What follows is a compilation of a series of bulletin articles attempting to "explain" the Mass. (The series began in Advent 2015 and ended on the 2nd Sunday of Easter 2016.)

To make this one continuous text some editorial adjustments have been made to make the flow smoother. There are references to the source documents that were used in writing the bulletin articles, and for convenience, the most commonly used references will be made with abbreviations of the source documents.

Those are:

CCC refers to the Catechism of the Catholic Church GIRM refers to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal The number following the CCC or GIRM refers to the paragraph in the source document where the information is found, so you can reference and check them out.

Another source document that was utilized extensively, and occasionally quoted from is The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of the Mass by Lawrence J. Johnson, 2011 (5th edition)

I hope this journeying through the Mass helps all of us to know and practice our Catholic faith more authentically, and to pray the Mass in the way the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, wishes us to pray.

Please note: what is presented here regarding the Mass is not a matter of personal opinion, but what the Catholic Church holds and teaches. If you disagree, or feel something is not presented correctly, I ask and encourage you to prayerfully investigate the official documents of the Catholic Church (available on the web at www.vatican.va) before publicly expressing any misguided discontent which may lead to confusion and upset of others, or for yourself.

"A Journey through the Mass". Why? Since the Mass (aka the celebration of the Eucharist) is the source and summit of the Christian life (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC] 1324), it would be good to know more about this particular liturgical action we call "Mass". (FYI, "liturgy" comes from a Greek word leitourgia meaning "work of the people") We do, or participate in, the actions of Mass often enough (hopefully) that we at times experience them on "auto-pilot", and

we miss the significance of what is happening. [The "hopefully" is not that we are on "auto-pilot", but that we come to Mass regularly.] An old saying goes: "Familiarity breeds contempt." Another way of saying this is that familiarity breeds a misplaced certainty that we understand something or have exhausted all its possibilities.

There are two things that need to be addressed before delving through the various parts of the Mass. Addressing them now will provide a framework for understanding the various parts of the Mass, and why particular actions are, or are not, allowed. The first of these two to be addressed is the realization, and acknowledgment, that the Mass is not our own as individuals, as a parish, as a diocese, or even as a country, to do as we please with. Since the Eucharist (Mass) is the source and summit of the Christian life [CCC 1324], and the Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life [CCC 2177], it is something that belongs to the universal Church.

As such: (1) Regulation of the sacred liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church, that is, on the Apostolic See, and, as laws may determine, on the bishop. (2) In virtue of the power conceded by law, the regulation of the liturgy within certain limits belongs also to various kinds of bishops' conferences, legitimately established, with competence in given territories. (3) Therefore no other person, not even a priest, may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority. (Paragraph 22 of Sacrosanctum Concilium, the document on The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, from Vatican II)

Within the Catholic Church there are eight recognized Rites, of which the "Roman Rite constitutes a notable and precious part of the liturgical treasure and patrimony [heritage] of the Catholic Church; its riches are conducive to the good of the universal Church, so that their loss would gravely harm her." (GIRM 397) (The broad meaning of "rite" is to be understood not only in the external, ritual sense of repetitive ceremonial activity with fixed rules, but also in the distinctive character that sustains the rite, and which the rite expresses.)

What does this have to do with us as we celebrate Mass in our parishes? We treasure the Mass so much, and rightfully so, that we should safeguard it from anything that would harm it. This doesn't mean that the Mass is so untouchable that changes can never occur – there have been obvious adaptations in the celebration of the Mass throughout the Church's 2000 year history –

but those changes are never introduced on the whim of someone who thinks "it's a good idea" or because "I (we) like it". As the Church grows and encompasses more and more peoples, some with distinctive cultural identities, at times certain cultural innovations do occur in the Mass; however, these "liturgical renewal innovations should not be made unless required by true and certain usefulness to the Church, nor without exercising caution to ensure that new forms grow in some sense organically from forms already existing, … Inculturation, moreover, requires a necessary length of time, lest the authentic liturgical tradition suffer hasty and incautious contamination." (GIRM 398) What it comes down to is this: any innovations in the Church's sacred liturgy, no matter how well intended, can only take place with the recognitio [approval] of the Apostolic See (i.e. Rome).

The second thing to be addressed before we proceed through the Mass is the recognition that the people at Mass have different roles, or functions, during Mass, and those different roles/functions have, at times, words and gestures (body positions and actions) particular to them. The most basic and obvious distinction of roles at Mass is that of the ordained clergy and the laity. (For simplicity of explanation, for Catholics at Mass it is the distinctive roles of the priest and the laity [i.e. those not ordained].) It is the role, or function, that the person has during Mass that determines the words and gestures used, not the worthiness of the person. That the role of the ministerial priesthood has distinctive functions with corresponding words and actions particular to it, and different from the laity, isn't something new for the Church. The Church grew and developed from the traditions of our older brothers and sisters in faith – the Jews. In the Old Testament, there are many examples of the specific roles of the priests (e.g. the Book of Leviticus). Clearly, Catholic priests are not the same as the priests of the temple in Jerusalem in ancient times, but they do have a similar function. They do not offer animal sacrifices as was done in the temple, but they do offer the sacrifice of the Mass on our altars. This special priestly function has special words and actions specific to it. The following examples might be helpful:

In the dialogue prayers at Mass, the priest introduces and leads the dialogue, but doesn't finish it. When the priest says: "The Lord be with you.", the people respond: "And with your spirit." Someone leads the prayer (the priest), and someone responds (the people). The priest does not respond to himself, so it would not be proper for him to join the people in the response "And with your spirit." (This may seem obvious, but is an important, albeit simple, distinction.)

Another instance regards the Eucharistic Prayer, the main body of which is prayed audibly by the priest, but the people (not the priest) pray the acclamation after the priest says "The mystery of faith"; and the people (not the priest) have the final word of the Eucharistic Prayer as they give their assent in the recited or sung "AMEN".

With gestures there are similar distinctions as to what gestures are appropriate for the roles of the ordained and those of the laity. Who does what during Mass is determined by the rubrics (instructions) of the Roman Missal. The rubrics are integral to the Mass and, therefore, are not optional. (If you look at a Missal, the rubrics are the words in red.) For example, during certain prayers or parts of prayers the rubrics will say: "Then, with hands extended, the Priest says ....." There are times when the rubrics say: "The people acclaim", meaning not the priest. And there are yet other times when the rubrics say: "He, together with the people ...", indicating everyone.

Another example: the orans position (hands and arms outstretched) during liturgies is a gesture of prayer reserved for the ordained, and is not to be used by the laity either along with the priest or in response to the priest (e.g. as the people respond, "And with your spirit."). The rubrics indicate that the Priest extends his hands; it does not say that the people do. Some may be thinking that since the rubrics don't specifically say the people can't extend their hands, then they can use that gesture. In the Missal, just because a rubric doesn't say you can't do something doesn't mean you can do it. The assumption is that you would not do something you are not supposed to do in the first place. (This would be similar to a child saying to a parent, "Well, you didn't say I couldn't do that", when the "that" is something the parent would never have expected their child would do.) Again, this is not about the worthiness of the person, but of their liturgical role at Mass. In order to safeguard the integrity of the Mass, what this comes down to is that no one, neither the priest nor the people, should be using words or gestures which are not called for or allowed in the Roman Missal.

If this reality regarding the instructions of the Roman Missal can be kept in mind as we venture through the Mass, it will help to clarify the appropriate use of the various words and gestures, and help us to more faithfully celebrate the source and summit of our Christian life – the Mass.

Before beginning with the Mass' Introductory Rites, what about when we enter church for Mass (hopefully before Mass begins)? For Catholics, we have the practice of dipping some fingers into

holy water from the holy water stoups placed near the doors of the church or from the baptismal font, and signing ourselves with the sign of the cross as a remembrance of our Baptism, which is the first sacrament we receive and which brings us into the life of the Church. The inside of a Catholic church is a holy place, and it should look, feel, and be treated differently than other buildings we go into. While we believe that God is present everywhere, in a very real and special way God is tangibly present as the Body of Christ in the form of consecrated hosts in the tabernacle.

