but need God to assist us in our lives and in this prayer.

Calling Christ to have mercy is a comforting prayer for he always assists those who call upon him. *Son of David have mercy on me! Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom! If you want to you can cure me!* To all these requests Jesus responds positively and heals or cares for all them. So starting our Mass calling for God's mercy is an appropriate disposition and put us in good company with others who have been saved by God.

Notice especially

The call for mercy places us in good company with so many others. The Mass is celebrated not only for ourselves, we also pray for our family, friends, school and world at the Eucharist. Many people in our world need God's love and mercy. At Mass we intercede for them. Asking for Mercy is a good start.

4

Mass Text

The Gloria



Interpretation and Teacher Instruction

This long and ancient prayer is said to the Trinity but the Father and the Son are the main ones addressed. The prayer is divided into two sections. The first addresses the Father, Lord God, heavenly king. This first part of the prayer praises, blesses and adores the Father for being God, for being so great, so glorious.

The second part of the prayer addresses Christ, only Son of the Father, who takes away the sins of the world. The Gloria returns to the theme of mercy that started the mass. In this prayer we praise Christ for being the Holy, the most High, Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is mentioned at the conclusion of the praise and the final line return to the Father's glory. As we noted the mass is bracketed by the prayers to the Father, Son and Spirit. This old prayer praises God for the great person that God is. This doesn't ask for things or gifts, it simply praises God.

At the end of the prayer we say Amen, our assent to all that is contained in the text. The prayer, as with nearly all the responses in the Mass is recited together and bonds us to the worshiping community by sharing this prayer. We rarely say personal, individual prayers at Mass, it is a communal event.

Notice especially:

The Gloria praises the Trinity, but mostly the Father and Son, the call for mercy is offered again.

Liturgy of the Word

5

Mass Text

*This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.
The Lord be with you. And with your spirit.*

Interpretation and Teacher Instruction

The reader at the end of the Scripture text says that the Lord really spoke through me in this liturgy. The community does not say, thanks to you, or even thanks to St Paul or the Prophet. We the participants respond: thanks be to God who spoke to us through our reader today. We can see the importance of thorough preparation for a reading of Scripture for we are doing God's work.

Many times during the Mass the priest will say *The Lord be with you* and we respond *And with your spirit*. This ancient greeting was said at the earliest masses. The Greeting is addressed to God, our Lord. The Lord be with you is like saying the Lord is with you, God is present at this prayer. The God who loved us, and created us, and saved us called us to this liturgy. Since God is present and will talk to us the Body of Christ in the Mass and we must listen attentively. We will speak, praise, thank and adore our loving God and, of course, our prayers will be heard.

Notice especially

God is present in the reading of Scripture at Mass. We must listen attentively and concentrate upon the message God is offering us. This is a holy task and demands our fidelity and a solemn demeanour.

6

Mass Text

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew. Glory to you Lord.

Interpretation and Teacher Instruction

The priest announces which one of the four Gospels is being read at this liturgy. The reading of the word of God at mass is nothing like reading any other text. We believe that Christ is speaking to us in this action. The full participation suggests that we see ourselves as one of his disciples who first heard these messages, parables during his earthly ministry.

The key word here is Lord! We recognize that Christ is addressing us in this proclamation today.

We know the priest but in the Gospel reading The Lord is addressing us. As we said at the start of Mass, God has called us here to this celebration and speaks to us, and listens to our responses, our prayer and our praises we offer.

When the Gospel is read by the priest he doesn't say "This is a parable from St Mark" he says this is the Gospel of the Lord meaning this is the word that Jesus is saying to us today. We respond "praise to you Lord Jesus Christ" stating that we recognize that Christ has spoken to us through the priest.

Notice especially

So the key thing to remember in the Liturgy of the Word is to forget that one of our class mates is reading the text from the bible, or that the priest is proclaiming the Gospel. The key thing to focus upon is that God speaks to us in the readings and Jesus Christ speaks to us when the Gospel is read. Christ speaks to us in the reading from the Gospel at Mass.



7

Mass Text

The Creed



Interpretation and Teacher Instruction

In the creed we state that we believe in God who is Father, the creator of the world. We assert that we believe in Jesus Christ who is fully divine and fully human; he lived, died and rose again.

