

August 24, 2014 The Mass – Liturgy of the Eucharist
Friends,

This is my monthly column on the Mass. We have been working our way through the Mass, step by step. As you know, **our liturgy has a structure that has been in place for centuries.** In fact, the basic structure has been there since at least the second century – almost 1,900 years ago! The Mass consists of four parts: the Introductory Rites, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Concluding Rites. Last month I completed my comments on the Liturgy of the Word and now we move on to the next part of the Mass.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal beautifully introduces the Liturgy of the Eucharist: *“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.”*

With this understanding, the Church has arranged the Liturgy of the Eucharist in the following order: the Preparation of the Gifts, the Eucharistic Prayer, and Communion. Today I begin looking at the Preparation of the Gifts.

The gifts being presented at the altar are, of course, bread and wine. Why bread and wine? The easiest and accurate answer is that these are what Jesus used at the Last Supper. Jesus was celebrating either a weekly Sabbath meal or, very possibly, the annual Passover Meal with his apostles. This meal included bread and wine, staples of the Middle Eastern diet. One of our Catholic theologians also states that these foods (bread and wine) are the result of human planting, harvesting, and labor. We bring them to the liturgy, as Eucharistic gifts, to express our dedication and willingness to give of our talents and ourselves to God and to others.

The bread that is used for the Eucharist is unleavened. That was a central feature of the ancient Exodus event. As the Israelites fled slavery in Egypt, they did not have enough time to allow the dough to rise and make leavened bread, and so all they had in their journey was unleavened bread. The Lord directed that they remember this saving action called the Exodus each year in the celebration of the Passover Meal and they were to use unleavened bread at that meal. As I said above, Jesus might well have been celebrating the Passover Meal at the Last Supper and might, therefore, have been using unleavened bread. The Latin Rite of the Church has adopted this

same practice for the Eucharist which celebrates the new passover of Jesus – his passing over from death to resurrection. I should note that many of the Eastern Rites of the Catholic Church have the tradition of using leavened bread which Jesus would have used at the weekly Sabbath service.

The bread must always be wheat bread, keeping it consistent with what Jesus would have used. **It can be low-gluten bread and low-gluten hosts are available** here at Saint Margaret for those with a gluten allergy.

In September, I will continue these reflections on the Preparation of the Gifts.

I began these monthly columns over one year ago and you may find all of them (now totaling fourteen) by going to the parish website at www.stmargaret.org, clicking on the Information tab and then clicking on Bulletins. These columns are listed at the top of that page.

May the Lord's peace be with you.

Father Mike