Therefore, a silent (or at least quiet) sense of reverential awe should be observed. (What about hospitality and greeting those coming to Mass? That fittingly takes place in the Narthex, aka gathering space.) Here in Alpena, with all of our churches having the tabernacle behind the altar, a genuflection (if physically able) toward the tabernacle is an appropriate gesture before entering the pews. A time of quietude (It's a real word; look it up.) is a wonderful way to get ready for Mass to begin.

We just covered the actions we do when we first come into church and our demeanor before Mass begins. What about the way we cover ourselves—yes, how we clothe ourselves for Mass? Have you ever noticed how people act differently when they are "dressed up"? Whether it is school children going to a dignified place for a field trip, school athletes dressed up for "game day", adults at a job interview, or a wedding— there is a sense of something "special". If you're thinking that clothes shouldn't affect the way we behave, you're right, they shouldn't, but they do. Am I talking about an enforced "dress code" for Mass? No (though some would like that). We are blessed to live in an area where many people like to vacation (including ourselves), and vacation time is often casual. There is something nice and friendly about being casual, but casual can still be neat and clean and modest. In the Gospel of Matthew, we hear the parable of a wedding feast to which everyone is invited, yet one guest "not properly dress for a wedding feast" is thrown out (Matthew 22:1-14). It's interesting that "the wedding feast of the Lamb" (Rev 19:9) is a way of referring to the Mass. Sometimes I wonder if we really believe what we say we do: that Jesus is truly present in our midst at Mass. How would you dress in the presence of God? But remember, in the parable it is the "king" (God) who orders the improperly dressed guest to be thrown out. We are not the "king"; so while we graciously welcome all who enter our doors for Mass let each of us also be good examples of being properly dressed for the wedding feast of the Lamb—the Mass.

The obvious first thing that we notice when Mass begins is the Entrance Procession. When the procession begins “A common bodily posture, to be observed by all those taking part [if physically able], is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community gathered together for the Sacred Liturgy, for it expresses the intentions and spiritual attitude of the participants and also fosters them.” (GIRM 43)

“The faithful should stand from the beginning of the Entrance Chant, or while the Priest approaches the altar, until the end of the Collect [aka the Opening Prayer]. For the sake of uniformity in gestures and postures during one and the same celebration, the faithful should follow the directions which the Deacon, a lay minister, or the Priest gives, according to what is laid down in the Missal.” (GIRM 43) [underlining is my Emphasis]

The entrance procession and gathering hymn are the first liturgical actions that all participate in as Mass begins. For the assembly, that usually involves just standing in place and singing as the altar servers with a Processional Cross adorned with a figure of Christ crucified (see GIRM 122), lector or deacon with Book of the Gospels, and priest process down the aisle toward the altar. (On occasion the procession may be in silence.) When those processing have arrived at the sanctuary — the area around the altar, presider’s chair, and ambo [the stand where the scriptures are proclaimed], usually elevated by one or more steps — the priest and other ministers genuflect as they approach the altar (GIRM 274) unless carrying a substantial object (e.g. Processional Cross, Book of the Gospels, candles). (In churches where the tabernacle is not located behind the altar, they reverence the altar with a profound bow – i.e. a bow from the waist vs a simple bow of the head – instead of genuflecting.) After the genuflection (or bow when appropriate), the priest goes up to the altar and venerates it with a kiss. If there is a deacon or any concelebrating priest(s), they also venerate the altar with a kiss. (Kissing the altar is one of the gestures reserved for the ordained clergy.)

When the entrance hymn is concluded, the Priest stands at the Presider’s chair, and along with those present, all sign themselves with the Sign of the Cross. The Sign of the Cross is a traditional prelude to prayer for Catholics, and so is very appropriate for the beginning of Mass: the Eucharistic celebration which is “the source and summit of the Christian life” (CCC 1324). It is a form of self-blessing with strong baptismal overtones, since in the rite of Christian

initiation a person (whether an infant or adult) is signed with the cross, for it is from the victorious Cross of Jesus Christ that salvation comes to us. Also, every Christian has been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This Sign of the Cross should be a large, unhurried sign, from forehead to breast, from shoulder to shoulder, symbolically encompassing the whole of us. We are not ashamed of the cross; we are proud of it.

After the Sign of the Cross, the priest greets the people in a specific ritualistic way. It is more than a friendly "Good morning" or "What a lovely day", etc. There are three greetings for the priest to choose from, the simplest being: "The Lord be with you". Whichever greeting is used by the priest, he says it while (per the rubrics), "extending his hands" (Remember, the gesture of extending hands is reserved for bishops and priests, not because of particular worthiness on their part, but because of their liturgical role at Mass.) To whichever of the three greetings the priest uses, the rubrics of the Missal state, "The people reply: And with your spirit" (There is no mention of hand gestures by the people, because none should be given. Again, outstretched, raised hands during Church liturgies, of which the Mass is foremost, is reserved for the role of ordained clergy.) If a bishop is presiding at Mass, he uses the greeting: "Peace be with you." (Even a bishop has to follow the rubrics.)

The priest, or a Deacon or another minister may then give a very brief introduction to the Mass of the day. [With 'rubrics' what is stated, or not stated, is important. If the rubrics state that something is to be done, then it is done; if they state that something may be done, then it is an option that can be done, but not required; if there is no mention of something, the assumption is the 'something' should not be done or added. Again, except for the Pope, or by decree of the local bishop with approval of the Apostolic See, "no other person, not even a priest, may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority." (# 22 of Sacrosanctum Concilium, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the very first document from Vatican II)] Some wonder why the people now say "And with your spirit" instead of the response they had been saying, "And also with you." Briefly, it is a closer translation of the Latin (Et cum spiritu tuo), which Pope John Paul II (now St. John Paul) called for in the 3rd Edition of the Roman Missal. It matches the response that had already existed in most other major languages, including Spanish, French, Italian, and German.

Additionally,the response “And with your spirit” is inspired by passages that conclude several of St. Paul’s letters (e.g., Gal 6:18; 2 Tim 4:22). This response is more than a simple expression of good will – the minister is the one whose spirit has received the Spirit of God in Ordination and who thereby is a special “servant of Christ” (1 Corinthians 4:1) Following the greeting is the Penitential Act, a simple penitential rite reflecting both Scripture and tradition. In Matthew 5:23-25 Christ calls for reconciliation with others before offering sacrifice. And in the Didache, an ancient document dating from the 1st century, it states that on the Lord’s Day people are to come together to break bread and give thanks “after first confessing their sins” so that the sacrifice will be pure.

The Penitential Act is not the Sacrament of Reconciliation (aka: Confession), but an acknowledgement of our sins and guilt, and that we are a community ever in need of conversion, of being reconciled with God and others. It is a proclamation of faith in a God who is loving, kind, and the source of all healing and reconciliation. There are three forms of the Penitential Act to choose from, of which a set of three invocations addressed to Christ (with the assembly’s response), and the Confiteor, are the most common. The Kyrie, eleison (Lord, have mercy) invocations follow unless they have just been part of the Penitential Act. (A sprinkling rite, a reminder of the life-giving waters of Baptism, may replace the usual Penitential Act. While most often used during the Easter season, the sprinkling rite may be celebrated during any season of the year.) On Sundays outside Advent and Lent, and on Solemnities and Feasts, and at particular celebrations of a more solemn character, the Gloria is then either sung or recited. The Gloria has been called by some the “Angelic Hymn” since its first words are those of the angels at Bethlehem. “The Gloria in excelsis (Glory to God in the highest) is a most ancient and venerable hymn by which the Church, gathered in the Holy Spirit, glorifies and entreats God the Father and the Lamb. The text of this hymn may not be replaced by any other.” (GIRM 53)

The Collect comes after the Gloria and begins with the priest saying “Let us pray”. The “Priest calls upon the people to pray and everybody, together with the Priest, observes a brief silence so that they may become aware of being in God’s presence and may call to mind their intentions. . .The people, joining in this petition, make the prayer their own by means of the acclamation Amen.” (GIRM 54) The word “Collect” comes from the Latin meaning “to bring together” or “to collect”. The purpose of this prayer, which the priest prays aloud on behalf of the assembly, is to bring together – to collect – our thoughts and minds and all that we as individuals bring to this

Mass. So there should be a period of silence between the "Let us pray" and the Collect prayer. During this quiet pause, each person – in silence – presents the intentions they want to bring to this Mass, and the priest brings them all together in the Collect prayer. It is during the quiet before the Collect that the priest – in silence – prays for the intention of that Mass for which an offering was made. The Collect concludes the Introductory Rites of Mass, and we then move into the Liturgy of the Word. [FYI – in some parishes you may hear an intercession in the General Intercessions (aka Prayers of the Faithful) something like, "For those things we hold in the silence of our hearts."

