



LITURGY MATTERS

# Celebrants or Consumers? It matters!

Louise Gannon rsj, Manager Worship and Prayer

Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle

PO BOX 756 Newcastle NSW 2300 | 841 Hunter Street Newcastle West 2302

P 02 4979 1200 F 02 4979 1119 E [enquiries@mn.catholic.org.au](mailto:enquiries@mn.catholic.org.au) ABN 91 605 046 457



[www.mn.catholic.org.au](http://www.mn.catholic.org.au)

## Introduction



When COVID-19 struck, the 'liturgical cafeteria' opened for business in a new and expanded form at the same time businesses, jobs, shops, theatres, parks, sport and a range of other activities closed.

The menu of live-streamed Masses was enormous. You could watch Pope Francis celebrate Mass, bishops in any diocese and priests in many parishes in this country and beyond. People talked about watching one Mass after the other. People compared homilies and music and camera angles. It seems people were searching to find the Mass that suited them.

I have to confess to being mystified by this. The notion of finding the Mass that you like is one thing. Watching one Mass after the other, or parts of many, mystifies me even more. It raises the age-old question: **What do we think we are doing when we celebrate Mass?**

Since COVID-19 began impacting on the liturgy, an avalanche of theological writing has emerged as we struggled to reflect on the meaning and experience of live-streamed Mass. Some of this writing is coalescing around the question which is the focus of this reflection: **When we celebrate Mass, do we understand ourselves to be celebrants or consumers?** Our answer to that question is critical. It is one of those questions to which there is a right answer.

The liturgy embodies and celebrates our faith. For this reason, it is a primary source of theology, the first place we look to understand any aspect of our faith. Does the liturgy treat us and refer to us as celebrants or consumers? Together, let us engage in a little Mystagogical Reflection on the liturgy – on its prayers and documents – to explore what the liturgy reveals about this question, particularly in relation to the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Mystagogical Reflection is not about explaining things. Rather it invites us into the mystery of God, searching ever more deeply for what God is revealing to us in this place, at this time, in these circumstances. Mystagogical Reflection opens us to the movement of the Holy Spirit. At each stage of our reflection and for each text, you are invited to consider four questions:

- What happened? Be attentive to all the detail of the experience
- What did you notice? What captured your attention?
- In this encounter what is Christ revealing to you/us (about God, Christ, the Church, the liturgy ...) What are we learning?
- What is God asking of you ... of us?

## The Structure of the Mass: Word and Sacrament

We will start by focusing on the overall structure of Mass. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) states in a. 28

*The Mass consists in some sense of two parts, namely the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, these being so closely interconnected that they form but one single act of worship. For in the Mass is spread the table both of God's Word and of*

*the Body of Christ, and from it the faithful are to be instructed and refreshed. There are also certain rites that open and conclude the celebration.*

We believe that the Liturgy of the Word is as important as the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Indeed 'The Liturgy of the Eucharist' cannot be celebrated except as a response to hearing the Word of God. We can't 'do' Eucharist until we've listened to the Word. This is our faith.

This is why the Book of the Gospels is brought in during the entrance procession and placed upon the altar. Word and Sacrament together form 'one single act of worship'.

This is why at the end of the first and second readings the minister says, 'The word of the Lord', and at the end of the Gospel, 'The Gospel of the Lord'. This dialogue intentionally mirrors the communion dialogue when the minister says to each one of us, 'The Body of Christ' and 'The Blood of Christ'. Word and Sacrament together from which 'the faithful are to be instructed and refreshed'.

How does our personal and communal participation in Mass embody this belief? As celebrants our participation in the Liturgy of the Word is as full, conscious and active as our participation in the 'Liturgy of the Eucharist.' In the Liturgy of the Word we open ourselves to be changed by the Word so that we become living Words of God. As consumers the Word is a preamble to me getting what I came for – communion.

Are we celebrants or consumers? The answer matters.

