

Wine and Water

In our Lord's time, it was usual to add water to wine so the priest or the deacon does the same. But as he mingles them, he says words based upon the Opening Prayer for the Mass of Christmas Day:

'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 adding of water to the wine is to remind us that the Son of God became human so that we human beings might become gods, that is, share in the life of the Holy Trinity in Heaven. In the year 253, the bishop and martyr, St Cyprian, wrote that the drop of water was also a sign that the Church was participating in the sacrifice of Christ. As one advisor for the new translation explained, 'the wine represents Christ our Lord and the water the people whom he redeemed through his precious blood and washed clean in the waters of baptism.'

'My Sacrifice and Yours'

After the priest has offered the bread and wine to God, he asks the congregation to pray that 'my sacrifice and yours' may be acceptable to God. The sacrifice which is at the heart of the Mass is Christ's death upon the cross. The cross was an altar for Christ upon which he was sacrificed for the forgiveness of our sins. At every celebration of Mass we re-experience this sacrifice. However, as baptized women and men we share in Christ's priesthood. This sharing is known as the priesthood of all believers. It is distinct from the ordained priesthood but nevertheless real. In our own way, at every Mass, we are able to make a sacrifice of, to offer up our prayers and our lives. The priest acts in the person of Christ but he also, with us, acts in his own person. Together we make a sacrifice of ourselves as we celebrate the sacrifice of Christ.

An Explanation of the Revised Translation of the Mass Part 2

- From the Readings to the Offertory -



St Sabina, Brightlingsea - with - St Monica, Wivenhoe

Readings from the Bible

Christ is present to us in a number of ways; one of the most important is through the Scriptures. St Augustine declared, “from the table of the Lord we receive the bread of life...And from the table of Sunday readings we are nourished with the doctrine of the Lord.”

The Gospel

Before Deacon Roger proclaims the Gospel he asks Fr Paul for a blessing because to proclaim it is an immense thing: Christ himself will be speaking to us. That is why we both respectfully stand to listen to it and at the end we directly address Christ: ‘Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.’ So Fr Paul prays that Deacon Roger may read the Gospel ‘worthily and well.’ While the source of the Gospel is announced, we make three signs of the cross on our body with our thumb. This is not merely a gesture but a prayer without words. We are praying that Christ may be in our mind, on our lips and in our heart.

We listen to the Gospel so that it may change our lives. This is another reason why we stand to listen to it. As St Francis de Sales wrote, “When the Gospel is to be read at Mass, stand up to show that you are ready and equipped to walk on the way that the Gospel commands. To stir your devotion, you can say as you do so: ‘Jesus Christ was made obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.’” After he has read the Gospel, a deacon or priest quietly prays, ‘Through the words of the Gospel may our sins be wiped away.’ The Gospels have been given to us to convert our hearts and minds.

The Creed

The beginning of the Creed until the statements on the Holy Spirit, was written at the first great gathering of the bishops of the Church at the Council of Nicea (325). The rest of the Creed was added by the bishops at the First Council of Constantinople (381). We have reverted to the long practice of saying ‘I believe’ rather than ‘We believe.’ This change emphasises our personal responsibility to embrace our faith and live it. We also now say ‘I confess one Baptism...’. One of the original meanings of ‘confess’ is to declare your beliefs.

The Council of Nicea met because of a disagreement over the nature of the Son of God. The orthodox understanding was that the Son of God was co-eternal with the Father; He had always been and was equally divine. But a priest from Egypt, Arius, was teaching that the Son of God had been created by the Father and was of course, therefore, not equal in His divinity. The Creed of Nicea is a defence and explanation of the orthodox understanding of the Son’s origin and nature. Concerning His origin, it tells us that the Son of God was ‘begotten, not made’; He was not made but has always been proceeding from the Father. Concerning His nature, the Creed teaches that the Son of God is equally divine by such statements as ‘God from God’ and the image ‘Light from Light.’ ‘Consubstantial with the Father’ - a new translation of the Latin ‘*consubstantialem Patri*’ - simply means that the Son of God is of one being (of the same divine nature) with His Father.

During the Creed, we bow as we say the words ‘and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.’ We do this because these words declare the most extraordinary truth and reveal the immensity of God’s love for us: His Son left Heaven to live as us with us.

The Offertory

This is a moment of transition in the Mass. So far we have been focused upon the ambo (the lectern) and the readings from the Bible. Now we enter the second part of the Mass, which looks towards the altar and is called the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

When the altar has been prepared, it is normal for parishioners to bring the bread and wine to the priest. This reminds us that these are gifts from the People of God, bought with the money they give. But the offertory procession is also a sign that we come to Mass to present to God our needs and hopes, our fears and thanksgiving. As the bread and wine are placed upon the altar we should imagine what is true: we, as it were, lie upon the altar with them.