

The Offertory

The Offertory: The Actions

1. Preparation of the Altar: “the altar” or “Lord’s table” is “made ready” when the “corporal,” the “purificator,” the “missal,” and the “chalice” are placed on it (GIRM 73)
2. Presentation of the Gifts: “the offerings are then brought forward. *It is a praiseworthy practice for the bread and wine to be presented by the faithful...* Even though the faithful no longer bring from their own possessions the bread and wine intended for the liturgy as was once the case, nevertheless the rite of carrying up the offerings still keeps its spiritual efficacy and significance.” (GIRM 73)
3. The Mixing of Water and Wine: “The Deacon, or the Priest, *pours wine and a little water into the chalice*, (Roman Missal, *Order of Mass*, no. 24)
4. Offertory Chant: “The procession is accompanied by the Offertory Chant” (GIRM 74)
5. Handwashing (Latin *lavabo*): “Then the Priest washes his hands at the side of the altar, *a rite in which the desire of interior purification finds expression.*” (GIRM 76)

The Prayers over the Bread and Wine

Priest: *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.*

[People: *Blessed be God forever.*]

Priest: *Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation,
for through your goodness we have received
the wine we offer you: fruit of the vine and work of human hands,
it will become our spiritual drink.*

[People: *Blessed be God forever.*]

The Secret Prayers

After this, the Priest, bowing profoundly, says quietly (Latin *secreto*):

*With humble spirit and contrite heart
may we be accepted by you, O Lord,
and may our sacrifice in your sight this day
be pleasing to you, Lord God.*

The Priest, standing at the side of the altar, washes his hands, saying quietly (Latin *secreto*):

*Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.*

The “Pray Brethren” (Latin *Orate Fratres*)

Priest: *Pray, brethren (brothers and sisters), that my sacrifice and yours
may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.*

People: *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, *Order of Mass*, nos. 21-30)

Sacred Scripture

Melchizedek's Offering and Abraham's Tithe

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. (Genesis 14:18-20)

The People Bring Offerings of Bread and Wine

The LORD said to Moses, "Say to the sons of Israel, When you come into the land you are to inhabit, which I give you, and you offer to the LORD from the herd or from the flock an offering by fire or a burnt offering or a sacrifice, ... then he who brings his offering shall offer to the LORD a cereal offering of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour, ... and wine for the drink offering, ...for the sacrifice, for each lamb. (Numbers 15:2-5; cf. Lev 17:5: the people bring their offerings "to the priest at the door of the tent of meeting...")

The Priest Washes His Hands

"You shall also make a laver of bronze, ...for washing... *When [the priests] go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister.... they shall wash with water, lest they die. They shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die...*" (Exodus 30:17-21)

The Prayer of Azariah in the Furnace

*With a contrite heart and a humble spirit
may we be accepted, as though it were with burn offerings of rams and bulls...
such may our sacrifice be in your sight this day...* (Daniel 3:16-17 [=39-40])

The Prayer of King David (after Repenting)

*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!* (Psalm 51:2)

Jesus Says the Jewish Blessing at the Last Supper

As they were eating, *he took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it.* (Mark 14:22-24)

[Ancient Jewish Tradition: The Mixing Wine and Water (1st Century)]

After they have mixed for him the third cup he says the Benediction over his meal.^{1]}

[Ancient Jewish Tradition: Passover Blessings of Bread and Wine (1st Century)]

Over bread a man says, “*Blessed are You, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.*” Over wine a man says, “*Blessed are You, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.*”^{2]}

Jesus, the “Bread of Life,” and the New Manna

I am *the bread of life*. (Latin *panis vitae*)... *the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.*” (John 6:48-51)

St. Paul, “Spiritual Drink,” and the Water from the Rock

Our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, *and all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink* (Latin *potum spiritalem*). *For they drank from the spiritual Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ.* (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)

Tradition

The Presentation of the Gifts in the Ancient Roman Liturgy (2nd Century)

St. Justin Martyr: *Then a bread and a cup containing water and wine are brought to him who presides over the assembly. He takes these and then gives praise and glory to the Father of all things through the name of his Son and of the Holy Spirit.*³

The Offertory Procession and the Washing of Hands in the Papal Mass (7th century)

Ordo Romanus 1: *The pope, however, descends... and he receives the [lay] offerings* (Latin *oblaciones*) *of the leading men in the order of their dignities. The archdeacon behind him receives the smaller flagons and pours them into the large chalice... The regionary subdeacon receives the [lay] offerings from the pope and offers [them] to the attendant subdeacon and the places [the] on the linen cloth held by the two acolytes... In similar fashion the pope, going up into the women’s section, completes everything in the same order as above... After this, the pope, ...returns to the seat and washes his hands.*⁴

¹ Mishnah, *Pesahim* 10:1-3, 7. In Danby, *The Mishnah*, 150-51 (slightly adapted).