## Liturgy of the Eucharist

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist we respond to the Word by doing what Jesus commanded us to do in his memory.

On the feast of the 'Body and Blood of Christ' (Year A), the images of wilderness and hunger in the first reading from Deuteronomy (8:2-3,14-16) seemed to resonate with our experience of isolation from the public celebration of Mass during our COVID lockdowns and continuing restrictions. With the exception of our brothers who are ordained priests, all of us were left hungering for both the body and blood of Christ on the altar, and the body of Christ gathered around the altar.

The experience of wilderness (isolation) and hunger changes you. The same reading talks about being humbled and tested to reveal our inmost heart. Change opens our eyes and hearts to see and know things differently. So, let us proceed to look differently at what, until recent times, has been so familiar.

To help us reflect mystogically on what we are doing together when we celebrate Eucharist we will focus on the liturgical texts and some scripture.

Firstly, you are invited to locate and pray with the following scripture texts:

'The feeding of the Five Thousand' in Matthew 14:13-21 and 15: 32-39.

'The Last Supper' in Matthew 26: 26-29

Notice the verbs used to describe Jesus' action.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) explains how our celebration of Eucharist embodies the same 'take – bless – break – give' eucharistic action recorded in the scripture. It says in a 72.

At the Last Supper Christ instituted the Paschal Sacrifice and banquet, by which the Sacrifice of the Cross is continuously made present in the Church whenever the Priest, representing Christ the Lord, carries out what the Lord himself did and handed over to his disciples to be done in his memory.



For Christ **took** the bread and the chalice, **gave thanks**, **broke** the bread and **gave** it to his disciples, saying: *Take, eat and drink: this is my Body; this is the chalice of my Blood. Do this in memory of me. Hence, the Church has arranged the entire celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist in parts corresponding to precisely these words and actions of Christ, namely:*

a) *At the Preparation of the Gifts, bread and wine with water are brought to the altar, the same elements, that is to say, which Christ took into his hands.*

b) *In the Eucharistic Prayer, thanks is given to God for the whole work of salvation, and the offerings become the Body and Blood of Christ.*

c) *Through the fraction and through Communion, the faithful, though many, receive from the one bread the Lord's Body and from the one chalice the Lord's Blood in the same way that the Apostles received them from the hands of Christ himself.*

Eucharist is not one moment. It is a four-part action and every part is essential. Any one part loses its meaning and purpose when isolated from the other parts. There can only be a communion procession because there has first been a procession of the people to present their gifts to God to be 'taken, blessed, broken and given' through, with and in Christ and in the unity of the Holy Spirit.



The celebration of Eucharist is an action that we do together. This is clear in the GIRM a 95, echoing the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* a 48.

*In the celebration of Mass the faithful form a holy people, a people of God's own possession and a royal priesthood, so that they may give thanks to God and offer the unblemished sacrificial Victim not only by means of the hands of the Priest but also together with him and so that they may learn to offer their very selves.<sup>83</sup> They should, moreover, take care to show this by their deep religious sense and their charity toward brothers and sisters who participate with them in the same celebration.*

*They are consequently to avoid any appearance of singularity or division, keeping in mind that they have only one Father in heaven and that hence are all brothers or sisters one to the other.*

*Moreover, they are to form one body, whether in hearing the Word of God, or in taking part in the prayers and in the singing, or above all by the common offering of the Sacrifice and by participating together at the Lord's table. This unity is beautifully apparent from the gestures and bodily postures observed together by the faithful. (a. 96)*

*The faithful, moreover, should not refuse to serve the People of God in gladness whenever they are asked to perform some particular service or function in the celebration. (a. 97)*

As celebrants our full, conscious and active participation in the Liturgy of the Eucharist is attentive to the entire four-part action. As consumers we are focused on single moments such as the 'consecration' or my personal reception of communion. As celebrants we are conscious that we are acting together as a community. As consumers our focus is 'me and God.' As celebrants presiders respect the Liturgy of the Eucharist as an action of the whole Church – 'my sacrifice and yours' – and refrain from adding actions that reflect a personal spirituality and harken back to a previous age, relegating the lay faithful to the status of consumers.

