

The Offertory

Now that we've worked through the first half of the Mass, known as the Liturgy of the Word, we're going to come to the second half of the Mass, which is known as the Liturgy of the Eucharist. And it's really going to begin with the Preparation of the Altar and the Presentation of the Gifts of bread and wine, commonly known as the Offertory. Now, when it comes to this part of the Mass, the Offertory, there are so many actions and signs taking place, as well as a number of prayers being said both out loud and quietly, or secretly, by the priest and the deacon, that it's a little overwhelming to try to cover them all. So I'm not going to try to do that. I just want to highlight certain elements of the Offertory that are most important for helping us understand that above all, what the Offertory is doing is preparing us for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the sacrificial component of the Mass, and also revealing to us that the Mass is not just a meal, but a sacrifice.

So, you can see this in a number of ways. First, if you just look at some of the actions taking place during the Offertory, it's at this time that either the priest or the deacon begins to focus our attention on the altar and prepares the altar for the offering of the Eucharist. So, for example, the deacon and priest will bring out the cloth known as the corporal and begin to lay it over the altar. You'll have the chalice being prepared and the purificator, the cloth that wipes the chalice, as well as bringing out the missal to place it on the altar so that the priest can say the words of the Eucharistic Prayer. So, there are a number of kind of solemn actions focusing our attention on the preparation of the altar for sacrifice.

It's also during the Offertory that we have the presentation and preparation of the gifts. Now, sometimes the gifts will just be brought to the altar by the priest himself, for example at a daily Mass or something like that. But at a Sunday Mass, it would be customary for there to be a symbolic or solemn procession of the gifts being brought up by the faithful, the bread and the wine to be presented to the priest and the deacon, along with the ministers, to be brought to the altar to be prepared, right. So, actually, the Church does not require there to be that procession with the gifts, but it does recommend it. It actually, in the instruction for the Roman Missal, it says this:

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...

We'll see that a little bit later when we look at the tradition on the presentation of the gifts.

...nevertheless the rite of carrying up the offerings still keeps its spiritual efficacy and significance.¹

So, this is the presentation of the gifts being brought off the altar. Another action you probably noticed that will tell you, "Hey, we're at the Offertory," is the mixing of the water and the wine by the priest or the deacon on the altar. You may have noticed this, that when the wine is poured into the chalice, a little bit of water will be mixed with it as well and certain prayers will be said. One final action you'll definitely notice is, after saying a few of the prayers, the priest is going to be brought water, and he's going to wash his hands and then dry them with a cloth before he begins the Eucharistic Prayer proper.

So those are some of the actions that tell you, "Hey, we're beginning the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and we are now at the point in the Mass known as the Offertory." What about the words of the Offertory? Well, here there are a series of multiple prayers being said, some of them out loud and some of them quietly or secretly. And which prayers you hear will often depend on whether you're at a Sunday Mass, where there's usually an Offertory chant being sung over the prayers, or whether you're at a daily Mass where there is no music, and then you can actually hear some of the words of the prayers that the priest is saying and certain responses of the people.

So let me just highlight three prayers in particular from the Offertory that we want to look at. The first are the benedictions over the bread and over the wine. Again, you'll hear these at a daily Mass. The priests will say these words:

¹ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 73.

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.

Now if you're at daily Mass and the priest says those aloud, the people will
respond:

[People: Blessed be God forever.]

And then he'll say a benediction or blessing over the wine as well. And it goes like
this:

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.

And then the people will respond:

[People: Blessed be God forever.]

So those are the prayers over the bread and over the wine. Now, during this time of
the Offertory, there're also going to be some secret prayers that the priest says
under his breath. And you may hear these at different times. Two, in particular,
stand out. First, the priest is going to bow profoundly over the gifts and say quietly,
and the Latin there is *secretis*, so, secretly:

*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.*

You often won't hear this one at Mass because the priest will say it very quietly. But sometimes you'll hear him when he's washing his hands say another secret prayer, like at a daily Mass, and it goes like this:

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

So those are the secret prayers of the priest. And then finally, there's going to be one prayer that's verbalized that everyone can hear, and not only hear, but they are invited to join in. This prayer is sometimes called the "Pray, brethren," or the invitation to prayer. The Latin here is *Orate Fratres*, which literally means "pray, brethren," and you probably hear this one clearly:

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

And then the people will respond to that invitation to prayer:

