

## **2008 STATEMENT BY THE BISHOP**

### ***- Two changes to the Ritual of the Mass -***

On Pentecost Sunday, two minor changes will be introduced into the celebration of the Mass across Australia. These changes are the result of the review of the ritual of the Mass undertaken at the direction of Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

#### *What changes?*

Though there will be a number of ritual changes for priests, only two minor changes will affect congregations. These relate to the Eucharistic Sacrifice and Holy Communion.

The first is that we no longer sit, but stand when we pray that the Sacrifice of the Mass will be accepted by God the Father. The second is that we bow our heads before receiving Holy Communion.

#### *Why the review?*

Ritual serves several basic purposes. First, it protects the experiences Jesus intends for us through the Mass or any sacrament, and their meaning. Without ritual, all kinds of practices and devotions could be introduced that obscure these.

Second, ritual helps us to respond appropriately to these experiences and their meaning. Unless we respond appropriately, we risk not benefitting from experiences Jesus wants to for us.

Third, ritual enables us to worship as a community. This would be impossible if everyone ‘did their own thing’.

In the light of experience, it is clear now that, in the rush to implement the liturgical changes called for by the Second Vatican Council, some ritual decisions could have been better. Hence, the need for the review.

### ***The Eucharistic Sacrifice***

This is the second of the two parts of the Mass. The first is the Liturgy of the Word.

#### *What experiences does the ritual of the Eucharistic Sacrifice seek to protect?*

For each who participates with their hearts in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, Christ shares the divine *power of his Resurrection*. This power affects us in two basic ways if we pray daily about our lives [*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1366, 613, 654].

First, the power of Christ’s Resurrection can *help us with our struggles* to overcome personal failings, weaknesses, hurts and temptations.

Second, it can *empower us* to become more like Jesus in how we think, speak and behave – and to succeed in our struggles to live daily as he taught. In practical terms, the Eucharistic Sacrifice includes two steps:

- The Eucharistic Prayer, with its Preface.
- The Communion Rite, which consists of the Communion of the Priest, followed by the Communion of the people.

### *The two steps in the Eucharistic Sacrifice*

Some people have remarked to me that it is no problem having a ‘Communion Service’ instead of a Mass. This view does not appreciate the Eucharistic Sacrifice and the experiences of Christ its ritual seeks to protect. The fact that some parishes have to make do at times with a Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion, because it is too far to drive to Sunday Masse, is a tragedy.

We need, therefore, to take each of the steps of the Eucharistic Sacrifice separately. Otherwise, we might begin to think there is little difference, between a Mass and a Holy Communion Service with a Liturgy of the Word.

### **The Eucharistic Prayer**

The Mass is the prayer of Jesus, into which we can join. This means that its power is infinite. The Mass, then, is the most powerful prayer possible.

We join Jesus in his prayer when we participate in the Mass with our hearts. *He makes our prayers his prayers* as we put before God the Father the needs of others, as well as our own needs.

The Eucharistic Sacrifice begins with the Priest greeting the people, and calling on them to lift their hearts in thanks to God for all God has given us. He invites: ‘Lift up your hearts’ ‘Let us give thanks to the Lord your God’.

Though it is the priest who proclaims the words, the Preface and Eucharistic Prayer are *the prayers of Jesus himself*. Jesus prays these prayers through the words of the priest.

For this reason, the priest has been spoken of as acting ‘in the person of Christ’ since ancient times. Every priest receives the power to serve Jesus and his people in this way through the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

### *The Preface*

The Priest then prays the Preface, which ends with all proclaiming ‘Holy holy holy Lord, God of power and might...’ The Preface gives thanks for all God has done for humanity either through creation, redemption or sanctification.

### *The Eucharistic Prayer Itself*

This prayer starts by calling on God the Father to send the Holy Spirit.