The appropriate time to mention those things is during the silence following the "Let us pray" just before the Collect.] "When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his word, proclaims the Gospel. Therefore, the readings from the Word of God are to be listened to reverently by everyone, for they are an element of greatest importance in the Liturgy."(GIRM 29)

"The main part of the Liturgy of the Word is made up of the readings from Sacred Scripture. . . As for the Homily, the Profession of Faith and the Universal Prayer, they develop and conclude it."(GIRM #55)

The Liturgy of the Word should be celebrated meditatively and to help in this periods of silence should be observed, e.g. before the Liturgy of the Word itself begins, after the First and Second Reading, and after the Homily. (GIRM #56). The "readings are always read from the ambo." (GIRM #58) (The ambo is one of three pieces of furniture in the sanctuary, which are: the altar, presider's chair, and ambo.)

"The function of proclaiming the readings is by tradition not presidential but ministerial. Therefore the readings are to be read by a reader, but the Gospel by the Deacon or, in his absence, by another Priest. If, however, a Deacon or another Priest is not present, the Priest Celebrant himself should read the Gospel". (GIRM #59)

The Lectionary arranges the Sunday readings in a three-year cycle, the characteristic feature of each year being the Gospel: year A is based on Matthew, year B on Mark, and year C on Luke. St. John's Gospel occurs on the first Sundays of Lent, during the Easter season, and on certain

Sundays during year B. For weekdays there is a twoyear Lectionary cycle: the Gospels remain the same each year but the first reading varies. Each cycle (the three-year Sunday cycle and the two-year weekday cycle) begins with the first Sunday of Advent.

Each reading is concluded by the people's exclamation Thanks be to God or Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ (after the Gospel) a custom which goes far back into the history of the Roman Missal. These replies of the assembled people "give honor to the Word of God that they have received in faith and with gratitude (GIRM #59)

"The faithful should stand … for the Alleluia Chant before the Gospel; while the Gospel itself is proclaimed; during the Profession of Faith and the Universal Prayer … The faithful should sit, on the other hand, during the readings before the Gospel and the Responsorial Psalm and for the Homily" (GIRM #43)

While all Scripture is sacred, the Gospels are given special consideration and signs of respect and honor. One way that specialness is shown is that we stand when the Gospel is proclaimed. And while the other readings may be proclaimed by any lector, the Gospel is read by a deacon, or if a deacon is not present, then by a priest. Other signs of honor for the Gospels are: there may be a separate Book of the Gospels (the lectionary contains all the scriptures proclaimed at Mass, including the Gospels); if part of the entrance procession, the Book of the Gospels is carried in the procession, not the lectionary; if the Book of the Gospels is on the altar, when it is processed to the ambo by the deacon or priest, it may be preceded by lay ministers with a thurible (aka a censor) and candles; before the Gospel is proclaimed the book may be incensed (incense may be used at any Mass, but is usually reserved for special occasions).

"At the ambo, the Priest opens the book and, with hands joined, say The Lord be with you, to which the people reply, And with your spirit. Then he says, A reading from the holy Gospel, making the Sign of the Cross with his thumb on the book and on his forehead, mouth, and breast, which everyone else does as well. [This expresses readiness to open one's mind to the word, to confess it with the mouth, and to safeguard it in the heart.] The people acclaim, Glory to you, O Lord. The Priest incenses the book, if incense is being used. Then he proclaims the Gospel and at the end pronounces the acclamation The Gospel of the Lord, to which all reply, Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ. The Priest kisses the book," (GIRM 134). As the priest kisses the

Book of the Gospel, he says quietly (so you won't hear this), Through the words of the Gospel may our sins be wiped away.

After the Gospel, comes the homily. "On Sundays and Holydays of Obligation there is to be a Homily at every Mass that is celebrated with the people attending and it may not be omitted without a grave reason." (GIRM 66) The Homily has long been part of the Mass, as attested to by one of the oldest descriptions of the Eucharist, written about the year 150, by an early Church Father, Justin the Martyr. Most often the homily relates to the scripture readings from the day, but could also be about some other sacred text (e.g. some aspect of the Roman Missal, or the Rite of a sacrament being celebrated at that Mass).

On Sundays and Solemnities, and other particular solemn celebrations, the Creed is recited after the homily. "The purpose of the Creed or Profession of Faith is that the whole gathered people may respond to the Word of God proclaimed in the readings taken from Sacred Scripture and explained in the Homily and that they may also honor and confess the great mysteries of the faith by pronouncing the rule of faith in a formula approved for liturgical use and before the celebration of these mysteries in the Eucharist begins." (GIRM 67). The approved formulas are the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed. The Creed Americans usually proclaim is the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed was originally formulated by the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, which was called to address, in part, the heresy of Arianism which denied the true divinity of Christ and distorted the true relationship of Jesus and God the Father.

It is longer than the Apostles' Creed partly due to additional statements clarifying that relationship (e.g. "born of the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father") Of all the words of the revised translation of the Roman Missal, which we started using in 2011, "consubstantial" has probably been the hardest to get used to. It replaced the expression "one in Being". It is closer to the Latin equivalent, consubstantialis, which means having the same substance, which is even more fundamental than "one in Being." Yes, "consubstantial" is a very unusual word, not one we use in everyday language. But when describing the unique relationship of the Son and the Father, why not use a unique word — a word that, when you hear it, will take your thoughts to God, and not something mundane.

The Creed is recited by the priest together with the people with everyone standing. At the words "and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man" all make a profound bow [my emphasis] (GIRM 137). A profound bow is not just a simple nod of the head, but a bow of the body, from the waist. Why do we do this? Think about it, God chose to become a human being (incarnate), changed the history of the world, and gave humanity a dignity it never had before, and we, as Church, are called to honor that with the action of a bow. On the Solemnities of the Annunciation (Jesus' conception by the Holy Spirit) and the Nativity of the Lord (Jesus' birth), we are all to genuflect at those words. (GIRM 137) It amazes me that many people still do not bow during these words of the Creed even though the Church's instructions clearly state to do so. Yet, some of these same people will persistently do actions not called for (e.g. certain hand gestures). I wonder, do we actually believe what we say we believe?

Something to ponder not just as we take this journey through the Mass, but every time we celebrate Mass, is that what we take for granted and so often just glibly go through the motions of (e.g. stating the Creed, being reverently attentive during the Eucharistic Prayer, or receiving Holy Communion) so many people suffered and died for – possibly even some of your relatives! It wasn't that long ago, that it was illegal and punishable by death to celebrate Mass in Ireland; French Catholics were persecuted and executed during the French Revolution; Catholics in Poland were persecuted and suppressed under communism. Violent persecutions continue in our day, particularly in parts of the Middle East and Africa. And we just don't feel like singing, praying, bowing, … , during Mass?

Regarding the Creed, the following is a reflection on the Creed: When we believe that God is our Father and that he is the Creator of all things visible and invisible, we can live as brothers and sisters who treasure one another and all creation. We can live as people who recognize that we are not the ones in control, but that we depend on God, our Creator, for all things. We can get up and go to work each day knowing that, as children of the Creator of the universe, made in his image, we bear a striking family resemblance…. When we believe that Jesus, the Son of God, became one of us, we can live with respect for our own dignity and the dignity of others, knowing that our God has a human face. When we believe that Jesus suffered, died, and rose from the dead, we can live with confidence, knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God – not even death. When we believe that Jesus will come again, we can live with hope, knowing that we indeed have a future.