*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)*

So this is from the Roman Missal. It's numbers 21 through 30 in the Order of the Mass if you want to go back and review those. So the questions these prayers and actions raise are several, right? First, what is the significance of the various actions taking place at the altar? Preparation of the gifts, especially the procession of the bread and wine. Why do we even need to do that? Why can't the priest just get it for himself? What's the significance of the laity bringing forth those gifts to the altar? What's the significance of mixing the water and the wine? And why is the priest saying these prayers in particular? "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation..." over the bread and over the wine. And why the constant emphasis on sacrifice? You might have noticed this. In the secret prayers the priest is saying, "May this sacrifice be acceptable in your sight, O Lord." And then also in the "Pray, Brethren", the priest is explicitly referring to what's about to happen as a

sacrifice, but he makes a distinction between his sacrifice and the sacrifice of the people in inviting them to pray, right?

So it's clear, before we even look at the scriptural or traditional roots of these prayers, that the Offertory is revealing that the Mass isn't just a meal, it's a sacrifice. But where do the prayers come from in Scripture and where do they come from in tradition? And then also, what do they tell us about what's happening invisibly at this moment in the Mass? It's clearly a very important moment. What's happening mystically or mystagogically?

So let's just walk through and answer those questions by going back to the Bible and to the Roman and, in some cases, ancient Jewish tradition. When it comes to the biblical roots of the Offertory, there are so many texts undergirding it, it's actually amazing to see how much it is almost a kind of a tapestry of allusions to key passages in Sacred Scripture that often have to do with sacrifice. So, for example, the idea of presenting bread and wine and saying a prayer of benediction goes back to the account in Genesis of the very first man to be called a priest in the Bible. And that man is Melchizedek. So in Genesis 14:18 following, there's a story of Melchizedek offering a sacrifice of Thanksgiving after Abraham has had a victory over the kings of Sodom and other countries that had taken Lot, his nephew, captive. So, the biblical account runs as follows:

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.² (Genesis 14:18-20)

So pause there, notice what we have here. We have the first man in the Bible to be called priest coming out, bringing gifts, presenting gifts to be offered in sacrifice. And in this case, it's important, the first man to be called a priest doesn't offer a

² Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

lamb or a bull or a goat, a bloody sacrifice. He offers an unbloodied sacrifice of bread and wine as a Thanksgiving offering for the victory that Abraham has had over his enemies in battle, right? So this is really important because it helps us to remember that not every sacrifice in the Old Testament was a bloody sacrifice. There were lots of bloody sacrifices of bulls and goats and lambs and pigeons, and those are the ones we tend to think of as Christians. But there was also a primordial category of sacrifice known as the unbloody sacrifice. And the two elements that it consisted of were bread and wine. So you would use this kind of sacrifice especially in a thank offering or *todah* sacrifice, which is what Melchizedek here is offering on Abraham's behalf.

Notice also that Abraham offers his own sacrifice of money. He's going to give a tithe. We'll look at that in a different video when we turn to the collection, but I do just want to highlight that the two things go together here. The offering of sacrificial elements, like bread and wine, is tied to a monetary offering. Now, over time, that idea of presenting gifts and bread and wine in sacrifice to God in an unbloody manner is just going to be part and parcel of ancient Jewish tradition. So, for example, if you look at the Book of Numbers 15 or the Book of Leviticus 17, when the people of God are called to offer sacrifice, God is going to explicitly command the Israelites, over and over, to go to the Tabernacle and to bring gifts to be offered in sacrifice to God to the priests. In other words, there's a kind of ancient Israelite offertory rite. So, for example, if you look at Numbers 15, it says this:

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...

So you have there people...notice the people, the laity, are bringing gifts of a cereal offering, which in Hebrew is a *minkhah*. It doesn't mean like Frosted Flakes or Fruit Loops or something like that. It's a it's a grain offering, right. So you would have flour and wine, so bread and wine are being offered. And in Leviticus 17:5 it says very explicitly:

...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...”)

So, basically what you would have is the people bring their gifts up to the very cusp of the sanctuary, to the door, into the holy Tabernacle and then the priest will receive those gifts from the people in order to then go into the sanctuary and offer them on the altar. So there's a kind of ancient form of the presentation of gifts of bread and wine, and in some cases it'll be also the gift of a lamb or a goat or a bull, if it's a bloody sacrifice, in Leviticus and the book of Numbers.

