**Why We Do What We Do V: The Liturgy of the Eucharist, Part 1**

*“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, Take and eat; this is my body. Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins”*

Matthew 26:26-28

*“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.”*

(General Instruction of the Roman Missal)

*“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.”*

(BerakahPrayer, Roman Missal)

This week we continue our reflection on why we do what we do in the Liturgy, which I have been talking about in this space for the last month. Today, we begin a multi-part reflection on the Liturgy of the Eucharist, specifically today on the preparation of the gifts.

In ancient days, the members of the Church provided the bread and wine from their own possessions and brought it forward. Today, it is a little different. The Church purchases the bread (hosts) and wine from the money offered by all the faithful. However, some members of the church still bring the bread and wine forward to be offered for the sacrifice, which is a representation of the ancient practice. The priest and deacon receive these gifts, along with the monetary offerings, and carry them to the sanctuary.

The bread and wine are then offered at the Altar. The priest raises the bread and prays (sometimes loudly, sometimes not) a prayer of offering, called the BerakahPrayer to which all respond “Blessed be God forever.” The deacon then mixes a bit of water with the wine, symbolic of the blood and water that flowed from the side of Christ on the Cross, symbolic also of the mixture of divinity and humanity in the Person of Christ, and prays:

*“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.”*

(Roman Missal)

Then the priest offers the wine as he offered the bread. At this point, at more solemn celebrations, the gifts and Altar are incensed, symbolic of our prayers rising to heaven.

Finally the priest washes his hands - a rite that is an expression of his desire for interior purification. During this time, all might make a silent prayer expressing their own desire for interior purification. Then all rise, and at the invitation of the priest, pray:

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

(Roman Missal)

And finally, the priest prays a prayer of offering, to which all respond “Amen.” The gifts are now prepared for the sacrifice, which takes place as the Liturgy of the Eucharist continues to unfold. More on that next week.