

The Liturgy of the Eucharist: Preparation of the Gifts

Since it has been so long since my last installment, I will recap what I've already said about the Preparation of the Gifts, and include an additional comment on the Collection. Christ offers himself to us and for us and we join in that offering when we proclaim the *Eucharistic Prayer*. During the *Preparation of the Gifts* we are preparing for this offering of Christ, symbolized by our preparing the gifts of bread and wine that will become Christ's body and blood. The key action during the time of the *Preparation of the Gifts* is the procession with the gifts to the altar. This is more than merely a means of getting the bread and wine and Collection to the front of the church. It is an expression of our personal preparation to enter into Christ's sacrifice, and even when only a few members of the congregation form the procession, they represent all of us. Their movement to the altar and presentation of the gifts symbolize the movement of our hearts toward the Lord, and our willingness to share in the sacrifice soon to be offered. As the gifts are prepared and placed on the altar, we can mentally place ourselves there too, prepared to give ourselves as gifts to others as Christ gave himself.

In practice, the Collection receives quite a bit of active attention during Mass (and after!), but the official books say very little about it. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal says simply *It is well also that money or other gifts for the poor or for the Church, brought by the faithful or collected in the church, should be received*. While the Collection is most often an important part of the income of the Parish and used for operating expenses, note how the Instruction speaks first of *gifts for the poor* in what it says about the Collection. Our regular second collections respond to this purpose.

Beyond the practical necessity of income to keep the Parish going, the point of the Collection also has something to do with preparing ourselves to enter into the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ. It is significant that the Collection takes place during the *Preparation of the Gifts*, and that the money collected is brought forward along with the bread and wine. In our culture, money is a powerful symbol of ourselves. The process of getting and spending it is such a significant part of our day to day lives that, when we give away some of it within the context of the Eucharist, we express our willingness to give ourselves away as well, the very action of Christ we commemorate and pledge ourselves to in Liturgy. In addition to providing for the material needs of the Parish, what we give in the Collection should be a symbol of all we have, and expression of our gratitude God's gifts to us, and a symbol that we will use those gifts as God wills.

Please let us know what else about our faith tradition you'd like to find out more about. Contact Fr. Dan Krettek at dkrettek@saintmaryhc.org.