

# **The Mass – What is it and Why does it matter?**

**The Mass as it is celebrated today is the result of many years of study, reflection and discussion. While the Council of Vatican II in 1962-1965 provided many changes to the rituals of the Mass, it did not in any way change the focus or the meaning of the Mass: the sacrifice that Christ made for His people.**

**The Mass, also known as the sacrament of the Eucharist (Greek for "Thanksgiving") and the Sacred Liturgy (or "Work of the People"), is the greatest prayer of the Church. During its celebration, the faithful of Christ remember the love that He has for us, renew their commitment to each other and the work of the earthly Church, and hope in the promise that He made to the universal Church (the Communion of Saints: those now living and those who have gone before.) Let's take a look at the participants at the Mass, the environment, and the flow of the celebration.**

## **The Participants**

While remaining true to Christ's statement "Where two or more are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst," (Matthew 18:20) the formal celebration of the Mass is made complete by the participation of several people in various ministries:

### **The Priest**

The most visible person in the Mass is the Priest. Ordained in the sacrament of Holy Orders, the priest is the representative of the people in leading prayers, presiding over the Mass and, most importantly, performing the consecration of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

### **The Deacon**

Ordained in the sacrament of Holy Orders as subordinate to the Order of Priest, there are two designations of Deacons: the transitional Deacon and the permanent Deacon. A transitional Deacon is someone who has completed his third year of seminary Theology training and will be ordained a Priest at the end of this training. The office of the permanent Deacon, re-established in 1977, is (usually) a married man and may have a career outside of the Church. Whether transitional or permanent, his function in the Mass is to assist the Priest in the prayers, prepare the altar for celebration, read the Gospel, give the homily if applicable and distribute Communion (in fact, the Priest and Deacon are referred to as "ordinary" ministers of the Word and Communion in order to distinguish him from the "extra-ordinary" ministries of Lector and Eucharistic Ministers now performed by the laity.)

## **Lectors/Readers**

Once *ordinarily* reserved for a man who had completed his first year of seminary training in the suborder of Lector, this ministry is now performed largely by lay members who are installed as extra-ordinary ministers of the Word, or Lector. During Mass, the Lector will read the first and second Readings (usually taken from the Old Testament and the Epistles), may lead the congregation in the Responsorial between the readings (always taken from the Book of Psalms) and make any necessary announcements.

## **Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion**

This ministry is performed by extra-ordinary ministers of the Eucharist, lay people installed to extend the community of the faithful both during the formal Mass and to bring Communion to people unable to attend Mass due to illness or infirmity. During Mass, these people will assist the Priest and Deacon in distributing communion to the people, possibly in both species (that is, in both forms of bread and wine which have been consecrated into the Body and Blood of Christ during that Mass.)

## **Cantors and Musicians**

These people lead the congregation in the musical worship of the Mass. Considered a form of prayer, music provides the opportunity to focus on the celebration at hand and to offer our voices and talents as "incense wafting up to the Lord." (Psalms 141:2)

## **Altar Servers**

Once *ordinarily* reserved for a man who had completed his second year of seminary training in the suborder of Acolyte, this ministry is now largely performed by lay people who are installed as acolytes, typically grammar- or high-school age young people. Altar-servers assist the Priest and Deacon in various tasks during the Mass such as bringing the gifts to the altar, assist during incensing when needed and ensure that the events of the Mass are conducted smoothly.

## **Greeters and Ushers**

These lay people are members from the congregation who have taken on a special task in promoting the sense of community that is vital to the Church. They assist those who have difficulty getting to their seats, help during the collection, answer or refer any questions that churchgoers may have regarding the Mass or the church, and generally provide a friendly face to those who have come to offer celebration.

## **The Congregation**

It is often a misconception that the Priest offers the Mass and the people are spectators. In reality, all present are offering the Mass, guided by the Priest. Without the community that its members provide and their active participation, both in the liturgy and outside the confines of the church building, the Catholic church would not be effective in carrying out Christ's directive to "tell the Good News to the ends of the earth." (Romans 10:18)

## **The Vestments**

In the Old Testament, God not only regulated the details of divine worship, but He also prescribed the type of dress to be worn by the priests in the performance of their priestly office. "You must make sacred vestments for your brother Aaron to consecrate him to serve as priest to me. The following are the vestments you must make: a pouch or breastpiece, an apron, a robe, a brocaded tunic, a mitre and a girdle, and they must use gold, violet, purple, and scarlet yarn and fine linen." (Exodus 28).