## The preparation of the gifts

The question 'What's in a name?' asked by Juliet in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has taken on a life of its own. We often hear people ask this question in all sorts of situations. It is a good place to begin our reflection on what the GIRM calls the 'Preparation of the Gifts'.

This name is important. Commonly and wrongly, we call this part of the Mass 'The Offertory'. While the word 'offerings' is an alternative to the word 'gifts', as is seen in the language of the GIRM (a. 73) and the rubrics of the Missal (a. 22), there is no 'offertory' or 'offering' at this point. That takes place during the Eucharistic Prayer. The name of this element of the Mass reveals its nature as preparatory. At the same time, it is the essential first part of the eucharistic action. The offering which is to come can only take place if there is something to be offered.

Let us turn our attention to the liturgical texts to help us reflect more deeply on what we are doing together when we 'celebrate' the Preparation of the Gifts. Pay attention to the words of the prayers prayed with the gifts we the faithful present.

*23. The Priest, standing at the altar, takes the paten with the bread and holds it slightly raised above the altar with both hands, saying in a low voice:*

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation,  
for through your goodness **we** have received  
the bread **we** offer you:  
fruit of the earth and work of human hands,  
it will become for **us** the bread of life.  
**Blessed be God for ever.**

*24. The Deacon, or the Priest, pours wine and a little water into the chalice, saying quietly:*

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.

*25. The Priest then takes the chalice and holds it slightly raised above the altar with both hands, saying in a low voice:*

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation,  
for through your goodness **we** have received  
the wine **we** offer you:  
fruit of the vine and work of human hands,  
it will become **our** spiritual drink.  
**Blessed be God for ever.**

*26. After this, the Priest, bowing profoundly, says quietly:*

With humble spirit and contrite heart  
**may we be accepted by you**, O Lord,  
and may **our sacrifice** in your sight this day  
be pleasing to you, Lord God.

*27. If appropriate, he also incenses the offerings, the cross, and the altar. A Deacon or other minister then incenses the Priest and the people.*

*28. Then the Priest, standing at the side of the altar, washes his hands, saying quietly:*

Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.

The Preparation of the Gifts then flows seamlessly into the next element, The Prayer over the Offerings

*29. Standing at the middle of the altar, facing the people, extending and then joining his hands, he says:*

Pray, brethren (brothers and sisters),  
that **my sacrifice and yours**  
may be acceptable to God,  
the almighty Father.

*The people rise and reply:*

**May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands  
the praise and glory of his name,  
for our good  
and the good of all his holy Church.**

Receive, O Lord, the sacrifice of conciliation and praise  
and grant that, cleansed by its action,  
**we may make [an] offering of a heart pleasing to you.**  
Through Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

[Prayer Over the Offerings for the 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time year A]



We are limping in our reflection on this rite because the action and the symbols are as important as the text. Liturgy is sacramental in nature. Everything we do, see, say, hear, smell and taste is a doorway through which we encounter the mystery of God's love revealed in Jesus' death and resurrection. So, in addition to reflecting on the texts, try to imagine what you are seeing and paying attention to at this time.

What did you notice in your reflection on these texts? What is God revealing to you? Are we celebrants or consumers?

As celebrants we watch members of the Assembly – our brothers and sisters – present bread and wine to the presider. These are symbols that acknowledge everything as a gift from God AND represent our very lives – the work of our human hands. With the bread and wine, we place our lives and our world, our joys and our sorrows, our griefs and anxieties on the altar to be joined to Christ's paschal action. As celebrants we come to Eucharist with our hands and hearts full, ready to offer ourselves. We can only receive at communion because we have first given who we are, not only as individuals, but primarily as the community of the faithful.