When we believe that the Holy Spirit is the Lord, the giver of life, we can live without fear, knowing that we are not alone but that the spirit of the risen Christ is with us at all times.

When we believe that the church is "one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church," we can live as people who seek unity, who seek to do God's will, who embrace diversity, and who are sent to carry on a mission that has been handed on to us by those who walked with Jesus.

When we believe in everlasting life, we can live with perspective and without anxiety, knowing that God has a plan for us to live with him through eternity. There's one one way to respond to all of the above, and it's the last word of the creed: Amen! (Living the Mass: How One Hour a Week Can Change Your Life by Fr. Dominic Grassi and Joe Paprocki, Loyola Press, Chicago, 2011 pp.67-68)

After the Creed (or after the homily if the Creed is not recited), are prayers of intercession offered up for the needs of the Church and the world in which we live. There are several titles used for these prayers: the Universal Prayer, or more traditionally, the Prayer of the Faithful since in ancient times the catechumens (the non-baptized who were preparing to become part of the Church) were often dismissed before these prayers; and the title General Intercessions, since they extend beyond the needs and concerns of the local community. (This is also the reason why the intention of a particular Mass is not mentioned during these intercessions. The proper place for the particular Mass intention, if there is one, to be prayed for is by the priest celebrant during the time of silence prior to the Collect, aka "Opening Prayer")

These intercessory prayers are an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word. Having heard the word, the assembled people, confident that God will act today as he has in the past, offer "petitions, prayers, intercessions … for all" (1 Timothy 2:1), thus exercising the office of a priestly people, which they received through baptism. "It is for the Priest Celebrant to regulate this prayer from the chair. He himself begins it with a brief introduction, by which he calls upon the faithful to pray, and likewise he concludes it with an oration. The intentions announced should be sober, be composed with a wise liberty and in few words, and they should be expressive of the prayer of the entire community. They are announced from the ambo or from another suitable place, by the Deacon or by a cantor, a reader, or one of the lay faithful. The people, for their part,

stand and give expression to their prayer … by an invocation said in common after each intention." (GIRM 71)

Since the Church is both universal and local, at least one intention is usually taken from each of the following categories: (GIRM 70) a) for the needs of the Church b) for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world c) for those burdened by any kind of difficulty d) for the local community. "At the very end, the Priest, with hands extended [my emphasis], concludes the petitions with a prayer." (GIRM 138)

The Prayer of the Faithful concludes the Liturgy of the Word, which prepares us for and leads us to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The ambo was the focal point during the Liturgy of the Word, for from the ambo the Sacred Scriptures were proclaimed. Now, as the Mass continues with the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the altar is the focal point.

"The Christian altar is by its very nature a table of sacrifice and at the same time a table of the paschal banquet: a unique altar on which the sacrifice of the cross is perpetuated in mystery throughout the ages until Christ comes; a table at which the Church's children assemble and give thanks to God and receive the body and blood of Christ." (from Dedication of a Church and an Altar, Ch. IV, no. 4) Because of this the altar itself is a symbol of Christ and has such a central role in the Mass that it is given particular reverence with a bow when approaching or crossing in front of the sanctuary, and with a kiss by any priests and deacons as they enter the sanctuary at the beginning of Mass, and before leaving the sanctuary at the end of Mass.

The first action of the Liturgy of the Eucharist is the preparation of the altar, which consists of the placing of the corporal, purificator, chalice and Missal on the altar. Since this is a ministerial task, it is carried out by someone other than the presiding priest — i.e. a deacon or altar server.

(FYI: the corporal is a white linen cloth placed on top of the altar cloth, on which are placed the chalice and paten—the plate or bowl which holds the hosts to be consecrated. Later, during the Communion Rite, the large consecrated host is broken into smaller pieces and the corporal is there to catch any small fragments of the Body of Christ which may fall. The purificator is a white linen cloth used to wipe the edge of the chalice.)

While we have seen this action at every Mass we have participated in, and probably take no special notice of it, the preparation of the altar at this time and in this way makes it clear that, at this Mass, something new is beginning — the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

One of the reasons that you might not notice the preparation of the altar is, at Sunday Masses at least, that is usually the same time that the gifts that the faithful bring (e.g. their monetary offerings) are being collected, often with the help of the ushers. "Even money or other gifts for the poor or for the Church, brought by the faithful or collected in the church, are acceptable." (GIRM 73). These monetary gifts, or other gifts, represent the fruits of the labor of the faithful—what they personally offer to God in gratitude for how God has blessed them. These, along with bread and wine, are brought forward.

After the altar has been prepared, the presentation of the gifts is made (another term often associated with this part of the Mass is the "Offertory", though the actual 'offering' of the bread and wine takes place within the Eucharistic Prayer). The "gifts which will become Christ's Body and Blood are brought to the altar. . . It is a praiseworthy practice for the bread and wine to be presented by the faithful. . . Even money or other gifts for the poor or for the Church, brought by the faithful or collected in the church, are acceptable; given their purpose, they are to be put in a suitable place away from the Eucharistic table." (GIRM 73) It is not that we are ashamed of the monetary offerings, or other gifts, that they are placed away from altar (after all, they are a representation of the fruits of our labor), but that we will not be asking God to change them into Christ's Body and Blood, as we do the bread and wine, which are, thus, placed on the altar. "The bread for celebrating the Eucharist must be made only from wheat, must be recently made, and, according to the ancient tradition of the Latin Church, must be unleavened." (GIRM 320)

"The wine for the celebration of the Eucharist must be from the fruit of the vine, natural, and unadulterated, that is, without admixture of extraneous substances." (GIRM 322) (A little later, water will be mixed with the wine, but the wine as presented by the faithful is just wine.)

The procession of the gifts (bread and wine, and—if there was a collection—monetary offerings) "is a symbolic expression of the gathered assembly's participation in the Eucharist and the social mission of the Church." (The Mystery of Faith, p.60) These gifts are accepted by the priest or a deacon, and the bread and wine are placed on the altar. "The Priest raises the bread a little

above the altar and prays a formula, modeled on a Jewish table prayer said by the father of the family, which blesses or praises God as the creator of the world for the gift of bread. After the cup has been prepared, the Priest says a similar prayer praising the Father for the gift of wine. . .Bread and wine, being the God-given fruits of the earth, symbolize our world, our life, and our labor. They are presented in view of what they will become, i.e., our bread of life and our spiritual drink." (The Mystery of Faith, p.62) When the prayer formula is prayed aloud by the priest (an option if any singing for this part of the Mass is finished, otherwise it is prayed quietly), the people respond by acclaiming, Blessed be God, for ever.

"There is something special about Christ choosing food and drink to be the symbols of his self-giving, because food and drink exist not for themselves but for other living creatures. . .That is how Jesus identified himself: under the forms of bread and wine, as the man who lived not for himself, but for others, that through his self-sacrifice others might live." (Liturgy Made Simple, by Mark Searle, 1981, p. 58)

Backing up a little: before the chalice is presented and the prayer praising the Father for the gift of wine is said, the wine is mixed with a little bit of water. Why? The mixing of water and wine is an ancient liturgical practice that grew from the custom of diluting the wine with water to make it less heavily textured and strong (which it tended to be) — this was a practice that sober people did. Early Christians continued this practical action when they celebrated Mass, but it soon took on dual symbolic meanings. In the west it represented: the union of Christ with the faithful: just as wine receives water, so Christ takes us and our sins to himself. St. Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200/210-258) in a letter against those who would use only water in the eucharistic celebration wrote: "we see that the water stands for the people whereas the wine stands for the blood of Christ. When water is united with the wine in the cup, the people are made one with Christ; the believing people are joined and united with him in whom they believe" (Letter 63). The eastern interpretation was that the wine and water represent the divine and human natures in Christ. (The Mystery of Faith, p. 64)

In Rome the rite eventually expressed both symbolic meanings: the wine, representing Christ and his divine nature; the water, correspondingly representing the faithful (you and I) and Christ's human nature. The mingling of wine with water is a beautiful expression with either paired meaning, because once the water is mixed with the wine, they cannot be separated. The

words the priest, or deacon, says when pouring the water into the wine are: "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." (The Order of Mass, # 24 in the Roman Missal) Through the Eucharist we share in the divine dignity of Christ who became incarnate for us.