In the New Testament no such regulations were laid down. Jesus recalled the life of Paradise when He said, "Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body what you shall put on." (Matthew 6:25) Perhaps for this reason, the early Church chose the chasuble of the peasant instead of the toga of the free Roman citizen.

The vestments of the Christian Church were developed from articles of dress worn in the Roman empire; the basic forms were inspired by classical Greek attire. Archeology shows that ecclesiastical apparel from the first century onward follows the Greco-Roman pattern and manner of wearing the tunic and the mantle.

### **The Alb**

The alb is a sack-like, full-length white tunic usually made of linen, with long sleeves, secured at the waist by a white linen, silk or cotton cord. Albs were originally plain, but about the 10th century, the custom arose of ornamenting the hem and cuffs with embroidery, and this became common in the 12th century. Such ornamentation at first encircled the whole hem and cuff, but soon it became customary to substitute rectangular patches of embroidery or fabric. Albs are worn by anyone who is involved in the Mass in the surroundings of the Sanctuary (Priest, Deacon, Altar Servers, Choir, etc.)

### **The Chasuble**

The Chasuble, the outermost Eucharistic vestment, worn over alb, amice and stole, is the distinctive garment of the Priest. Ornamentation was the first element that began to alter the appearance of the chasuble. In order to strengthen the single front seam, it was covered by a band; the neck opening was also strengthened and a transverse band became common. This "T" led to the placing of crosses on the chasuble. The medieval custom was to add side bands to the central column, forming a "Y" or fork. This is typical of chasubles from 13th to 16th centuries. As the sides of the chasuble came to be cut down in later centuries, the "Y" was squared off to form the Latin cross, which was transferred to the back of the vestment to symbolize the carrying of the Cross. Today there is no requirement for placing a cross or any other decoration on the chasuble.

## **The Priest's/Bishop's Stole**

The Stole is the sign of the authority of the Priesthood of Christ. It symbolizes immortality and reminds the priest of how sweet it is to serve Jesus. While putting on the stole, the priest may say, "Give me, O, Lord, the help to be able to come to You in heaven." He kisses the cross on the center back of the stole as he places it over his head and around the back of his neck.

The stole is a band of silk or other fine fabric eight feet long and four inches wide, marked in the center with a cross. If the stole is worn over the alb and under the chasuble, the ends are worn loose. Bishops always wear the stole over the chasuble with the ends of the stole hanging loose. A stole is worn when a cleric is exercising his order in celebration of Mass or in administering a sacrament such as Penance (Confession) or the Sacrament of the Sick.

## **The Deacon's Stole**

A deacon wears a stole from the left shoulder to his right side, attached at the hip level with a chain or tie. He wears the stole over the alb and under the dalmatic when he is assisting at the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, when he preaches the Word of God or when he assists at weddings. He can wear the stole over the alb when he is baptizing or when he is preparing to wear the cope for Exposition and/or Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

## **The Amice**

An Amice is a rectangular vestment made of white linen and measuring 36" x 24" with two 36" strings of twill tape. It is worn under the alb, covering the neck and shoulders of the priest and/or of the deacon at Mass. Originally, it was a neckcloth to protect the valuable chasuble and stole. Also, it is known that the amice was at one time a head covering for priests and monks in cold monasteries. In legend, it is the helmet worn by the priest going forth to do battle for his people. The amice is no longer obligatory if the alb covers the neck. While putting on the amice, the priest may pray, "Lord, give me strength to conquer the temptations of the devil."

## **The Dalmatic**

The Dalmatic is a more elaborate tunic with color and fabric the same as the vestments of the celebrating priest. The form has remained identical to the original with open sides, wide sleeves with bands about the cuffs and colored bands descending from the shoulders. As in early Christian times, it is worn without cincture or girdle. The dalmatic became the distinctive garment of the deacons of the city of Rome during the 5th century and it is retained as the diaconal vestment.

## **Vestment Colors**

The colors of the vestments necessary for a full set of Ecclesiastical Vestments are the following:

**White** is the symbol of purity and is used at the following offices and Masses:

1. Christmas season, Easter season other than those concerning the Lord's passion
2. Feasts and memorials of the Blessed Virgin Mary
3. Feasts of the Angels
4. Feasts of the Saints who were not martyrs
5. Feast of All Saints (Nov. 1)
6. Feast of Saint John the Baptist (June 24)
7. Feast of Saint John the Evangelist (Dec. 27)
8. Feast of Saint Peter's Chair (Feb. 22)
9. Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul (Jan. 25)

**Red** is the symbol of fire and blood and is used for the following offices and Masses:

1. Passion Sunday
2. Good Friday
3. Pentecost
4. Commemorations of the Lord's passion
5. Commemorations of the martyrdoms of the apostles the evangelists and other martyrs

**Green** is the symbol of hope in Christ and is used in the following offices and Masses:

1. Those times (ordinary time) of the year which are not particular seasons.

**Purple** is the symbol of repentance and is used in the following offices and Masses:

1. Penitential seasons of Lent and Advent
2. Masses for the Dead (optional)

**Rose** is the symbol of joy and is used on the following Sundays:

1. Gaudete Sunday, third Sunday of Lent
2. Laetare Sunday, fourth Sunday of Advent

**Gold** is the symbol of special occasions and can be worn on all special occasions such as Easter and Christmas.

**Black** may be used for the Masses for the Dead, but today rarely is.

## The Parts of the Mass

The Roman Catholic Church recognizes that Christ left us with two important gifts to aid in our worship: the gift of His teachings and the gift of His Body. The Mass is designed to pay homage to both of these blessings, and so is divided into two parts: The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Both are required in order to accomplish the goal of the Church: **To Know, Love and Serve Him in this Life and to Enjoy Him in the next.**

### **Liturgy of the Word**

**Entrance** - The Mass begins when the Priest and ministers process from the Sacristy to the Sanctuary and the Altar. All of the congregation stands and sings, not to honor the Priest, but to express our unity in Christ. As the Priest and ministers bow before approaching the Altar and the Priest and Deacon kiss it as a sign of adoration to Christ.

**Greetings** - The Priest extends the blessing of the sign of the cross † and the words "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" to the people, at which they respond "Amen" (Hebrew for "So be it" or "It is true".) It is followed by an invocation such as "The Lord be with you", to which the people respond "And with your spirit." The Priest then says a short greeting.

**Blessing and Sprinkling of Holy Water** - at solemn events this optional rite is included. The Priest calls the people to remind them of their baptism. After this, he says a prayer to bless the water then sprinkles the people and other ministers. If this rite is used, the Penitential Act is omitted.

**Penitential Act** - The Priest calls for silence and an examination of conscience. The Kyrie or other option (with the response "Lord Have Mercy/Christ Have Mercy/Lord Have Mercy") is said.

**Gloria** - This is a festive hymn glorifying God, the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints. It may be said or sung. It is used on all Sundays outside of Lent and Advent.

**Opening Prayer or Collect** - The formula "Let us pray" is used. This invocation is repeated at several key points of the Mass in order to focus attention and worship. In the prayer, the people are exhorted to prepare themselves to hear and listen to the Word of God.

**The Readings** - The reading of Scripture is a custom thousands of years old and is reminiscent of our Jewish heritage. In the present Mass, the Readings take the following form:

**The First Reading** - usually taken from the Old Testament (*but not always*, such as during the Easter season.) The account read expresses emotions and experiences to which ordinary humans can relate (such as hopes, dreams, fears, anger) and how God has answered these down the ages. This reading is usually connected in some way to the Gospel. The Lector ends the reading with the words "The Word of the Lord" to which the people respond "Thanks be to God."

**The Responsorial Psalm** - *almost* always taken from the Old Testament Book of Psalms, although occasionally may come from songs or poems in other Old Testament books such as Daniel, Isaiah or Tobit, and on very rare occasions from the New Testament books. They are usually chanted or sung and the people respond with the antiphon at the end of each verse.

**The Second Reading** - usually taken from the New Testament Letters and books outside of the Gospels. A second reading is said on Sunday, Holy days of obligation and Feast days.

**Gospel Acclamation** - The Alleluia (Hebrew for "Praise God") is always sung. If not sung, it is omitted (Introduction to the Lectionary, 23). It is also omitted during the seasons of Lent and Advent.

**The Gospel** - Greek for "Good News", the people stand in reverence to the word which is about to be proclaimed. If the Deacon is going to proclaim the Gospel, he asks for the Priest's blessing by quietly saying "Your blessing, Father" at which the Priest responds "May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips that you may proclaim his Gospel worthily and well. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, † and of the Holy Spirit." The Deacon answers "Amen." If there is no Deacon, the Priest bows before the Altar and says quietly "Cleanse my heart and my lips, Almighty God, that I may worthily proclaim your holy Gospel." The Priest or Deacon begins with the invocation "The Lord be with you" at which the people respond "And with your spirit." The proclaimer announces the gospel at which the people respond "Glory to you, O Lord" and makes the sign of the cross on the book, and then on his forehead, lips and breast to signify obedience to His word within our minds, upon our lips and within our hearts. If incense is to be used, the proclaimer incenses the book. The gospel is then proclaimed. At its conclusion, the proclaimer says "The gospel of the Lord," to which the people respond "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ."

On Sundays, the gospel is proclaimed on a 3-year cycle. Cycle A concentrates on the Gospel according to Matthew. Cycle B concentrates on the Gospel according to Mark. Cycle C concentrates on the Gospel according to Luke. The Gospel according to John is used on various occasions (such as commemorations and the weeks leading up to Easter) throughout the year. During the week, the gospel takes on a 2-year rotation from the different gospels.

**The Homily** - The Priest or Deacon explain the word that the people have just heard and how they should apply it to their lives. On Sundays and Holy Days, a homily must be given; it is recommended for other days.

**Profession of Faith** - On Sundays and solemnities the congregation says the Creed. Within it are the basics of our Catholic faith: our belief in God, in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. We also express our hope in the promises of our faith. There are two Creeds; the one normally used at Mass is the Nicene Creed and in Masses for Children the shorter and older Apostles' Creed is said (*Directory for Masses with Children, 49.*)

**General Intercessions or Universal Prayer or Prayer of the Faithful**- Petitions that the people and the Church place before God and are usually said by the Deacon or other minister. They are petitions for the Church, for our own needs and for the needs of others. After each petition the people respond, such as "Lord, hear our prayer." After the petitions, the Priest says a short prayer, which concludes the Liturgy of the Word.

## Liturgy of the Eucharist

**Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts** - The offertory song is sung. Meanwhile the ministers place the corporal and purificators (white cloths used during the offerings), the chalice and the Sacramentary on the Altar. It is encouraged that members of the congregation bring the gifts to the Priest in order to symbolize the mutual participation of the people in the sacrifice of the Mass.

The Priest blesses the bread with the following: "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." The people respond "Blessed be God for ever." The Priest then says quietly (or Deacon, if he is preparing the gifts): "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." He pours a small amount of water into the chalice with the wine. One theory behind this is that early wines were very thick and water was used to make them more drinkable. Whatever the reason, the prayer and action emphasize the union of Christ with us in the mixing of water and wine.

The Priest blesses the chalice with the wine with: "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." The people respond "Blessed be God for ever." The Priest then says quietly: "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."

If incense is used, he now incenses the offerings and the Altar. Afterwards, the Deacon (if present) incenses the Priest and the people.

Next the priest stands at the side of the Altar and washes his hands, saying quietly: "Wash me, O Lord, of my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."

Standing at the center of the altar, the Priest says: "Pray, my brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father." The people respond: "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of His name, for our good, and for the good of all his holy Church." The Priest says a prayer over the gifts, and the people respond "Amen."

**Eucharistic Prayer** - The prayer of Thanksgiving is composed of several parts:

*Greetings* - The invocation "The Lord be with you" is used, to which the people respond "And with your spirit." As at the beginning of Mass, this is used to focus the people's attention to the worship at hand.

*Preface* - We begin to give thanks with the following: Priest: "Lift up your hearts" People: "We lift them up to the Lord" Priest: "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God" People: "It is right and just." The Priest then says a short Eucharistic Preface prayer.

*Acclamation* - The "Holy, Holy, Holy" prayer comes from several sources:

"Holy, Holy, Holy, God of hosts" - Isaiah 6:3

"Hosanna in the Highest" - Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. John 12:13

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" - Psalm 118:26

The congregation kneels.

The *Eucharistic Prayer* itself - There are four primary forms of the prayer. Whichever form is used, the prayer is composed of several parts:

Epiclesis (Greek for "invocation") - invoking the Holy Spirit to come upon the gifts.

Anamnesis (Greek for "memory") - recollection of the institution of the sacrament of the Eucharist by Christ in the Last Supper in the words: "Take this, all of you and eat of it, for this is my body which will be given up for you." and "Take this, all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant. It will be shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me." It is at this point that the mystery of *transubstantiation* (the consecration of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ while still retaining their physical form) takes place. The Memorial Acclamation is said or sung by the Priest ("The mystery of faith",) and the people respond with an article of our faith.

Offering - the Priest offers the gifts of the consecrated host and chalice, as well as ourselves, to the Lord.

Intercessions - prayer for the Pope, bishops, clergy and all the faithful.

Doxology - (Greek: doxa, "praise" and logos "word") The Priest says or chants "Through him, and with him, and in him, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, for ever and ever." The people respond "AMEN."

**Communion Rite** - (Greek: *koinonia*, "unity" or "sharing") We are now invited to share ourselves. First, with God as the Priest asks us to pray the "Our Father". Then, with each other by offering a sign of peace amongst the people. This ancient custom began by kissing a picture of Christ in the Passion, first by the Priest and then by the people. Larger congregations today have required a more practical substitution.

**Breaking of the Bread** - Now that we have shared with one another, we are invited to unite to receive Christ. The Priest begins the prayer "Lamb of God." While the people complete the prayer, the Priest takes the consecrated host and breaks it over the paten (also called the Fraction Rite.) He places a small piece in the chalice, saying quietly: "May this mingling of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it." He then continues silently: "May the receiving of your Body and Blood, Lord Jesus Christ, not bring me to judgement and condemnation but through your loving mercy be for me protection in mind and body and a healing remedy."

**Communion** - The Priest genuflects. Taking the consecrated host, he raises it slightly over the paten and says: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb." The people respond: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed", paraphrasing the words of the centurion speaking to Jesus in Matthew 8:8. The Priest faces the Altar and the congregation and says quietly: "May the body of Christ bring me to eternal life" and consumes the body of Christ. He then says quietly: "May the blood of Christ bring me to eternal life" and drinks the blood of Christ. At this point, the Priest distributes communion to the Deacon and other ministers, and then to the people.

Communion may be received under either species, that is, under the form of bread, the form of wine, or both. When giving the host, the minister says, "The body of Christ." When giving the chalice, the minister says, "The blood of Christ." In either case, the communicant responds "Amen." Communion of only the blood of Christ is just as valid as communion of only the body of Christ and may be necessary in circumstances where the person cannot receive solid foods. People are encouraged to receive communion under both forms where possible. Communion may be received either directly on the tongue or in the hand

See "Guidelines for the Reception of Communion" below for conditions under which communion should be received.

After communion has been distributed, the Priest, Deacon or acolyte purify the vessels used in communion at a side table from the Altar to remove any trace of the consecrated body or blood. While the vessels are being cleansed, the minister says silently: "What has passed our lips as food, O Lord, may we possess in purity of heart, that what has been given to us in time may be our healing for eternity."

**Prayer After Communion** - The Priest invites the people to stand. He says a short prayer which sums up the gift we have just received.

**Concluding Rite** - The Priest says: "The Lord be with you." to which the people respond "And with your spirit." Just as before, the congregation is invited to focus on their worship. The Priest may give some preliminary words of blessing. The Priest extends the blessing of the sign of the cross † and the words "May Almighty God bless you, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" to the people, at which they respond "Amen." The Deacon sends each member of the congregation to do good works, praising and blessing the Lord with the words "Go forth, the Mass is ended" to which the people respond "Thanks be to God." The Priest and Deacon kiss the Altar as at the beginning. Bowing to the Altar, the Priest and ministers leave.

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### Guidelines for the Reception of Communion

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**For Catholics** As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. We are encouraged to receive Communion devoutly and frequently. In order to be properly disposed to receive Communion, participants should not be conscious of grave sin and normally should have fasted for one hour. A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord without prior sacramental confession except for a grave reason where there is no opportunity for confession. In this case, the person is to be mindful of the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, including the intention of confessing as soon as possible (*Code of Canon Law, canon 916.*) A frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance is encouraged for all.

**For our fellow Christians** We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this Eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions which separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us "that they may all be one" (*John 17:21*).

Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion. Eucharistic sharing in exceptional circumstances by other Christians requires permission according to the directives of the diocesan bishop and the provisions of canon law (*canon 844, § 4*). Members of Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Polish National Catholic Church are urged to respect the disciplines of their own Churches. According to Roman Catholic discipline, the Code of Canon Law does not object to the reception of communion by Christians of these Churches (*canon 844, § 3*).

**For those not receiving Holy Communion** All who are not receiving Holy Communion are encouraged to express in their hearts a prayerful desire for unity with the Lord Jesus and with one another.

**For non-Christians** We also welcome to this celebration those who do not share our faith in Jesus Christ. While we cannot admit them to Holy Communion, we ask them to offer their prayers for the peace and the unity of the human family.

## ***Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About the Mass***

**Q:** *Why do we bless ourselves with water when entering the church?*

**A:** The historical basis for this custom of blessing ourselves with holy water from the fonts located by each door of the church goes back to early Hebrew times. When entering one's house after travelling on unpaved and often dirty roads, the host would provide water for the traveller to wash so that they would not track dirt into the house. In Luke 7:36-48, Jesus alludes to this custom during a visit to a Pharisee's house when He says:

"Look! See this woman kneeling here! When I entered your home, you didn't bother to offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair." (*Luke 7:45*)

Symbolically, blessing with water is to remind us of the waters of our baptism:

The symbolism of water signifies the Holy Spirit's action in Baptism, since after the invocation of the Holy Spirit it becomes the efficacious sacramental sign of new birth: just as the gestation of our first birth took place in water, so the water of Baptism truly signifies that our birth into the divine life is given to us in the Holy Spirit. As "by one Spirit we were all baptized," so we are also "made to drink of one Spirit." Thus the Spirit is also personally the living water welling up from Christ crucified as its source and welling up in us to eternal life. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 694*)

Incidentally, water is always kept in the fonts **except** for the time between Holy Thursday night services and the Easter Vigil Mass. At that time, the fonts are emptied and the consecrated Hosts are removed from the Tabernacle (they are placed in another repository until Saturday evening.) Holy water is blessed at the Easter Vigil with the following words:

Father, you give us grace through sacramental signs, which tell us of the wonders of your unseen power. In Baptism we use your gift of water, which you have made a rich symbol of the grace you give us in this sacrament. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1217.*)

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**Q:** *Why do Catholics need to go to Confession? Isn't confessing our sin to God enough?*

**A:** While we are to always confess our sins to God, He tells us Himself that we must confess them to the Church (i.e. the priest). Jesus tells Peter after his acknowledgement of Jesus as Messiah (when Jesus is fortelling the establishment of His Church on Earth through Peter):

"And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; whatever doors you lock on earth shall be locked in Heaven; and whatever doors you open on earth shall be open in Heaven." (*Matthew 16:19*)

Jesus was referring to Peter (and to those church leaders after Peter) as He conferred the divine power of forgiveness upon humanity. A short while later, James, the leader of the early Jerusalem council, writes: Admit your faults to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed. (*James 5:16*)

Outward confession of sins is a sign of our resolve to commit them no more and sometimes is very helpful on our own path to salvation. We as Catholics should consider ourselves fortunate that there is such a sacrament as that of Reconciliation. Few faiths have such an ability to have our sins heard and forgiven **here and now**, instead of confessing them alone to God and hoping that we're forgiven.

"Individual, integral confession and absolution remain the only ordinary way for the faithful to reconcile themselves with God and the Church, unless physical or moral impossibility excuses from this kind of confession." [94] There are profound reasons for this. Christ is at work in each of the sacraments. He personally addresses every sinner: "My son, your sins are forgiven." [95] He is the physician tending each one of the sick who need him to cure them. [96] He raises them up and reintegrates them into fraternal communion. Personal confession is thus the form most expressive of reconciliation with God and with the Church. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1484.*)

Catholics are bound to confess grave sins at least once a year. (*Code of Canon Law, 989*) traditionally sometimes during Lent. We are recommended to confess venial (non-mortal) sins as well in order to "receive the strength to arrive at the full freedom of the children of God". (*Code of Canon Law, 988 § 2.*)

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