As celebrants we are attentive to the language of the prayers prayed in our name. The pronouns are all plural. I love the prayer we rarely hear because the presider prays it quietly:

*With humble spirit and contrite heart  
may **we** be accepted by you, O Lord,  
and may **our** sacrifice in your sight this day  
be pleasing to you, Lord God.*

This rich understanding of what we are doing at the Presentation of the Gifts is gathered into a 73 of the GIRM which says that it is '... a praiseworthy practice for the bread and wine to be presented by the faithful.' In stark contrast the consumer is attentive to this ritual action as something separate to themselves, something that we observe rather than something we are part of.

As celebrants we appreciate the Preparation of the Gifts as the essential first part of the eucharistic action that is done by the faithful, specifically by the fully initiated. As consumers we experience the Preparation of the Gifts as preliminary to, rather than part of the main event. As preliminary to, rather than part of the eucharistic action, we think anyone can present the gifts, including those who are other than Catholic or not fully initiated.

Our reflection on this first moment in the four-part eucharistic action helps us deepen our appreciation of the serious limitations of live-streamed Masses. It also opens our eyes to the way poor ritual action and minimalised symbols at any Mass compromise the effectiveness of the liturgy in revealing the God of Jesus Christ, and in shaping our identity as members of the Body of Christ for mission.

Are we celebrants or consumers? What is the gift being prepared for offering? Who is the gift being prepared for offering? The answer matters.

## The Eucharistic Prayer

The Church refers to the Eucharistic Prayer as 'the centre and high point of the entire celebration.' (GIRM a 78) The Eucharistic Prayer is the second part of the four-part eucharistic action. There can be no Eucharistic Prayer if no gifts have been presented for blessing/offering AND the Eucharistic Prayer finds its purpose in the breaking and giving that follows. Such an appreciation of the Liturgy of the Eucharist is essential if we are to participate as celebrants rather than consumers.

In the parable of the sower (Mt 13:1-23) God invites us not just to look but to see, not just to listen but to hear ... so that we perceive and understand. Our process of Mystagogical Reflection helps us do that,



especially with texts like the Eucharistic Prayer that are so familiar that we can become dull to their power and meaning.



Let us turn our attention to the text of one of our Eucharistic Prayers and reflect on it using our four mystagogical questions. The text viewed via the link below includes the rubrics (red instructions). As we have noted previously, the text itself is not the liturgy. As you reflect on the following text imagine praying it as a member of the Assembly.

### [Eucharistic Prayer III](#)

What did you notice? What is God revealing to you? Are we celebrants or consumers?

As celebrants we 'perceive and understand' this to be our prayer, the prayer of the assembly. The language is in the plural. It is '**our** duty and **our** salvation.' 'Therefore, O Lord, **we** humbly implore you ...' We ask for the gifts we have presented to be made holy through the Spirit! 'Therefore, O Lord as **we** celebrate the memorial ...'. The opening dialogue demands that **we** lift up our hearts and give thanks to God. As a celebrant it is incumbent on me to fully, consciously and actively participate in this prayer because it is ours, and we have declared that it is 'right and just' that we do so! The presider may voice the prayer, but he does so in our name. (cf. GIRM a 78)

As celebrants we 'perceive and understand' that we are offering ourselves through, with and in Christ and in the unity of the Holy Spirit, so that we will be changed: (cf. GIRM a 95)

Look, we pray, upon the oblation (offering) of your Church  
and, recognising the sacrificial Victim by whose death  
you willed to reconcile us to yourself,  
**grant that we**, who are nourished  
by the Body and Blood of your Son



and filled with his Holy Spirit,  
**may become one body, one spirit in Christ.**

As celebrants we 'perceive and understand' that we are part of the offering. This is a terrifying thing to think about. Not only because we are laying ourselves bare to be changed by God, but because we are being made into a holy communion with all the implications of what it means to be a member of a community responsible for continuing God's mission in the world.

Reflecting on this reminds me of my favourite quote from Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (Harper & Row, 1982), page 40.

*Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.*



We have been reflecting on what we missed when we were not able to participate in the celebration of Eucharist. Many people talked about missing being able to receive communion. Many talked about missing the community. Many talked about missing both in equal measure. To be honest, what I missed was the opportunity of joining with my brothers and sisters in offering ourselves to God with Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. I need to be shaped by our loving God. I need to be shaped into community. What an opportunity God has given us to be able to join ourselves to Christ in the liturgy. It is there, joined to Christ that we learn the steps of the paschal mystery so that we will be able to walk those paschal steps meaningfully every day. We are the offering. This is what I miss being part of.

What did you miss? What are you reflecting on? Are we celebrants or consumers? It matters to us and more importantly it matters to the world.

## The Fraction Rite

We've taken bread and wine. We've blessed bread and wine. Now it is time for the bread to be broken and the wine poured out for the life of the world. What do we think we are doing when we celebrate The Fraction Rite?

This is the third part of the four-part eucharistic action: take – bless – break – give. Let us attend to the liturgical texts and reflect on them mystagogically.

The Fraction Rite – or the 'Fraction of the bread' as it is referred to in the GIRM is part of the Communion Rite. The entire Communion Rite is about unity: a unity characterised by forgiveness, freedom, and peace; a unity found in Christ and shared with our brothers and sisters. The Communion Rite flows as follows:

*The Lord's Prayer*  
*The Rite of Peace*  
***The Fraction of the Bread***  
*Communion*  
*Prayer After Communion*

In explaining the meaning of the Fraction Rite, the GIRM (a 83) references the following scripture reading which is proclaimed on the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ (Year A).

The blessing-cup that we bless is a communion with the blood of Christ, and the bread that we break is a communion with the body of Christ. The fact that there is only one loaf means that, though there are many of us, we form a single body because we all have a share in this one loaf. (1 Cor 10:16-17)

The difficulty we face in appreciating the profound meaning of this simple and pithy rite is the poverty of the symbols and our ritual enactment of the rite. The signs are barely perceptible to the senses. To a large degree they have been compromised by the Church itself. A seeming fear about ensuring respect for the body and blood of Christ on the altar, has resulted in a lack of concern and respect for the body of Christ gathered around the altar.

As the scripture indicates, the meaning of the rite is to be found in ONE loaf broken and ONE cup poured out and shared. Interestingly, the GIRM (a 321) also says that the bread is to have the appearance of food – a sign perceptible to our senses. Yet our common practice is to use multiple single hosts that lack any resemblance to food, and multiple chalices which are on the altar from the preparation of the gifts. In the previous rendition of the Missal the multiple chalices were brought to the altar during the Fraction Rite.

What can we do to strengthen our symbols and rituals, so they are able to carry the great mystery of unity and love they are meant to reveal, and facilitate our participation as celebrants not consumers?

At the very least we could use large, scored hosts that not only need to be broken into many pieces, but also have the appearance of being broken from something larger. We could eliminate the less common practice of some presiders using a 'presider's host' that is not shared with any of the Assembly. Such a practice suggests the presider is separate from the Assembly, apart from the one body of Christ. In the absence of one loaf it would be helpful to use only one paten, big enough to hold many larger hosts that need to be broken. Any of these actions would go some way to helping the Fraction Rite become a sign perceptible to our senses and so enable us to become celebrants rather than consumers.