Now, another element from the scriptures that's really interesting is that according to the book of Exodus 30, when a priest is going to offer sacrifice, he can't just take the bread and wine from the people, or take the lamb or goat from the people and then just begin to slaughter it or put it on the altar or burn it. He has to purify himself first. So there's a very solemn command that before the priests offer sacrifice, he has to wash his hands. In fact, not just his hands, but his hands and his feet, in this bronze laver known as the laver of washing. It was in the Tabernacle, but it was outside the most sacred place, the Holy of Holies in the Holy Place, because that is where the blood sacrifices would be offered, for example. So, in Exodus 30, we hear about the priest washing his hands. This is what it says:

“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.

This is very serious. It would be a grave abuse. Literally, grave, it will put you in the grave if you fail to wash before offering sacrifice. And it goes on to say:

They shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die...” (Exodus 30:17-21)

The two parts of their body that would ordinarily be unclean. So if you see a priest receiving gifts and then washing his hands before he offers sacrifice, you know, already mystically, kind of biblically, that you are entering into a sacred space. You're entering into the Tabernacle. You're entering into a place of sacrifice. You

see a priest washing his hands, he's about to offer sacrifice. So in order to prepare for such a solemn act, it's very fitting that the priest would offer some prayers of preparation and that's why during the offertory in the Mass today, the priest is going to say these secret prayers, right? With a humble and contrite heart, may our sacrifice be acceptable to you. Or, Lord, wash me of my iniquity and cleanse me of my sin. Those two secret prayers, I just want to quickly highlight, again, are just the inspired words of scripture being placed on the lips of the priest. So the first secret prayer is from the Book of Daniel. It's actually the prayer of Azariah when Daniel and his companions are in the furnace and they're basically about to be burned up as a kind of living sacrifice to God, as martyrs for the Jewish faith. Azariah utters this prayer in the Greek version of the Book of Daniel, and he says:

*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])*

Now pause there for a second. Notice, when Azariah prays that prayer, he's recognizing that the ordinary sacrifice will be bulls or goats, but in this case the sacrifice is going to be themselves. So they want to offer God humble and contrite hearts because that's the real sacrifice that pleases the Lord. It's the sacrifice of the heart. All throughout the Old Testament, whenever a person would offer a bull or a goat or bread or wine, that giving of that gift is not really, at the end of the day, about the bread or the wine or the bull, the goat. God doesn't need bread. He doesn't need wine. He doesn't need bulls and goats, right? But those elements are visible signs of the self-offering to God of a person's heart, of their life, of their body, of their very selves, loving the Lord, their God, with their whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. So every sacrifice in the Old Testament is basically like a ritualized self-offering to God and you really see that in the prayer of Azariah when he's in the furnace. So when the priest prays the prayer of Azariah secretly, it's like he is entering into the furnace of the Eucharistic Prayer, not just to offer the elements and offer Christ, but to offer himself in union with Christ in this Holy Sacrifice. It's a beautiful prayer of the priest.

Of course, the priest is a sinner, right? So he also takes the words of David on his lips when he says:

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

Those words he prays while he's washing his hands, those are from Psalm 51. Psalm 51 is the most famous penitential Psalm in the Book of Psalms. And it's the prayer that David prays after he realizes his sin that he's engaged in with Bathsheba, right? This is his Psalm of being turned around in penitence toward God and turning away from his sin, turning back to God. And so he recognizes he's defiled himself through his sin. So he says, Lord, wash away my iniquity, cleanse me from my sin. So at this moment in the Mass the priest is taking both the prayer of Azariah from the furnace on his lips, of self-offering, and the prayer of David, begging God to cleanse him of sin, to make him worthy in God's sight and in God's presence in Psalm 51. So it's a beautiful, mystical appropriation of the scriptures in those secret prayers of the priest.

What about the prayers over the bread and wine, though?

*Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation,
for through your goodness we have received
the bread we offer you...*

Where does that come from? Well, it's interesting. You're not going to find those prayers exactly in the Bible. They're not in their word for word. But there's actually an allusion to those prayers in the accounts of the Last Supper, and you can only really see it if you know not just Jewish scripture. but ancient Jewish tradition. So if you look at the account of the Last Supper, for example, in Mark 14, it says that:

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)