After the bread and wine are prepared and the prayer praising God the Father for the gifts of bread and wine is prayed by the priest (Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation . . .), the priest celebrant alone makes a profound bow while saying the following prayer asking God to favorably receive the bread and wine which will soon be offered up in the Eucharistic Prayer. The prayer is said quietly, though when there is no music and a microphone is used you may hear the words: "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." (Liturgy of the Eucharist, #26, in the Roman Missal)

Incense is a traditional symbol of prayer rising up to God (see Psalm 141:2; Revelation 8:3-4). If incense is going to be used over the bread and wine, it occurs at this time. (The use of incense is optional, but it may be used at any Mass.) The "Priest may incense the gifts placed on the altar and then incense the cross and the altar itself, so as to signify the Church's offering and prayer rising like incense in the sight of God. Next, the Priest, because of his sacred ministry, and the people, by reason of their baptismal dignity, may now be incensed by the Deacon or by another minister." (GIRM 75) When incense is used at this part of Mass, the priest and the people are incensed along with the bread and wine, since they are to unite themselves and their prayers with the gifts which will be offered in the Eucharistic Prayer.

Then the priest washes his hands. Some have the notion that this washing is associated with Pontius Pilate's washing of his hands after condemning Jesus to death. The hand washing of the priest is not a connection with Pilate, but is a connection with the ceremonial washing of hands that the high priest did in Jesus' time "before making the sacrifice of killing an unblemished, spotless lamb in the Temple of Jerusalem on the day of Passover. So, too, celebrating Mass today, the priest prepares to offer up the Lamb of God (Jesus Christ) to God the Father, so he ceremonially washes his hands to offer a spotless sacrifice." (Catholicism for Dummies, p.158)

This ‘offering up the Lamb of God’ at Mass is a function of the ordained priesthood, so only the priest celebrant does this ceremonial washing of hands, while saying quietly: “Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”

Just as the celebration of Mass is the center of the whole of Christian life for the Church universally and locally, and for each of the faithful individually [this statement can be made because within the Mass is found the high point both of the action by which God sanctifies the world in Christ and of the worship that the human race offers to the Father, adoring him through Christ and in the Holy Spirit (GIRM 16)], the center and high point of the Mass itself begins with the Eucharistic Prayer, that is, the prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. The meaning of this Prayer is that the whole congregation of the faithful joins with Christ in confessing the great deeds of God and in the offering of Sacrifice. It requires that everyone listens to it with reverence and in silence. (GIRM 78) The Eucharistic Prayer is one of the “presidential prayers”, meaning it is “Addressed to God by the Priest who presides over the assembly in the person of Christ, in the name of the entire holy people and of all present.” (GIRM 30)

In the early Church the Eucharistic Prayer was closely connected to a series of table prayers required at every Jewish meal, however, even during apostolic times, a process of simplification and unification occurred, perhaps in conjunction with the separation of the Eucharist from a regular meal. That being said, in the first few centuries the early Eucharistic Prayers were extemporaneous and improvised. From about the 4th century until 1968, there was only the one Eucharistic Prayer used in the Roman Rite, called the Roman Canon (from Latin/Greek for “rule” or “law”).

In 1968, following Vatican II (1963-1965), a slightly revised version of the Canon was published, now known as Eucharistic Prayer I, together with three other prayers designated as Eucharistic Prayer II, III, and IV. Eucharistic Prayer II is extremely brief and simple, and based on a model given in the Apostolic Tradition (c.215), attributed to St. Hippolytus, one of the early Church Fathers.

In 1974 three Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children were approved, but their use is strictly limited to Masses celebrated with children (i.e. they are the majority of the assembled

faithful). Now, there are also two Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation and four for Various Needs and Occasions, for a total of 13 approved Eucharistic Prayers for use in the Roman Rite. Priests rely heavily on the Missal even if they usually use just a few of the available Eucharistic Prayers, because they are "not permitted, on [their] own initiative, to add, to remove, or to change anything in the celebration of Mass." (GIRM 24)

Let's further delve into this most important prayer which is the central action of the entire celebration of the Mass. But first it should be stated that "by its very nature, the Eucharistic Prayer requires that only the Priest say it, in virtue of his Ordination. The people, for their part, should associate themselves with the Priest in faith and in silence, as well as by means of their interventions as prescribed in the course of the Eucharistic Prayer: namely, the responses in the Preface dialogue, the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy), the acclamation after the Consecration, the acclamation Amen after the concluding doxology". (GIRM 147)

The Eucharistic Prayer has several structural parts: 1) thanksgiving; 2) acclamation; 3) epiclesis; 4) institution narrative and consecration; 5) anamnesis; 6) offering; 7) intercessions; 8) final doxology. (see GIRM 79) (Some of these parts have strange names, but we'll discuss these as we get to them.)

Thanksgiving — though giving thanks and praise are evident through the whole Eucharistic Prayer, they are particularly present in the Preface, which is a term meaning "proclamation" or "speaking out" in the presence of God and God's people. The Missal contains over 80 approved individual Prefaces for feast days, liturgical seasons, votive Masses, and special occasions. Some Masses have a "Proper" Preface (meaning it is mandatory for Mass on that day/feast/occasion), while others are optional, with the selection of which Preface is used being up to the presiding celebrant.

The beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer is a dialogue prayer, "the Priest extends his hands and sings or says, The Lord be with you. The people reply, And with your spirit. As he continues, saying, Lift up your hearts, he raises his hands. The people reply, we lift them up to the Lord. Then the Priest, with hands extended, adds, Let us give thanks to the Lord our God, and the people reply, It is right and just. After this, the Priest, with hands extended, continues the Preface. At its conclusion, he joins his hands and, together with all those present, sings or says

aloud the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy). (GIRM 148) (The underlining is my emphasis to stress that these hand gestures are those of the priest, not the assembly. You still see people extending and raising their hands during this dialogue prayer. In the Missal, just because a rubric doesn't say you can't do something, does not mean you can do it. The assumption is that you would not do something you are not supposed to do in the first place.)

As stated above, the Preface, prayed by the priest, concludes with the people, together with the priest, pronouncing (preferably by singing) the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy). With this acclamation the assembly responds to the celebrant's invitation to join all creation in giving praise to the Father through Christ. With one voice the whole communion of saints gives glory to God. The next structural part of the Eucharistic Prayer is the epiclesis (a Greek word meaning "calling upon"), "in which, by means of particular invocations, the Church implores the power of the Holy Spirit that the gifts offered by human hands be consecrated, that is, become Christ's Body and Blood, and that the unblemished sacrificial Victim to be consumed in Communion may be for the salvation of those who partake of it." (GIRM 79) As the priest makes this petition, he extends his hands over the bread and wine in the ancient gesture signifying the giving of the Spirit.

The following is a reflection on the epiclesis, from "The Mystery of Faith" prepared by the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions in cooperation with the Bishop's Committee on the Liturgy, 2011, p. 79: "To sanctify is the role properly attributed to the Holy Spirit who completes and brings to fullness the work of the Father and the Son. Although the prayer for the consecration is addressed to the Father, it is through the power of the Spirit, who integrates the gifts of the people into the offering of Christ, that the Church presents to the Father the memorial of the Son and efficaciously repeats the words of institution. It is also through the Holy Spirit that the Church constantly becomes the body of Christ, nourished and fortified by his presence in the Eucharist. Both gifts and people are transformed by the power of the Spirit: the gifts of bread and wine become the signs of Christ's sacramental presence as food; the people enter into communion with Christ and with each other; they are unified, given life and sanctification. In other words, just as the bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ, so by sharing the loaf and the chalice we also are to be transformed, we are to become the body of Christ, paradoxically something we already are through Baptism."