Essentially the Fraction Rite is a visual rite. The meaning is to be perceived in what we see. The action of the breaking is what drives the rite. Yes, it is accompanied by the 'Lamb of God' but the 'Lamb of God' is not the driver. It only starts when the presider is ready to begin the fraction of the bread. This ordering

of the Fraction Rite is indicated by a simple word in the rubrics, 'meanwhile'. 'Meanwhile the following is sung or said' (Missal a 130)

*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,  
have mercy on us.*

*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,  
have mercy on us.*

*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,  
grant us peace.*

One final comment on the ritual action: there is no reference to the tabernacle in the Fraction Rite, neither in the rite as it is outlined in the Missal, nor in the GIRM. The tabernacle has no place in the celebration of Mass and so it has no place in the Fraction Rite. The altar is the focus. The people are fed from the altar with the bread and wine they have presented – the fruit of the earth and the work of their human hands. (GIRM a 85)



How do we participate in the Fraction Rite as celebrants rather than consumers? To a significant degree this is dependent on how the presider celebrates this rite. It would help if:

- large easily broken hosts were used
- as far as possible, there were enough 'hosts' to feed everyone present
- the tabernacle was only used in an emergency
- the rite began only after the Sign of Peace is complete, silence has fallen, and the attention of the Assembly is focused on the action at the altar.

It would also help if music ministers appreciated that the 'Lamb of God' accompanies the action of breaking the bread and that they take their cue to begin from the presider.

It is up to us as members of the Assembly to be fully attentive to this action as we join our voices to the 'Lamb of God'. We bring our awareness that this rite expresses our deep unity with Christ and each other. This is a unity so profound that, with Christ, we are broken open and poured out in love for the life of the world. New life comes from death. This is what the symbols are meant to reveal so that we are well disposed to give our AMEN as we receive communion.



The breaking of the bread is an essential part of the eucharistic action. Indeed, as the GIRM (a. 83) reminds us, in the early Church it was the name used for the celebration of Eucharist. The disciples on the road to Emmaus recognised Jesus in the breaking of the bread. It was and remains THE sign. Because of that sign they turned around.

What are you pondering? What do you think we are doing when we celebrate the Fraction Rite? What would help you engage in this rite more meaningfully? To what change is God calling you, both in the way you participate in the celebration of The Fraction Rite at Mass and live the mystery it reveals every day? Where and how are you being broken open and poured out in love? The Fraction Rite is rehearsing us for these 'broken open' and 'poured out' experiences in life.

The world needs us to be celebrants of the liturgy because society needs people who know deep within, that fullness of life is not to be found in being a consumer.

## Communion

Our mystagogical journey through the Liturgy of the Eucharist has been focused on the question: Do we participate in the celebration of Eucharist as celebrants or consumers? Alas communion is potentially the ultimate consumerist moment.

Let us begin our reflection on Communion by listening to a couple of hymns. [Click on the links below and 'skip adds' if necessary.] What we sing during Communion is very important. We sing our faith. We sing words that help us know ourselves as celebrants NOT consumers, as a community NOT individuals. As participants NOT adorers.

As a diocesan community we have been learning [From the Many Make us One](#) by Tony Alonso. The refrain is:

*Ref: When we sing and when we cry,  
as we live and as we die:  
To this table now we come.  
From the many make us one.*

*Tune: Tony Alonso, © 2015 GIA Publications, Inc. Text: Gabe Huck, © 2015 GIA Publications, Inc. Reprinted with permission under ONE LICENSE #A-624954. All rights reserved.*

A favourite in our repertoire is [One Love Released](#) by K. Keil & B. Frenzel, the refrain of which is:

*Ref: One bread, one body, one cup, one call,  
One faith, one spirit present in us all.  
One prayer, one blessing, one hope, one peace,  
One church, one people, one love released.*

*Text and music © 1999, 2000, Robert H. Frenzel and Kevin Keil. Published by OCP. Reprinted with permission under ONE LICENSE #A-624954. All rights reserved.*

What did you notice? What is God revealing to us in these Communion hymns? Hold your reflections as we proceed.

It is important to be aware of the context of Communion. As we know, it is the fourth part of the four-part eucharistic action: take – bless – break – give. This action begins and ends with a procession. In the first procession the faithful present the gifts to be taken, blessed, broken and given. In the second procession the faithful are given the bread of life and the cup of salvation, that is, we receive who we have become in Christ. There's a lot to ponder here.