Now a lot of times we kind of rush right through that and we don't pause to ask, well, what was the blessing that he said? What was the prayer of thanksgiving that he said over the bread and over the wine at the Last Supper? I'll give you a hint. It wasn't "Bless us, O Lord, and these, Thy gifts, which we are about to receive... right? Although that's a wonderful, traditional, beautiful prayer, that's not the words that were part of the ancient Jewish prayer over bread and wine. But through study of Judaism at the time of Jesus, and through the collection of ancient Jewish traditions in a book known as the Mishnah — I have a copy right here. The Mishnah is a collection that the rabbis made around 200 AD of lots of prayers and rites and ceremonies that especially were being preserved from the time when the Temple still stood, and Jesus was alive at the time of that second Temple. And in the Mishnah it actually tells us that there were certain prayers that were said over bread and wine, not just at any meal, but in particular at the Passover meal, right. So there were common prayers of blessing that were used over regular meals, but also over the — this is important — the sacrificial banquet of the Passover, right? So if you look, this is what the Mishnah says would have been said by a man praying a prayer of benediction over the wine and the bread during an ancient Jewish meal, including at the Passover meal:

Over bread a man says, "*Blessed are You, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.*"

Sound familiar? And then again:

Over wine a man says, "*Blessed are You, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.*"³

Now, one other element that I want to make sure I add here is that the same Mishnah that records these two prayers, which you can see are almost verbatim with what we're saying in the Roman Missal over the bread and wine, the Benedictions. It also says that whenever a man has brought the chalice or the cup of wine at Passover, it is supposed to be mixed with water. Okay, so it says:

³ Mishnah, *Berakoth* 6:1. Cf. Hebert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 6.

After they have mixed for him the third cup he says the Benediction over his meal.⁴

So when you take those Jewish traditions from the Mishna, and those are in the treatise...there are two treatises, one called *Berakoth*, on blessings, and then another called *Pesahim*, on the Passover. When you look at those traditions, we can then go back at the Last Supper and say that if Jesus is following these ancient Jewish traditions from the 1st century, then they would have at the Last Supper mixed water and wine in his cup that he's going to consecrate at the Last Supper and then when he said the blessing, the prayers he would have said would have been substantially something like “*Blessed are You, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.*” And “*Blessed are You, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.*” So in the Missal, then, we're taking the prayers that Jesus himself — this is important — would have offered over the gifts of bread and wine at the Last Supper, and placing them on the lips of the priest.

With two changes though, and this is important, you'll notice the Jewish prayers do not say so “that it will become for us the bread of life”, and they also do not say “it will become our spiritual drink.” Those two final lines in the in the prayers of the Offertory are taken from the Bread of Life Discourse in John 6, the famous Eucharistic discourse, and St. Paul's teaching on the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 10, where he compares the Eucharist to the manna and the water from the rock that he says was the “spiritual drink” of the Israelites in the desert. So what the Church is doing here is it's bringing those ancient Jewish prayers forward to the fulfillment in the new manna, which is the bread of life, the Eucharist, the body of Christ, and then the new spiritual drink, which is the blood of Christ, in the consecrated wine. So it's like a blending of old and new, prophecy and fulfillment, in the Eucharistic prayers themselves, drawing on the very language of St. Paul and our Lord in the Bread of Life discourse.

Okay, so those are the biblical roots of the Offertory. What about the traditional roots of the Offertory? Well, it's interesting, if you look at the actions in the

⁴ Mishnah, *Pesahim* 10:1-3, 7. In Danby, *The Mishnah*, 150-51 (slightly adapted).

Offertory, those are very, very ancient. But in terms of the prayers of the Offertory, it's going to be a long time, many centuries, before certain prayers are added to the actions of presenting the gifts and offering them to God. So let's just walk through the development of the Offertory throughout the centuries with attention both to the actions and to the words, the prayers. Let's start with the Presentation of the Gifts. Our oldest description of the Roman liturgy that we possess, in the 2nd century AD, comes from St. Justin Martyr. I have a copy here of his 1 and 2 Apologies. These are his defenses of Christianity, written to the Roman Emperor at the time. And in that he actually describes the Eucharistic liturgy and already in the 2nd century, the Presentation of the Gifts and prayer over the gifts is part of the Roman liturgy. This is what Justin says:

Then a bread and a cup containing water and wine...