We state that we believe in the Holy Spirit, the giver of life and in the one, holy Church. We conclude this prayer with an Amen, a Yes to all that is contained in the Creed. Our Amen is our firm statement of our belief in all that is contained in the creed.

The words of the Creed and the prayer of the faithful are opportunities for us to talk to God.

Notice especially

We see that the creed is a communal statement. We are united in our adherence to this belief with the other members of the community. Very few of the prayers of the mass are individual, most are communal texts. The Creed is not said at every Mass, but always on Sunday. The key elements of the creed were recited at our baptism.

8

Mass Text

Lord hear us. Lord, hear our prayer



Interpretation and Teacher Instruction

THE PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Even though one of our class mates reads the intercessions she is praying to God on our behalf. She says *Lord hear us*. The Lord we are praying to generally is the Father; most of the major prayers in the Mass are addressed to this person of the blessed Trinity. We echo statement in the intercessions by responding *Lord hear our prayer*.

During the Prayer of the Faithful we ask God for our needs, those of our Church and our world. By all of us praying together *Lord hear our prayer* we are associating our lives with the petition and adding weight to the urgency by praying together. Just as when everyone at the birthday party sings and so say all of us we add to the sentiments that are addressed. It is because we are baptized and share the life of Christ we can confidently pray to the Father and ask for our needs.

We shall see that the prayer of the faithful is connected to the Dismissal rite. It is not good enough to merely pray for others we must assist them by our actions. Just as Christ commanded the lawyer to whom he addressed the parable of the Good Samaritan, *Go and do the same yourself*, we are called to act in accordance with God's will and not simply to prattle out some prayers .

Notice especially

The prayer of the faithful ranges widely and implies that we will do something about the needy and not merely pray for them.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

9

Mass Text

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God. It is right and just



Interpretation and Teacher Instruction

After the gifts are placed on the altar, and a prayer is said the Celebrant begins the great prayer to the Father. Once again we commence with *The Lord be with you*. God is with us and we need to focus on this special prayer. This prayer has a long introduction. *Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to the Lord*. We can see that something special is occurring for the preamble is longer. Just as the fanfare for a dignitary is greater depending upon the status of the person.

The call by the priest is to raise our thoughts, our souls, our hearts to God for this prayer.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right and just. No other prayer in the mass has such a build up. Notice the three elements: God is with us, raise your hearts in prayer, and give thanks to God for all he has done. It is not surprising that the Greek word for Thanks became the word for the Mass: Eucharist. The word thanks is hardly used in other prayers of the Mass, it is almost solely reserved for this Great Prayer. We do not use the verb in the Prayers of the Faithful.

Notice especially

This is the formal introduction that starts the long Eucharistic prayer. The prayer is addressed to the Father.

10

Mass Text

Holy Holy Holy

Interpretation and Teacher Instruction

The reason why we come to mass is to praise and glorify God.

In this prayer we praise God for his glory that fills all heaven and earth.

During this prayer we will remember the death and resurrection of

Christ but we start with remembering the glory of God that fills all creation. Our prayer at mass joins the prayers of the angels and saints in acclaiming the great love of God. The Holy, Holy, Holy sets the tone for our prayer and enables us to focus clearly upon our wonderful God.





Mass Text

This is my body, this is my blood



Interpretation and Teacher Instruction

This is my body, this is my blood. These words can be confusing in the Eucharistic prayer for they are repeating what Christ said at the Last Supper. Though the Eucharistic prayer is addressed to the Father they include a passage that remembers the Last Supper of Christ. This is my body is a statement made by Christ. The celebrant repeats these lines for they are also true for us the Church. We are Christ's Body in the world and we make Him present by our words and actions.

Notice especially

This is the high point of the Mass. There are eight different sections in the ancient Eucharistic prayer but since the Middle Ages we have especially highlighted this one: Ringing bells and genuflecting after these holy words.

Note that the Eucharistic prayer is addressed to the Father but incorporates a narrative that remembers and repeats the words of Jesus at the Last Supper.



Mass Text

Through him, with him..

Interpretation and Teacher Instruction

Look carefully at the final prayer that the priest says at the conclusion of the Eucharistic prayer.

Through him, with him and in him. Who is he? Who are we addressing? Once again we must remember that the prayer is said to the Father. *All glory and honour is yours, O God, almighty Father.* These prayers are prayed through Christ and with Christ and in Christ. Christ offers our prayers to the Father, Christ prays with us in this prayer and we pray these prayers in Christ.