The Eucharistic Prayer is not only central to the Mass, the source and summit of our faith as Catholics, because of the transformation of bread and wine into Christ's Body and Blood, but also because it is central to who we are called to be—who we were made to become—the Body of Christ!

When first starting to cover the topic of the Eucharistic Prayer, it was pointed out that there are currently 13 approved Eucharistic Prayers for use in the Roman Rite, and that each Eucharistic Prayer has several structural parts—which we are working our way through now (e.g. thanksgiving, acclamation, epiclesis, etc). While the narratives of the structural parts of these 13 Eucharistic Prayers differ to varying degrees from each other, each of the Eucharistic Prayers have the same words for the institution narrative (aka the words of "consecration"). As the priest holds the bread that is to be consecrated slightly raised above the altar, he bows slightly and says: "TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND EAT OF IT, FOR THIS IS MY BODY, WHICH WILL BE GIVEN UP FOR YOU." He then shows the (usually larger) consecrated host to the people and, after that, places it on the sacred vessel holding the now consecrated hosts, and genuflects in adoration. Next, he continues with the chalice of wine, holding it slightly raised above the altar, and while bowed slightly, says: "TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND DRINK FROM IT, FOR THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD, THE BLOOD OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL COVENANT, WHICH WILL BE POURED OUT FOR YOU AND FOR MANY FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME." He then shows the chalice to the people, afterwards placing it on the corporal (a white linen cloth on top of the altar cloth), and genuflects in adoration.

These genuflections in adoration are because we believe that the hosts and wine, while still having the appearance of bread and wine, are now the Real Presence of Christ's Body and Blood. If they were not, then the genuflections would be an action of idolatry. (FYI: the proper posture during the Eucharistic Prayer is to kneel or stand. Sitting is not a proper posture, unless a person is physically unable to kneel or stand.) "In the Dioceses of the United States of America, they [the people] should kneel beginning after the singing or recitation of the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy) until after the Amen of the Eucharistic Prayer, except when prevented on occasion by ill health, …, or for another reasonable cause. [e.g. when there are no kneelers, or there are a significant number of non-Catholics attending for whom kneeling is not their custom, and they would otherwise sit] However, those who do not kneel ought to make a profound bow when the

Priest genuflects after the Consecration." (GIRM 43) [the underlining is my emphasis] An example of this is when there is more than one priest celebrating Mass. The presiding priest is the only one who genuflects after the consecration; the concelebrating priests make a profound bow as the presiding priest genuflects.

The people assembled at Mass participate in whichever Eucharistic Prayer is used by listening attentively to the words sung or spoken by the priest and joining their hearts and minds to the actions of the prayers. Their voices should join together in the acclamations of the Eucharistic Prayer. One of these takes place after the Consecration, and is called the Memorial Acclamation. The priest initiates the acclamation by saying or singing, "The mystery of faith", and the people (not the priest) respond with one of the three prescribed formulas, which are:

"We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again." Or: "When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again." Or: "Save us, Savior of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free."

What is this "mystery of faith"? The mystery of faith is the Paschal Mystery, the mystery of Christ's dying, rising, and presence among his people, the whole plan of God realized in Christ's saving love.

All three of the acclamation formulas are addressed to Christ. The first option recalls Christ's death, resurrection, and second coming. The second option almost word for word echoes 1 Corinthians 11:26. The third option is the only formula that does not mention the final coming of Christ. Whichever option is used, by joining their voices together the faithful express and affirm belief that the whole mystery of the Risen Christ is present and active in the celebration.

After the Memorial Acclamation is the Anamnesis, a Greek word for making "memory" of the whole saving and liberating action of God in the historical past. While the whole Eucharistic action is a memorial, a special statement—the anamnesis—expresses the meaning of the Eucharistic memorial, and normally leads to a statement of offering. While the precise wording may vary, most Eucharistic Prayers state that the Church makes memory of the Lord's passion, resurrection, and ascension, and sometimes including his burial and future coming. But this is

not simply a “remembering” like recalling something that has happened in the past; it is a “making present”, a reactualizing for today of something that occurred in the past. God is always faithful to his covenant, so his past deeds become present and accomplish their effects “today” as they did in the past. This is the context in which Jesus spoke his command “Do this in memory of me.”

After the Anamnesis, but very closely linked to it, is the “offering” which is an explicit declaration that the Church is offering the “Body and Blood” of Christ to the Father. Now, how this declaration is expressed varies depending on the particular Eucharistic Prayer used. The following are from Eucharistic Prayers I – IV (4 of the 13 approved EPs in the Roman Rite):

EP I: “we, your servants and your holy people, offer to your glorious majesty from the gifts that you have given us, this pure victim, this holy victim, this spotless victim, the holy Bread of eternal life and the Chalice of everlasting salvation.” EP II: “we offer you, Lord, the Bread of life and the Chalice of salvation”. EP III: “we offer you in thanksgiving this holy and living sacrifice.” EP IV: “we offer you his Body and Blood, the sacrifice acceptable to you which brings salvation to the whole world.”

“The Church’s intention, indeed, is that the faithful not only offer this unblemished sacrificial Victim but also learn to offer their very selves, and so day by day to be brought, through the mediation of Christ, into unity with God and with each other, so that God may at last be all in all.” (GIRM 79f)

After the “offering”, there are some intercessions, which vary depending on which Eucharistic Prayer is used, but there is always supplication for the Church and her pastors, for the immediate community and for the dead. (With EP I – aka, the “Roman Canon” – these intercessions are split into two parts, before and after the institution narrative. All the other EP’s have the intercessions placed near the end of the prayer.) “The intercessions; by which expression is given to the fact that the Eucharist is celebrated in communion with the whole Church, of both heaven and earth, and that the oblation is made for her and for all her members, living and dead”. (GIRM 79g)

The final doxology summarizes the Eucharistic Prayer which concludes, as it began, on a clear note of praise. The Church offers praise and honor to the Father through Christ who is the High Priest, with Christ who is really present in the sacrificial memorial, and in Christ who gives himself in the Eucharist to the members of his body, and all this in the unity of the Holy Spirit. (While the priest prays this final doxology, the paten and chalice with the Body & Blood of Christ are elevated.) While the priest proclaims the Eucharistic Prayer in the name of the people, the people confirm and approve this action by their "Amen" given in energetic song or in a loud voice befitting of this primary acclamation of the Eucharistic celebration.

After the Eucharistic Prayer comes the Communion Rite. "The rites of preparation for Communion are a structural link between the Eucharistic Prayers and the reception of the Eucharist. They are rites 'by which the faithful are led directly to Communion' (GIRM 80). Their purpose is to prepare the whole congregation for its participation in the Lord's Body and Blood." (The Mystery of Faith, p. 90)

The first of these preparatory rites is the praying of the Lord's Prayer (the Our Father). The Lord's Prayer enjoys a unique place in Christian tradition, spirituality, and worship. "In the Lord's Prayer a petition is made for daily bread, which for Christians means principally the Eucharistic Bread, and entreating also purification from sin, so that what is holy may in truth be given to the holy. The Priest pronounces the invitation to the prayer, and all the faithful say the prayer with him; then the Priest alone adds the embolism [Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, . . . , as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.], which the people conclude by means of the doxology [For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever.]. The embolism, developing the last petition of the Lord's Prayer itself, asks for deliverance from the power of evil for the whole community of the faithful. "The invitation, the Prayer itself, the embolism, and the doxology by which the people conclude these things are sung or said aloud." (GIRM 81)

This next segment in the series of "A Journey Through the Mass" may cause some people to be upset as it regards a gesture that has become common practice for some, and which they may have even been told to do by a priest. What is presented here regarding the Mass is not a matter of my personal opinion, but what the Catholic Church holds and teaches. If you disagree, or feel something is not correct, I ask and encourage you to prayerfully investigate the official

documents of the Catholic Church (available on the web at www.vatican.va) before publicly expressing any misguided discontent which may lead to confusion and upset of others, or for yourself. While praying the "Our Father", it is only the priest (and concelebrating priests, if present) who extends his hands in the orans position (hands and arms outstretched). In Catholic tradition and practice, in public liturgies the orans posture of prayer is reserved for the priest. Even deacons (who are ordained into Holy Orders) do not extend their hands in orans during Mass or other liturgies. The rubrics (instructions) of the Roman Missal do not call for the people to extend their hands, and so they should not, in imitation of the priest's gesture. (This is particularly evident during the "Our Father", but also applies to other parts of the Mass and in other liturgies.) Also, during the embolism following the Our Father (Deliver us, Lord …) only the main priest celebrant extends his hands, even concelebrating priests do not.

