

Liturgy of the Eucharist: Preparation of the Gifts (4)

Once the gifts of bread and wine and the collection have been brought forward in procession, they are placed on and near the altar. The number of hosts and amount of wine brought forward is prepared before Mass by the priest or a helper, based on an estimate of the number of people expected to be at that particular Mass. The General Instruction emphasizes that the communion breads (hosts) distributed at Mass should be consecrated at that same Mass, rather than at a previous Mass, as a clear sign of sharing in the sacrifice actually taking place. While we do sometimes use extra hosts from the tabernacle when we run out of those consecrated at the Mass being celebration, this should be only an exceptional situation. The practice of reserving the Blessed Sacrament is primarily intended to provide the Eucharist to those unable to participate personally in the communal celebration of Mass, such as the sick, shut-ins, prisoners, and so on. As the gifts and altar are prepared, there are a couple prayers the priest prays silently. One is prayed when water is mixed with the wine, recalling how both blood and water flowed from Jesus' side when he was pierced with the soldier's lance on the cross. It says *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.* Another silent prayer by the priest comes during the washing of his hands by the altar server. It is *Lord, wash away my iniquity and cleanse me of my sin.* Next comes the invitation addressed to the Assembly, *Pray brothers and sisters, that our sacrifice may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.* Right here is where there is some difference of practice between different communities regarding exactly when people should stand. The *General Instruction* says *The faithful should stand ... from the invitation "Pray, brothers and sisters..." until the end of Mass, except at the places indicated...* {The common practice in the United States is to kneel after the Holy Holy until the Our Father, rather than until the end of Mass, as indicated here in the *General Instruction*.} The common confusion here is whether to stand at the very beginning of the priests' invitation, or after the people's response, *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.* Actually, neither of these timings is exactly right. The General Instruction specifies that the people should rise *after* the priest's invitation (*Pray, brothers and sisters...*), and *before* your reply (*May the Lord accept...*). It's widely acknowledged by folks (priests and people) that this is kind of a confusing or clumsy timing and "choreography", but I think we can get the hang of it with a little (or maybe a lot) of practice!

Please let us know what else about our faith tradition you'd like to find out more about.

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