Though the Great Eucharistic prayer is addressed to the Father it is bound up in the person of Christ, in his work and in his mission to bring all of creation to the Father.

Notice especially

Just as the start of the Eucharistic prayer has a special introduction so also does the conclusion. The Doxology is another formal fanfare that embellishes the text. The Amen says yes to all that is in this long prayer. It is a short statement that gives assent to our belief in the great work God has done for us.

13

Mass Text

Our Father



Interpretation and Teacher Instruction

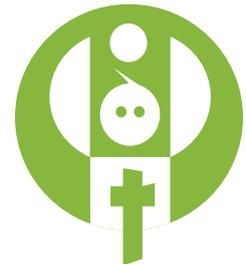
This classic Christian prayer emerged in the early church as the key prayer to the Father. We note firstly the address to the Father citing the great qualities of God: existing in heaven, hallowed (holy) in name, whose kingdom is coming, whose will is to be done on earth. This is a wonderful model for all our prayers: we praise God first, then ask for our needs, our petitions. The second part of the Our Father is made up of four intercessions. The key verbs give the clue to the prayer: Give, forgive, lead and deliver.

This prayer to our loving Father echoes the prayers that Christ made to his father during his earthly ministry. His most insistent prayer was the night before he died and he prayed that the Father's will be done, not his. This formed a key part of the Our Father that we pray. It is especially appropriate to pray this prayer just before we receive Holy Communion. It focusses us upon the love and power of our loving God, and orients us to be people who will, with the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, be faithful Children of God.

14

Mass Text

Lord I am not worthy that



Interpretation and Teacher Instruction

Notice that this is a personal prayer, one of the few that are prayed in the mass. Not all people in the church will receive Holy Communion so the choice to take the Body of the Lord in is a serious one. The assertion that we are unworthy to receive such a great gift is the appropriate disposition for Communion. This ancient text was always said before receiving the Lord in the Eucharist. It comes from the statement of the centurion to Jesus saying that he was not worthy to have Christ come to his house.

The Body of Christ. Amen

Interpretation and Teacher Instruction

In preparing students for the reception of Holy Communion the teachers and catechists focus especially upon the gestures that accompany this part of the Mass. They will focus upon the solemnity of the Rite and the appropriate, conscious and reflective attitudes that the reception of Christ demands. The priest or extraordinary minister of Communion will hold the host before the communicant and say: The Body of Christ. In some respects this is a question for the communicant. By asserting that the wafer/host is the Son of God

< fully human and fully divine, The person who created the world, became human for us, lived, died and rose again >

the priest in a sense is asking if the communicant believes this. The response Amen is an act of faith in all that has been said about Jesus Christ. The person is given the Body of Christ only after the Amen, the yes to the Catholic belief has been said.

Concluding Rites

The final part of the mass is the Dismissal Rite. This is not merely the end of the celebration and the chance to go home it is a specific charge that is given to the worshipping community. The meaning of this rite is to go and put into practice the things we have heard and seen in the Eucharist. The celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ calls us to offer our lives also to the Father. Hearing the story of Jesus' life and ministry not only leads us to pray for others in the Prayer of the Faithful but also galvanizes us to actively live out the call of the Kingdom that Christ demands.

15

Mass Text

May almighty God bless you, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Interpretation and Teacher Instruction

The Dismissal Rite is very simple: a blessing and a command!

The story of the people of Israel and the account of the Christian Church is one of God's continued blessings that have been showered upon humankind. The ministry of Jesus was one of Blessing the Father and blessing people. His departure from the disciples at the end of Matthew's Gospel is clear. He charges them to Go and make disciples, Baptize and teach them: there are three actions that Christ demands of his followers. At the end of Mass we are also called to live out what we have celebrated: God's love for us, God's saving action and his gift of the Holy Spirit to assist us on our journey

16

Mass Text

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

Thanks be to God

Interpretation and Teacher Instruction

The command to go in peace to serve the Lord we accept by the statement: Thanks be to God.

This is an agreement to put into practice what we have celebrated. Though the text says thanks it means that we will do what the Lord has asked of us. As baptized members of the Body of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit of Jesus we should be confident and even thankful that we have this work to do.