The same can be said regarding the holding of hands during the Our Father. Some people like to hold hands as a sign of unity, after all, we are praying to "Our" Father, not "My", Father. While it is true that we collectively pray to the Father, it is a prayer directed to the Father, a vertical direction, not horizontally among ourselves. Holding hands stresses the horizontal dimension. You may ask: what if we raised our held hands up toward God? Well, again, the hands in a raised orans position is reserved for the priest. Please remember, it is the role, or function, that the person has during Mass that determines the words and gestures used, not the worthiness of the person. (From the vantage point of a priest facing the people, sometimes people are so busy gathering the hands of others around them that we are sometimes a third of the way through the Our Father by the time their hands are all set. Where is their focus?) Regarding the holding of hands as a sign of unity — the real sign of unity is Communion to which these preparatory rites are leading us. Might those who are set on holding hands with all those around them be jumping the gun? And, if unity is the key, then should we not be holding hands throughout the entire Mass? Those old enough to remember when holding hands during the Our Father began in the 1970's and 1980's, might also remember how odd, and for some even uncomfortable, that was; maybe because it was an uncalled for and unapproved innovation. (This does not mean that spouses or families can't spontaneously hold each other's hand as a sign of affection, but this should not be done with everyone in the assembly, and certainly not with raised arms.)

Regarding the rubrics of the Roman Missal, some may be thinking that since the rubrics don't specifically say the people can't extend their hands, then they can use that gesture. In the Missal,

just because a rubric doesn't say you can't do something doesn't mean you can do it. The assumption is that you would not do something you are not supposed to do in the first place. (This would be similar to a child saying to a parent, "Well, you didn't say I couldn't do that", when the "that" is something the parent would never have expected their child would do.) Again, this is not about the worthiness of the person, but of their liturgical role at Mass. In order to safeguard the integrity of the Mass, what this comes down to is that no one, neither the priest nor the people, should be using words or gestures which are not called for or allowed in the Roman Missal.

It is strange that some people will do gestures that are not called for (e.g. crossing themselves during the Penitential Act; or raising arms and/or holding hands), yet often will not do gestures which the Church directs them to do (i.e. striking their breast at the words "through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault" in the Confiteor, or bowing at the words "and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man" in the Creed). Some may be thinking "What's the big deal? Aren't there bigger things to be concerned with?" In Luke 16:10, Jesus says: "Whoever is faithful in small matters will be faithful in large ones". Yes, there are many "big" things to be concerned about in the Church. To help us be faithful in those larger matters, let's be faithful in these smaller ones — beginning now.

After praying the Lord's Prayer, we share the Sign of Peace. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) states:

There follows [after the Lord's Prayer] the Rite of Peace, by which the Church entreats peace and unity for herself and for the whole human family, and the faithful express to each other their ecclesial communion and mutual charity before communicating in the Sacrament [i.e. receiving Holy Communion].

As for the actual sign of peace to be given, the manner is to be established by the Conference of Bishops in accordance with the culture and customs of the peoples. However, it is appropriate that each person, in sober manner, offer the sign of peace only to those who are nearest. (GIRM 82) (underlining is my emphasis)

The Sign of Peace is both a call to reconciliation, unity, and communion, as well as a seal that ratifies the very meaning of a people gathered for Eucharist who find and pray for peace in one another. If we can't express at least the hope for peace for those who are at Mass with us, maybe we shouldn't receive Communion.

After the sign of peace, comes the Fraction Rite (the breaking of the larger host). In Luke's Gospel there is the post-resurrection account of Jesus walking along the road to Emmaus with two dejected disciples who didn't recognize who Jesus was. (see Luke 24:13-35) While journeying with them he enlightened them regarding what referred to him in the scriptures. When Jesus shared a meal with them, they finally recognized Jesus and he vanished from their sight. The two disciples returning from Emmaus recounted "how Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of bread." (Luke 24:35)

In fact, the Eucharist itself was once called "the breaking of the bread" (see Acts 2:42). Actually, a few things happen simultaneously or in very close succession, that it is almost one action. As the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God), is begun, the Priest alone, or with the assistance of a deacon, breaks the Eucharistic bread (at least the larger host). The gesture of breaking bread done by Christ at the Last Supper signifies that the many faithful are made one body (1 Cor 10:17) by receiving Communion from the one Bread of Life, which is Christ, who for the salvation of the world died and rose again. The Priest breaks the Bread and puts a piece of the host into the chalice [aka: the "commingling"] to signify the unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the work of salvation, namely, the Body of Jesus Christ, living and glorious. The supplication Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) is usually sung, or at least recited. There is a beautiful prayer that the priest prays quietly as he puts the piece of the host into the chalice: May this mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it. (So, if you happen to receive the Precious Blood from the priest's chalice during Communion, and see a little piece of a host, it's okay, it's not backwash — the priest put it there.)

It is ironic that the "breaking of the bread" — the tearing apart of the host — is actually a sign of unity. It brings out "more clearly the force and importance of the sign of unity of all in the one bread, and of the sign of charity by the fact that the one bread is distributed among the brothers and sisters" (GIRM 321). Though there are many of us, we become what we eat — the one Body of Christ.

After the Fraction Rite (breaking of bread), which is accompanied by the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God), and the Commingling (placing part of the consecrated host into the chalice with the Precious Blood), the "Priest prepares himself by a prayer, said quietly, so that he may fruitfully receive the Body and Blood of Christ. The faithful do the same, praying silently." (GIRM 84) As the priest is praying this prayer, the faithful — at least in parishes that have kneelers — kneel after the Agnus Dei. So, even if there is no conscious prayer of preparation on the part of the people, the kneeling itself is preparation to receive Christ's Body and Blood. (As Catholics, we pray not just with words, but with our actions as well, and using all of our senses. That's one of the wonderful things about being Catholic!)

Then what follows is the Invitation to Communion, the words of which are taken from Scripture. After the priest prays his preparation prayer, he genuflects, and then shows the Eucharistic bread to the people, holding it slightly raised above the paten or above the chalice, as he says aloud: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world." (The words John the Baptist said as Jesus approached him. See John 1:29). Then the priest immediately adds: "Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb." (Words drawn from those of an angel in Revelation 19:9, referring to the Mass — the Eucharist — as the wedding feast of the Lamb.) Then the people, along with the priest, respond: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed." (Derived from the words spoken with humility by the centurion to Jesus in Matthew 8:8) While these words of invitation and response are prayed, the people are invited to look at the Eucharistic Bread and to express reverence, confidence, and faith.

We now come to the part of the Mass that is the real sign of unity — Holy Communion. (The Body and Blood of Christ are distributed by ordinary ministers — bishops, priests, deacons — if present and there are enough of them. For simplicity, what follows will describe the use of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion—laity trained and entrusted with this privilege—which is the case with most parishes in our diocese.) Following the Invitation to Communion ("Behold the Lamb of God …" "Lord, I am not worthy …"), the priest, and any concelebrants, receive Communion. "After the Priest has concluded his own Communion, he distributes Communion to the extraordinary ministers, and then hands the sacred vessels to them for distribution of Holy Communion to the people." (GIRM 38)

“It is not permitted for the faithful to take the consecrated Bread or the sacred chalice by themselves. The norm established for the Dioceses of the United States of America is that Holy Communion is to be received standing, unless an individual member of the faithful wishes to receive Communion while kneeling. When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister. The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant. When Holy Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood.” (GIRM 160) When receiving Communion, the minister says “The Body of Christ” or “The Blood of Christ”, depending on what form they are distributing, and the communicant replies “Amen” (GIRM 161 & 286 respectively) [“Thank you”, “I believe” or anything other than “Amen” are not proper responses.]