So see, it's both 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.⁵

So you have here the action of the gifts being presented to the priest. He says prayers over them, but Justin doesn't tell us exactly what the words of those prayers are, and in fact he appears to be speaking there of the Eucharistic prayer in particular, which at this period is still going to be extemporaneous. The priest is going to largely pray the prayer with his own words. There's not going to be a set formula just yet in the Church of Rome in the 2nd century. That's going to develop over time. If we fast forward to the 7th century in Rome. I've mentioned this text before, but *Ordo Romanus I*, this is a 7th century description of a Papal Mass, is one of our most explicit descriptions of the offertory procession being practiced in the Roman Church. So here you have a Papal Mass where the laity are going to bring forward the gifts of bread and wine, the Pope's going to receive them and then he's going to offer them on their behalf in the offertory right of the Mass. So here's a 7th century description of the Offertory. Listen to this, it is very interesting. It says this quote:

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

The pope, however, descends...

It means he comes down out of the sanctuary.

...and he receives the [lay] offerings (Latin oblationes) of the leading men in the order of their dignities.

So a lot of times the leaders of the Roman church, kind of the the leading laymen, would bring the gifts on behalf of the rest of the people. It says:

The archdeacon behind him receives the smaller flagons...

So if the deacon is there with him, the Pope gives the the flagons of wine to the Deacon and then the Deacon:

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...

So there you see what would later be called the corporal, that white cloth that the offerings go on. And then it says:

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 hands⁶

So notice, what is that describing? Several things. First, in the early Church, for several centuries, it was customary for the men to sit on one side of the church and the women to sit on the other side of the church. So they would separate according

⁶ *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.

to genders. And both groups of laity, both the laymen, the leading layman, as well as the laywomen, would present offerings of bread and wine to the Pope, who would go down out of the sanctuary, receive those gifts from the laity, and then give them to the deacon or archdeacon, who would then begin preparing the altar on his behalf. So we see a number of parallels to what we do today in the Presentation of the Gifts, with the exception being that in the early Church, the bread and wine that was offered was often prepared by the laypeople themselves. The women would break the bread and then offer it to the Pope to be consecrated in the Eucharist. In fact there is a story of St. Gregory the Great, in one of his dialogues, where he actually talks about a woman, who when she came up to receive communion from him, she laughed because the host that he was giving to her, she saw, looked down and saw it and recognized that she had baked it herself, right? So there was a recognition that the very bread she had prepared, was the bread that he had consecrated and then given back to her in Holy Communion. So it's really interesting window into the early Church. And the symbolism — we'll get back to that in just a minute — is there, again, just like in the Old Testament, that when you offer bread, wine, bull, goat or lamb, it's an offering of yourself, right? You're offering yourself to God through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass at the hands of the priests, or in this case, the Pope himself. So that's the 7th century.

What about some of the prayers? Those are going to take a long time to develop. St. Robert Bellarmine actually, in his treatise on the Mass, he was a famous Jesuit priest, Doctor of the Church. He wrote a book on the Mass in the 17th century. And he pointed out that a lot of the prayers we use in the Offertory are not ancient. They're from the Middle Ages. They're from later centuries. And the secret prayer of the priest is one of those. So it's not until the 8th century that we have accounts of the priest saying those beautiful words:

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.⁷

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.”

There was a Sacramentary of Amiens in the 8th century. That's kind of the oldest example we have of that. So it's an early medieval prayer that expresses the desire to say holy words while engaging in these holy actions of preparing the gifts to be offered. And then it's not until the 13th century that we see an account of the Prayer, Brethren, that invitation to pray that we have in the Mass. So here, it's one of my favorite books, this is the description of the Mass at the time of Pope Innocent III in the 13th century. It's the Ordinal of the Papal Court and our prayer that we pray in the invitation, pray, brethren, goes all the way back to this medieval form of the Mass at the time of Pope Innocent. And it says this, that the Pope or the priest leading the Mass:

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.*⁸

Now pause there for a second. You'll notice something interesting. First of all, that that prayer is specifically directed to the people, right? In fact, other missals from this time period, other medieval missals, like the Sarum Missal, is going to be very clear that the response here is the response of the people to the invitation to pray. I bring this up because in later centuries, like at the time of the Council of Trent, the Roman Missal, there's going to be an alteration here where the priest is going to say that to the server and the server will respond for the people, but it will only be the server responding. And so what's going to happen over centuries is, eventually, after Vatican II, the prayer of the people, that's going to be restored like it was in the Missal of Pope Innocent the III or the medieval Sarum Missal, where the Roman liturgy was being practiced in England in the 13th and 14th and 15th centuries. So this is a very important prayer because it shows the convergence of

⁸ 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.

two distinct sacrificial offerings. They're united, but they're distinct. There is the offering of the Eucharist by the priest, or the Pope, but then there is the sacrifice that the people are offering in union with the priest. And these are coming together in this powerful prayer, "*Pray brethren (Latin Orate fratres)* that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable God, the Father Almighty."