Communion is also part of the smaller unit known as the Communion Rite, a rite that is all about unity. Recall the hymns above.

Within this context, Communion is essentially an action we do together: we watch, listen, process, sing, engage in dialogue. These are the modes of our full, conscious and active participation.

With these things in mind let us turn our attention to the texts and rubrics of the Missal and the GIRM. Mindful that the liturgy is not the texts but the celebration, as you ponder the texts, imagine the liturgical action and perhaps the last time you participated in it. Does the whole liturgy – text and ritual action – invite our participation as celebrants or consumers?

### [Liturgical Texts for Reflection](#)



The following reflection presumes the liturgy is celebrated in its fullness without COVID-19 restrictions.

The liturgy works through signs perceptible to the senses and in ways appropriate to those signs. (CSL a 7)

In regard to Eucharist, Communion in particular, the central sign/symbol that needs to be perceptible to our senses is a shared meal: a meal in which the community gathers around one table, to eat from one loaf and drink from one cup.

A shared meal, of its nature, is communal. As celebrants the mode of our individual participation needs to convey this. As celebrants we are attentive to our brothers and sisters with whom we share this meal. The Communion procession – from beginning to end – is the focus of our attention. We watch and pray for each one of our brothers and sisters as they come to the table to eat and drink. While there is a personal dimension to Communion, it is not a private ‘me and God’ moment. The name ‘communion’ reveals its essential nature as a communal, unifying time. We receive Communion to become a communion.

As a sharing-in-one-meal, the ritual actions endeavour to unite the communion of the presider with that of the lay faithful. Having received Communion, the presider moves directly to distribute Communion to the faithful. The Communion hymn assists in establishing this unity. It begins with the presider’s Communion and continues until the Communion procession is finished.

Communion is a time for singing, not for quiet music. Uniting our voices in song strengthens the sense of this being a communal action. Soft instrumental music during the Communion procession reinforces Communion as private 'me and God' time.

If the central 'sign' is that we are sharing in the one meal by eating from the one loaf, then as a 85 of the GIRM indicates, all the lay faithful, like the presider, ought to receive Communion from the altar and NOT from the tabernacle. We receive from our sacrifice, not from that of another community. We presented the offerings and we receive who we have become through, with and in Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. The two processions balance each other. We can only receive because we have in the first instance given ourselves to be joined to Christ's offering. The whole Church is not only changed, it is made in the celebration of Eucharist. For presiders to deny the lay faithful of this full, conscious and active participation is to reduce them to the status of consumers. The ritual signs need to be bold and expansive if they are to embody the mystery they are meant to reveal.

To participate in Communion as celebrants demands everything of each one of us. The moment I approach the minister, extending my hands and engaging in that simple dialogue, is a moment of deep encounter that is life changing. I need, and ideally can feel, the love and prayer of my brothers and sisters supporting me as I muster the courage to say 'Amen' to the proclamation 'The body of Christ' and 'The blood of Christ'. I receive the body and blood of Christ as a sign of my commitment to live as a member of the body of Christ. I am making a public commitment, not alone, but as part of the Assembly of God's faithful people. This is too big to do alone. We can only do this together.

## Conclusion

Are we participating in the celebration of Eucharist as celebrants or consumers? It matters. As celebrants we gather as a community not as a group of individuals. As celebrants we come to offer ourselves to God with Christ, to be taken, blessed, broken open and poured out, and given in love for the life of the world. These four steps are the heart of the Paschal Mystery. As celebrants we come to Eucharist to learn the steps that we are called to live, day in and day out.

The integrity of the liturgy as a celebration of the faithful and the integrity of our lives as a communion of missionary disciples are inextricably linked. The Liturgy of the Eucharist demands that we participate as celebrants not consumers.

