

Mass Parts 21/52: *Preparation of the Gifts*



Setting up the altar reveals both the sacrificial and meal aspects of the Eucharist. The altar of sacrifice is prepped to receive the victim. The top of the altar itself is also set for a fancy dinner party. Think of all the effort that goes into decorating and setting up for holiday dinners or wedding receptions. Before the food is placed on the altar, it must be properly set. The servers place all that is necessary for the consecration. In the middle is the *corporal*, a small square napkin / table cloth. The name comes from the Latin for “body,” as it goes under the bread and collects any fragments that break off. To the upper right, as at dinner, is placed the chalice. While we used to use the word “cup,” “chalice” brings out more of the sacred and fancy nature of what we are celebrating. Near the chalice is placed a *purificator*, or as some servers call it: the napkin thing. Its purpose is to wipe the rim of the chalice after drinking and to clean up when we purify the vessels. When the bread is brought forward, it can be on a *paten*: a small plate, or a *ciborium*; a small bowl. This comes from the Greek *cibus*, which means “food.” The Roman Missal, which has all of the words and actions necessary for consecration, is placed to the left. Extra chalices and extra plates or bowls can be used as well, but that is it. Nothing else, other than the monstrance during Adoration, is ever placed on an altar. Not even for a second. It is a sacred place, where a piece of bread and a bit of wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. It is not a place to just rest something for a second.

The gifts that are brought up are the bread and wine to be used for the consecration and gifts for the poor. While it was a practice in times past to bring up other symbolic gifts, especially at funerals, this is frowned upon today. The focus should remain on the Eucharist itself.

Now, what do we all do during this time? As the altar is being prepared, as the gifts are being prepared, all are called to prepare themselves for the Eucharist as well. We take the time to prepare our hearts for what we are about to celebrate and what we are about to receive. As the gifts are brought forward, we send with them all of our hopes, intentions, fears, and supplications. All the prayers and sacrifices of our lives are also placed on the altar. They are offered up with the Eucharist and become one with the Body of Christ as well. Take the time during preparation to call to mind all that you want to pray for during this Mass and take the time to visualize them being placed on the altar. As baptized priests, prophets, and kings, your prayers join with the priest’s as one and ascend to heaven as well.

-Fr. Kopp

Next Week: Collection