

Mass Parts 23/52:

Offering Preparatory Prayers



As the very gifts we offer back to God in the celebration of the Eucharist were first given to us by God in the natural order of the earth, we give thanks to God and bless the bread and wine. These prayers are based on Jewish meal and cup blessings. In a quiet, small setting, the priest can say these prayers out loud; the congregation then responds to each Invocation: "Blessed be God for ever." If there is music during the preparation of gifts, the priest says them quietly and no response is necessary.

Over the bread, the priest prays:

*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.*

Over the chalice of wine, the priest prays:

*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.*

Before blessing the chalice the wine is mixed with a little water. Historically, this finds its meaning in the natural practice of diluting the strong wine of the ancient world. With time and liturgical practice, a theology was discerned and added to the prayers. After wine is poured into the chalice, a tiny bit of water is mixed in as well, as the deacon or priest prays:

*By the mystery of this water and wine
may we come to share in the divinity of Christ
who humbled himself to share in our humanity.*

As we prepare to unite our own intentions and our own lives to the sacrifice of the Mass, we see this symbolically in the uniting of the water and the wine: the wine which will be the supernatural Blood of Christ and the very natural water of our own bodies.

Throughout the consecration in the Mass, there are numerous quiet preparatory prayers on behalf of the presider and the people. At this point, immediately before the beginning of the Eucharist Prayer, the priest bows profoundly with hands joined and prays:

*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 final part of this quiet preparation is the washing of the hands of the priest. Obviously there is a natural historic aspect to the ritual: the priest should wash his hands before touching things for other people, but there is also a ritualized aspect in that the priest should purify his hands before touching holy things. It is also an external rite of an internal disposition, acknowledging the personal sinfulness of the priest and the unworthiness that he hopes will be removed. While the servers pour water over his hands, he prays:

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

-Fr. Kopp

Next Week: Congregation Prayers over the Offertory