

October 19, 2014 The Mass – Liturgy of the Eucharist
Friends,

Today I am continuing my monthly column on the Mass. We have been working our way through the Mass step by step. In this column I am continuing reflections on the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the major part of the Mass that begins with the Preparation of the Gifts.

Just before the bread and wine are presented to the priest, a collection is taken. This has a very practical purpose – the support of the parish ministry. Beyond that, the collection represents us as we offer ourselves to God. Thus, an offering of money, earned by our hard work, speaks of our joining ourselves to Christ as he offers himself for all of humanity.

Many parishes, including Saint Margaret, present a basket of food at the altar along with the bread and wine. This practice goes back to the earliest years of Christianity when food was all that people had to offer. It was clear then, as it is now, that we as disciples of Jesus have a responsibility to do what we can to assist those in need.

While the collection is taken and the gifts are presented to the priest, the altar is prepared. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal comments on the altar itself: *“The altar, on which is effected the Sacrifice of the Cross made present under sacramental signs, is also the table of the Lord to which the People of God is convoked to participate in the Mass...”* The altar is, in effect, a very special table: a table because from it we are fed with the Eucharist, but called an altar because upon it the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is represented under the sacramental signs of bread and wine.

Usually the deacon of the Mass prepares the altar while the gifts are being presented. The following items are to be on the altar:

- ❖ A white cloth. Although cloths of the different liturgical colors can drape the front and sides of the altar, the cloth on the top must always be white. The color white is to convey the special and unique dignity of the Eucharist being celebrated on the altar.
- ❖ A corporal. This is a smaller, white cloth (usually about 12 inches square) placed on top of the white altar cloth. The vessels containing the bread and wine, to be consecrated into the body and blood of Christ are to be placed on a corporal. The corporal is especially intended to hold any crumbs or particles that break off of the consecrated bread.

- ❖ A purificator. These are also white linens, the size of napkins. They are to be used to wipe the lip of the chalice after a person has sipped from it and then to dry the chalices when they have been cleansed either after Communion or after Mass has ended.

My comments on the Preparation of the Gifts will be continued next month. I began these columns on the Mass over one year ago and **you may find all fifteen of them on 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