² Mishnah, *Berakoth* 6:1. Cf. Hebert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 6.

³ Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 65; cf. 67:5. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 1:67-68.

⁴ *Ordo Romanus* I, nos. 69-71, 75. In John F. Romano, *Liturgy and Society in Early Medieval Rome* (London and New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2014), 240-241; cf. *Ordo Romanus Primus* (trans. Alan Griffiths; Joint Liturgical Studies 73; n. 1.: Alcuin Club, 2012), 47,

The Secret Prayer of the Priest (8th Century)

Sacramentary of Amiens: With humble spirit and contrite heart may we be accepted by you, O Lord, and may our sacrifice in your sight this day be pleasing to you, Lord God.⁵

The “Pray Brethren” and the People’s Response (13th Century)

Innocent III: He turns to the people (Latin *ad populum*), saying:

Pray brethren (Latin *Orate fratres*)
that my sacrifice and yours
may be acceptable to almighty God.

But let *the bystanders* answer:

*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.*⁶

The Medieval Origin of the Offertory Prayers (16th Century)

St. Robert Bellarmine: These [five offertory prayers] are not very ancient, nor were they read in the Roman Church five hundred years ago.... These prayers are recited according to the Gallican ordinal, but none of these prayers were established in the Roman Ordinal... Still, because they contain nothing that offends, little by little they were all received.⁷

Mystagogy

The Mystery of the Mixed Wine and Bread (3rd Century)

St Cyprian of Carthage: Since Christ bore all of us when he bore our sins, *we see that the water stands for the people whereas the wine stands for the Blood of Christ. When water is united with the wine in the cup, the people are made one with Christ; the believing people are joined and united with him in whom they believed...*⁸

The People’s Offerings and the Priest’s Handwashing (9th Century)

Amalar of Metz: *The people give their offerings, namely the bread and wine, according to the order of Melchizedek. The bread and wine that they offer express all the pious desires that lie hidden within, whether for the sacrifice or for the living host. That which*

⁵ In Michael Witczak, “History of the Latin Text and Rite,” in *A Commentary on the Order of the Mass*, 206, n. 20.

⁶ Cf. S. J. P. Van Dijk and Joan Hazeldon Walker, *The Ordinal of the Papal Court from Innocent III to Boniface VIII and Related Documents* (Fribourg: University of Fribourg Press, 1975), 505.

⁷ Robert Bellarmine, *On the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, Chap. 17. In St. Robert Bellarmine, S.J., *On the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass* (trans. Ryan Grant; Post Falls, Idaho: Mediatrix Press, 2020), 256. Cf. Adrian Fortescue, *The Mass: A Study of the Roman Liturgy* (repr. Boonville, N.Y.: Preserving Christian Publications, 2007), 305, who states that “The Offertory prayers adopted by the revisors of 1570 are those in the XIVth Roman Ordo. All are taken or adapted from various, mostly non-Roman sources.”

⁸ Cyprian of Carthage, *Letters* 63; in Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 1:169.

is done externally is a sign of what lies hidden within... The priest washes his hands in the manner of the first priests [in the Old Testament].... *This hand washing signifies the purification of the heart...*⁹

The Eucharist as Sacrifice of the Church (20th Century)

Catechism: *The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church. The Church which is the Body of Christ participates in the offering of her Head. With him, she herself is offered whole and entire. She unites herself to his intercession with the Father for all men. In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value. Christ's sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering. (CCC 1368)*

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is the relationship between the presentation of the Gifts and the gathering of the Collection? How do they reveal the nature of the Mass as a sacrifice?

2. Is it appropriate for the Collection to be taken up during the Presentation of the Gifts? Why?

For Further Reading

Jungmann, Joseph, S.J. *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*. 2 Volumes. Translated by Francis A. Brunner, C.S.S.R. Reprint. Notre Dame, Ind.: Christian Classics, 2012. Volume 2, pp. 1-40. [An in-depth study of the history of the offertory procession.]

Amalar of Metz, *On the Liturgy*. 2 vols.; trans. Eric Knibbs; Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 36; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014. Volume 2, pp. 109-133 [An in-depth examination of the spiritual meaning of the Medieval Offertory.]

⁹ Amalar, *On the Liturgy*, 3.19. In Amalar of Metz, *On the Liturgy*, 2:121, 123, 127, 129.