Regarding receiving the Body of Christ and/or the Precious Blood, “Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it takes place under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clearer expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord,” (GIRM 281) That being said, “the Catholic faith teaches that Christ, whole and entire, and the true Sacrament, is received even under one species, and hence that as regards the resulting fruits, those who receive under only one species are not deprived of any grace that is necessary for salvation.” (GIRM 282) “It is the choice of the communicant, not the minister, to receive from the chalice.” (GIRM 41)

Because Holy Communion is the sign of unity, those who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church, either by profession of faith or by Catholics who have separated themselves by their actions (i.e. serious sin), should not receive Holy Communion at Mass. To ignore these differences would make Holy Communion a false sign of unity — something we should never do. In the meantime, we hope and pray for the day when all are living in full communion with the Catholic Church, so that we can share the ultimate sign of unity — Holy Communion.

Before moving on, a few clarifications should be made in regard to some signs of reverence for the Body and Blood of Christ. One is that of chewing gum during Mass— that just should not be happening. It might help to think of it this way: if you were getting married, hopefully with all

of the dignity it deserves, would you want the members of your wedding party standing up there chomping away? Or, if you were granted a personal audience with the Pope or the President of the United States, would you greet them chewing away on a piece of gum? (Hopefully the answer would be: "No, of course not. That would be disrespectful.") Then why would you think of being in the presence of Jesus Christ mindlessly chewing away? But, I like chewing gum; and, it's just a nervous habit. So, start a new habit, stop chewing gum in church; and be a model of appropriate behavior. (FYI: As a priest in the sanctuary looking out among the assembly, it is disturbing to see how many people chew gum during Mass. I have heard accounts of some people taking the gum out of their mouths to receive Holy Communion — apparently as a sign of respect — then putting it right back in afterwards!)

Another clarification regards receiving Holy Communion in the hand. As noted earlier, the "consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant." (GIRM 160) If choosing to receive the Body of Christ in the hand, the communicant should place their hands, one on top of the other as a throne, "as befits one who is about to receive the King. Then receive him, taking care that nothing is lost." (GIRM 41) The communicant is not to pick the consecrated host out of the hand of the Eucharistic minister presenting the Body of Christ. And, if you receive the Body of Christ in the throne made by your hands, doesn't it seem only sensible that an effort would be made that this throne be clean? (Granted, some people's hands have work stains that just won't come off, but others have dirty hands that simply have not been washed.) The point is, we should be properly reverent and prepared to receive the most Blessed Sacrament.

When the distribution of Holy Communion is over, any unconsumed Precious Blood is consumed by the priest or assisting ministers, and any remaining consecrated hosts are consumed, or gathered and placed in the Tabernacle, primarily for Communion to the sick, the dying, and homebound, and secondarily, for adoration outside of Mass. Then there is the functional task of the Purification of the Sacred Vessels. This is not a thorough washing, but making sure none of the Precious Blood is left as residue in the chalices, or particles of the Body of Christ are left in the ciboria; after all, we believe Christ's continued presence is in any of the unused Precious Blood and even in the crumbs. (That's why we treat them, and perform this action, with reverence.) "The sacred vessels are purified by the Priest, the deacon, or an instituted acolyte after Communion or after Mass, in so far as possible at the credence table."

(GIRM 279) This is often done after Communion, since most parishes don't have a deacon or instituted acolyte to assist the priest, and the priest is usually busy after Mass greeting people, or getting ready to move on to another Mass. (FYI: An instituted acolyte is one of the steps on the way to holy orders, though the bishop may choose to "institute" someone as an acolyte to help in a particular parish.)

"After this, the Priest may return to the chair. A sacred silence may now be observed for some time, or a Psalm or other canticle of praise or a hymn may be sung." (GIRM 164) They [the faithful] "may sit or kneel during the period of sacred silence after Communion." (GIRM 43) Private prayer after Communion has long been a recommended practice. If you had been singing the song during the distribution of Communion (and hopefully you were), take this time of sacred silence for your private prayer. This is not so much a prayer of thanksgiving (that is the nature of the Eucharistic Prayer); but a prayer asking for the spiritual effects or fruits of the Eucharist. "To bring to completion the prayer of the People of God, and also to conclude the entire Communion Rite, the Priest pronounces the Prayer after Communion, in which he prays for the fruits of the mystery just celebrated. . .The people make the prayer their own by means of the acclamation, Amen." (GIRM 89) (This is similar to the Collect —aka, the 'Opening Prayer'— near the beginning of Mass, when the priest first said "Let us pray." There was a period of silence, during which the priest prayed for the intention of that Mass and the people pray for the intentions they bring to the Mass. The Collect "collected" all these prayers together, and the people made it their own with the acclamation, Amen.)

The Concluding Rites of Mass follow the Prayer after Communion. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM 90), states: "To the Concluding Rites belong the following: a) brief announcements, should they be necessary b) the Priest's Greeting and Blessing, which on certain days and occasions is expanded and expressed by the Prayer over the People or another more solemn formula; c) the Dismissal of the people by the Deacon or the Priest, so that each may go back to doing good works, praising and blessing God; d) the kissing of the altar by the Priest and the Deacon," followed by a genuflection at the foot of the sanctuary (or a profound bow when appropriate) by the Priest, the Deacon, and the other ministers.

Announcements should be short, necessary, and generally of concern to the whole community. (The issue of announcements can be a contentious one, often involving pastoral judgement in

the face of the reality that many people do not read the bulletin.) Since the ambo is reserved for the proclamation of God's word, the announcements are preferably given elsewhere.

The Greeting and Blessing is another dialogue prayer. The "Priest, extending his hands, greets the people, saying, The Lord be with you. They reply, And with your spirit. [Again, the rubrics only call for the priest to extend his hands, not the people when they respond, since this is a priestly gesture only] The Priest, raises his right hand and adds, May almighty God bless you and, as he makes the Sign of the Cross over the people, he continues, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All reply, Amen. "On certain days and occasions this blessing, in accordance with the rubrics, is expanded and expressed by a Prayer over the People or another more solemn formula." (GIRM 167)

"Immediately after the Blessing, with hands joined, the Priest adds, Ite, missa est (Go forth, the Mass is ended) [or another optional dismissal] and all reply, Thanks be to God." (GIRM 168) Thus, the people are sent forth to carry out the mission of the Church, a mission of healing, justice, and evangelization.

"Then the Priest venerates the altar as usual with a kiss and, after making a [genuflection (or a profound bow when appropriate)] with the lay ministers, he withdraws with them." (GIRM 169) [The kiss of farewell at the end of the celebration mirrors the kiss of greeting at the beginning of Mass. Both gestures venerate the altar as a symbol of Christ.]

A recessional song is ordinarily brief and well-known. Instrumental music, even silence, especially on occasions of a penitential nature, may also be appropriate.

This journey through the Mass is ended. (Some of you may be thinking, "Thanks be to God.") Again, please note: what has been presented here regarding the Mass is not a matter of personal opinion, but what the Catholic Church holds and teaches. If you disagree, or feel something is not presented correctly, I ask and encourage you to prayerfully investigate the official documents of the Catholic Church (available on the web at www.vatican.va) before publicly expressing any misguided discontent which may lead to confusion and upset of others, or for yourself.

I hope this “journey” has helped you to know and practice our Catholic faith more authentically, and to pray the Mass in the way the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, wishes us to pray.
Blessings,

Fr. Joe Muszkiewicz