The central point of this prayer is the Consecration. This is when the power of the actions and words of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit, change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. Though the appearances and characteristics of bread and wine remain, in fact they are now the Body and Blood of Christ [*Catechism of the Catholic Church 1353, 1375*].

The Consecration is followed by the Priest praying the prayer of offering. Ideally, at this moment, we too are offering our lives to God the Father. Then there are prayers for the whole Church, living and dead, and those called by Christ to serve as its pastors.

### *The Great 'Amen'*

The Eucharistic Prayer concludes with the Priest proclaiming: 'Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours almighty Father forever and ever'. *These are the words of the Priest, acting 'in the person of Christ'* – not the words of the congregation.

To this, the whole congregation, including other ministers in the sanctuary, proclaim 'Amen' – which means 'So be it!' Ideally this Amen is sung, but this is not always possible. Traditionally it has been called the 'Great Amen' of the people.

### **The Communion Rite**

The Communion Rite comprises the Priest's Communion and then the Communion of the people.

#### ***The Priests' Communion: Christ completes his sacrifice***

In the Communion Rite, we pray the 'Our Father', exchange is the Sign of Peace, and then proclaim the 'Lamb of God' as the priest mingles the Body and the Blood of the Lord.

Then Jesus completes his sacrifice through the Priest when *the Priest* receives Holy Communion.

It is not for anyone else to complete their participation is Jesus' sacrifice by receiving Holy Communion before Christ's sacrifice has first been completed.

#### ***The People's Communion: completing their participation in the Christ's Sacrifice***

After Christ's sacrifice has been completed, the whole congregation is then invited to receive Holy Communion. They complete their participation in Christ's sacrifice by doing so.

#### *What experiences does the Rite of Holy Communion seek to protect?*

If we receive Holy Communion, conscious of the One we are receiving, Christ deepens our personal oneness and union with himself. This can be a moment of deeply intimate relationship with him when we can place before him our deepest needs and life concerns.

If we enter this intimacy with Christ, we are affected in many ways. First, our spiritual gifts, especially those received through the other sacraments, are nourished and strengthened. This fulfils the promise of Jesus: 'If you eat my Body and drink my Blood, you shall have life in you.'

Other ways Christ influences us include by strengthening us against temptations to sin, renewing our spiritual strength weakened by sin, and forgiving venial sin. Our sense of Christian community grows and commitment to the poor. Our pain at the disunity among Christians which prevents them from joining us in receiving Holy Communion grows, as does our commitment to Church unity

#### *Should people go to Mass if they cannot receive Holy Communion?*

Our participation in Christ's sacrifice is more complete if we receive Holy Communion. However, it is a common misunderstanding for people to think these days that there is no point in going to Mass if they cannot receive Holy Communion.

In this they are mistaken. They can still open themselves to the experience Christ offers through the Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and Jesus still makes their prayers his own. Anyone who feels unwelcome at Mass because they do not receive Holy Communion should be encouraged to come and welcomed.

### ***The two minor changes***

- (i) The first minor change is that all stand when the Priest says over the prepared gifts of bread and wine: 'Let us pray that our sacrifice may be acceptable to the Lord, our God.' The reason for this change is that standing or kneeling are the people postures for prayer – and the people's response: 'May the Lord accept this sacrifice...' is a prayer.

Previously the congregation stood only after saying this prayer.

- (ii) The second minor change is that people are asked to adore the Lord just before receiving Holy Communion. They are asked to do this by bowing their heads just before it is their turn to stand before the Priest or another minister.

It is always important to appreciate the One we receive in Holy Communion. It would be a tragedy if receiving Holy Communion ever became routine or a thoughtless habit.

This new ritual replaces other practices just prior to receiving Holy Communion.

### ***Conclusion***

I hope that this explains the ritual changes to the Mass being implemented on Pentecost Sunday. May we all grow in our appreciation for the Mass as the great sacrifice of Jesus, the most powerful prayer in which we can join, and all that Jesus offers us through it for our lives..

Most Rev Gerard J Holohan  
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