It's interesting. One little note. It's all interesting, I keep saying that, but it is interesting. In the Sarum Missal, it actually says "Orate, fratres et sorores," so pray, brothers and sisters, which makes it very clear that the priest there is speaking not just to the men, but also to the women in the congregation. So all the faithful are being invited to offer sacrifice in union with the priest at the time of the Offertory. Okay, so with all that in mind, clearly the Offertory is a key moment. This is a very solemn, very significant moment. It's a key moment of transition from the Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. And more than anything else, it highlights the sacrificial character of the Mass.

So, with that in mind, what's happening mystically? What's going on invisibly at this moment? I just want to end with a few applications. First, the act of mixing the water and wine together is very ancient and has always been seen as symbolic. St. Cyprian of Carthage, he was a saint in North Africa in the 3rd century, he wrote a lot on this because there were some heretics who were actually not mixing water and wine. Some only wanted to use water because they didn't want to have alcohol during the liturgy. Others would just use wine and Cyril wants to say no, no no, it has to be both water and wine. Why? What's the symbolism? St. Cyprian says:

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...⁹

So he sees the mingling of the water and wine as like the union of Christ, the wine symbolizing his blood and the water, which represents the people, being mixed

⁹ Cyprian of Carthage, *Letters* 63; in Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 1:169.

together into one so that you can no longer separate them, he would go on to say. So this is a very important symbolic action that's part of the Mass, and it's a good example of how from very early on, the Church Fathers are going to attribute a kind of mystical meaning to not just the words but also the signs and actions in the liturgy. A second mystical meaning to this Mass is from the 9th century AD. One of the most famous commentators on the Mass, probably the most famous in the Middle Ages, was a Bishop, Amalar of Metz. He was Bishop of Metz at the time of King Charlemagne. There was a lot of emphasis on the liturgy, and he wrote this famous two volume work called *On the Liturgy*, and still at this point in the ninth century, the people were presenting their gifts to be offered in the Roman liturgy in the Latin Rite. And so Amalar describes the significance of this part of the Mass, the Presentation of the Gifts as follows:

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 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...¹⁰

So beautiful. Amalar sees in the Offertory almost a kind of dance here. Both actions of the people and the priests are meant to signify the interior purification and the interior self offering that is expressed through the exterior acts of offering bread and wine by the people and the exterior act of the priests washing his hands before offering the sacrifice of the Mass. And sure enough, it's not just the Middle Ages but in the Church today. The Catechism of the Catholic Church has a beautiful paragraph on the Offertory in 1368 where it emphasizes, and I cannot stress this enough, that when we come to Mass, when we participate in the Mass, it's crucial to remember that the Mass is not only the sacrifice of the priest. The priest is the ministerial offerer. He's the one offering the sacrifice of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, but, so crucial, the people also offer sacrifice in union with him, right? And the sacrifice they offer is the sacrifice of themselves. Listen to what the Church says, this is the Catechism:

¹⁰ Amalar, *On the Liturgy*, 3.19. In Amalar of Metz, *On the Liturgy*, 2:121, 123, 127, 129.

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.

Now you might be thinking, pause here. What do I have to give? What do I have to offer? I'm not a priest. How can I offer sacrifice? That Catechism says:

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)

So, this is going to be so crucial. If you want to know what's being offered at the Mass, just ask what's being lifted up. The priest is going to lift up the Blessed Sacrament. He's offering the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ to the Father in the person of Christ. But as we're going to see when we get to the beginning of Eucharistic Prayer, the Laity are going to be asked to lift up their hearts. So at this point in the Mass we're bringing our prayer, our praise, our sufferings, our work, everything in our lives that we want to unite to the offering of the priest who's offering Christ himself, body, blood, soul and divinity, in the sacrifice of Mass. That's what makes it not only the sacrifice of the priest, but the sacrifice of the people as well, so that the whole Christ, head and body, are united in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. And for me personally, this makes the Offertory such a crucial moment in the Mass, because it's so often the case, I know, with my own personal life, for many years I thought I only went to Mass to receive. I went to Mass to receive Holy Communion. I went to Mass to receive the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ. And that's true that you go to receive, but it's not true that you go only to receive. You also go to Mass, not just to receive, but to offer, because the Mass is a sacrifice, not just a meal, and that happens in such a crucial way, that happens and is manifested in the beautiful prayers and rites of the Offertory.