*One prayer, one blessing, one hope, one peace,  
One church, one people, one love released.*

We have missed more than we can really appreciate with live-streamed Mass during these COVID-19 times. In light of this experience, many are asking how we can better celebrate the Eucharist so that our experience of the love of God revealed in Christ will indeed change us – the Body of Christ gathered around the altar. Change starts with me and my participation in what Jesus asked us to do in his memory. To what change is the Holy Spirit calling you? To what change is the Holy Spirit calling us, both as celebrants of liturgy and life?

Imagine what the Church community would be like if we were all celebrants! Our world and our society need us to be celebrants.

What are you pondering? To what insight and conversion has your reflection led you?



## Some resources

You might like to:

- Read this article from America Magazine, '[Social Distancing and the Sacraments: How the Coronavirus has changed our sense of communion](#)'. You should be able to open this as this magazine allows people to view five free articles a month.
- Read these articles by Thomas O'Loughlin:
  - [Coronavirus and the Eucharist](#)
  - [After the virus: Liturgy and accountability](#)
  - [We are celebrants not consumers](#)
- Reflect on St Augustine's famous homily '[Your own Mystery](#)'.
- Watch an interview Michael Kelly sj facilitated on [virtual Mass](#).
- View the videos in the '[Flashes of Insight: let's talk liturgy](#)' series.
- Read the '[Diocesan Guidance on the Communion Rite at Mass](#)'. This is the second edition of the document. It has been revised in light of conversations across the diocesan community in 2019.
- Watch a short video on the [Fraction Rite](#) featuring Archbishop Mark Coleridge.
- Watch a video demonstrating the [use of large scored hosts](#).
- Listen to the hymn, [In the Breaking of the Bread](#) by Chris Ward or [Behold the Lamb of God](#) by the St Louis Jesuits.

## Mystagogical Reflection: The real deal.

On page two there is an abbreviated form of Mystagogical Reflection. What follows is 'the real deal'. A full process of reflection that when done in a group could take at least forty-five minutes and up to an hour and a half. A group of at least three and no more than about eight works best. If the group is too large the sharing is compromised.

*Their eyes were opened, and they recognised him ... (Lk 24: 31)*

1. **Encounter** with Christ in the Word proclaimed ... listen ...
2. **Recollection:** What happened? What did you see? hear? do?  
*An Invitation to recall what happened. No interpretation, just what happened. The detail is important.*
3. **Reflection:** What did you notice – what word or phrase, prayer, symbol or action captures your attention? What did you experience/feel? What meaning is God revealing to you?  
*An invitation to be attentive to Christ present in the encounter.*
4. **Faith Sharing:** What wisdom does our Catholic understating of liturgy bring to the meaning you found in your encounter with Christ in the liturgy?  
*An invitation to reflect on your experience through the lens of our Catholic faith, particularly Catholic liturgy as the celebration of our faith.*
5. **Connection:** How is Christ's revelation rehearsing us for life now – as missionary disciples and as church?  
*An invitation to consider what it means to live from Christ here and now.*
6. **Conversion:** How will you live differently as a result of what you have experienced?  
*What is dying? What is being raised up?*

Contemplate – rest in the presence of God.

*Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures (Lk 24: 32)*

## Abbreviations

CSL: The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

GIRM: General Instruction of the Roman Missal

## Acknowledgements

Prayers and references to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal are from the English Translation of the Roman Missal © 2010 International Committee on English in the Liturgy Inc. (ICEL). All rights reserved.

Photo: p. 2 by [Jill Sauve](#) on [Unsplash](#).

Image: Cover and p. 4: Illustration by Elizabeth Wang. T-00535-OL-V2. *At the Mass, if we unite ourselves with Christ's self-offering, we are like jewels on His robe, as he looks up in love to the Father* © Radiant Light 2006, <https://radiantlight.org.uk/>. Used with permission.

Photo: p. 9: Image by [PublicDomainPictures](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Photos: p. 6, 8, 11, 13. © Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle. All rights reserved.

*Louise Gannon rsj is the Diocesan Manager Worship and Prayer.*

© November 2020. Updated November 2021. Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle