

## Catechism on the Liturgy: VII, 1

Once the Creed is finished, the priest turns to pray the *Dominus Vobiscum* and *Oremus* - an invitation to pray and also a command to do so - though now it is prayed just for the baptized. Then the Mass begins the Offertory, which is sung with a verse or verses that were chanted in a shortened form of a procession in which gifts were brought up. This was done at every Mass, but we see it now only occasionally, for example at Candlemas, which was the traditional time to bring up all the candles to be used at an altar for a year's time so that they can be blessed. Another example is the offering of candles in procession to the bishop by those being ordained in the Minor Orders or priesthood.

The collection is done at this time (a different kind of gift), and the intention is to give something in return to the Lord for what He has given us, and is about to give us in Holy Communion. Although the collection is of material goods for the maintenance of the church or for the poor or for the diocese, it is part of the Sacred Liturgy. Not to take part in it (i.e., putting something in the collection plate even if only some coinage) can be a kind of refusal to take part in the liturgy. But with that being said, a collection is not essential to the Mass, and outside of Sunday's is done only occasionally.

In the solemn high Mass, we see the procession in a short form where the gifts are still brought to the altar, but the Church saw over the years that the greatest gifts were the sacred vessels and the bread and wine. The giving of pigs or chickens as in the first century was fine, but over time became unmanageable. You'll notice that the gifts are completely covered by the humeral veil, and are placed on the credence table on the Epistle Side of the altar.

The first of the gifts to be offered to the

Father is the bread. The Fathers of the Church spoke often of the one bread made up of many grains gathered together from all the shocks. To provide this bread, the grains had to be crushed in the mill, and for the wine to be used in the Mass the grapes gathered from many vines had to be pressed in the wine-press to yield the wine. This represents the spirit of unity of a parish, which cannot be acquired except by a continual crushing and pressing of selfishness, the party spirit, the cliques, the little rivalries, the jealousies and envies, the critical and disparaging outlook, and the focus on what is wrong.

When the celebrant prays the *Dominus Vobiscum* of the Offertory, the deacon and subdeacon stand behind the celebrant in a line, so that the subdeacon is on the floor, and the deacon on the steps half way between him and the celebrant, who is on the platform at the altar. The subdeacon represents to us of the Old Testament and the Jews, who by the Law and the Prophecy came only near to the great Sacrifice; the deacon is the New Testament, the Gospel and the Apostles, who came higher and nearer to the perfect man Jesus Christ, figured by the celebrant who is the closest to the altar.

When the priest prays *Oremus*, the deacon makes a genuflection and goes to the side of the celebrant to wait for the gifts. The subdeacon takes the gifts which are completely covered by the humeral veil and brings them up to the altar. As the subdeacon here represents the Old Testament, so the veiled gifts represent the mysteries and ceremonies of the Mass, veiled and foretold in the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Old Testament represented by the subdeacon.

The bread to be used in the Sacrifice is brought to the altar on the paten, as was

done in the Jewish ceremonies of the loaves of proposition bread. The Lord commanded Moses that he should make twelve loaves of bread, and put them on a most clean table: "And each Sabbath they should be before the Lord. And they shall be Aaron's and his Sons, that they may eat them in the holy places." (Lev. 24.8) This was also called the priests' bread, for they alone could prepare it and eat it; it was called the proposition bread since it was placed on the table of proposition in twelve loaves, to represent each of the tribes of Israel.

Great care was taken to prepare the bread. St. Gregory the Great mentions that it was twisted like a braid and wound into a circlet of four inches in diameter. Later it was a small round loaf divided into four parts by a cross-notch (*panis quadratus*) with a XP (chi-rho) symbol stamped on it. Monastic custom by the middle ages was to select the wheat kernel by kernel, and only those monks who were at least a deacon could bake it, and they had to be in amice and alb. All the baking was done in silence, except for the singing of certain psalms.

The bread itself is called a "Host" when it has been consecrated, from the Latin *hostia* meaning a sacrificial victim that was being slaughtered. Up until that time it is referred to as altar bread.

To this day the bread to be used must be made of pure wheaten flour that has been mixed with natural water and baked in fire, and it must be pure (no additives), whole and fresh. The bread must be unleavened. This is because the Eucharist was instituted on the Pasch, "the first day of unleavened bread." It is generally admitted that this is the kind of bread our Lord used for the Last Supper. Medieval thought saw leaven as a symbol of impurity, in as much as its fermentation works decomposition or decay in bread,

but unleavened bread has no such change. It also saw a connection with the admonition of St. Paul, "Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new paste, as you are unleavened. For Christ our pasch is sacrificed. Therefore, let us feast, not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness: but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (1 Cor. 5, 7-8)

The wine to be used must be pressed from ripe grapes, fully fermented, not soured, or settled, or artificially composed. There are no directives as to its color or taste.

The unveiling of the gifts in the Byzantine rite of Mass is more solemn. They are brought through the church with incense and candles, and the faithful bow or fall to the ground. This is because the unveiling is the terrible moment of the stripping of His garments. We do not do this because in our rite the bread and wine are not worthy of veneration until they have been sacrificed, and become our Lord. But the unveiling itself does represent the stripping of the garments.

Even in the low Mass, the priest taking the veil off the chalice and handing it to the acolyte is the stripping of the garments. Sometimes when I celebrate Mass, this very much comes to mind, and I find it difficult to do...but at the same time I am glad His garments were stripped. I should never be able to be detached from the things of this world, unless He had suffered that indignity.