



Bulletin Inserts

Hearing the Word of God

When the Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself is speaking to his people and Christ, present in his own word, is proclaiming the Gospel.

(GIRM, n.29) These words from the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* set before us a profound truth that we need to ponder and make our own. When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel. (GIRM, no. 29) These words from the

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The words of Sacred Scripture are unlike any other texts we will ever hear, for they not only give us information, they are the vehicle God uses to reveal himself to us, the means by which we come to know the depth of God's love for us and the responsibilities entailed by being Christ's followers, members of his Body. What is more, this Word of God proclaimed in the liturgy possesses a special sacramental power to bring about in us what it proclaims. The Word of God proclaimed at Mass is 'efficacious' that is, it not only tells us of God and God's will for us, it also helps us to put that will of God into practice in our own lives.

How, then, do we respond to this wonderful gift of God's Word? We respond in word and song, in posture and gesture, in silent meditation and, most important of all, by listening attentively to that Word as it is proclaimed. Following each reading we express our gratitude for this gift with the words '*Thanks be to God*' or, in the case of the Gospel, '*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ,*' and it is appropriate that a brief period of silence be observed to allow for personal reflection. Following the first reading we sing the Responsorial Psalm, a meditation on God's word through the inspired words of one of the psalms from the psalter, the Bible's prayer book.

The Gospel is the highpoint of the Liturgy of the Word. The readings from the Old Testament tell us of God's promises and his preparation of his people for the coming of his Son; the epistles and other pre-Gospel New Testament readings offer the reflections of St. Paul and other contemporaries of the Lord on the life and message of Christ; in the Acts of the Apostles we have a history of the early Church. We believe that all Scripture, the Old and New Testaments, is inspired by the Holy Spirit, but the Church has always given special honor to the Gospel because in the Gospel we have not simply the preparation for and prefiguring of Christ, nor reflections on his message, but the words and deeds of Christ himself. The proclamation of the Gospel is surrounded with marks of respect and honor: the Gospel is read by an ordained minister, the deacon, or, when no deacon is present, by a priest; the Book of the Gospels is carried aloft with honor in the entrance procession and placed on the altar until the Gospel reading to show the unity of Scripture and Eucharist, of the table of the Word and the table of the Christ's body and blood; just before the Gospel is read the Gospel book is carried in procession to the ambo to the accompaniment of an acclamation sung by the people; it may be incensed before the reading and is kissed at its conclusion; finally, all stand as the Gospel is proclaimed. Through this posture and

through the honor paid to the book containing the Gospel, the Church pays homage to Christ who is present in his Word and who proclaims his Gospel.

What then must we do to properly receive the Word of God proclaimed at Mass? The *General Instruction* tells us that *all must listen with reverence to the readings from God's word.* (GIRM, no. 29) and it provides that those who read the Scriptures must be *truly suited to perform this function and should receive careful preparation, so that the faithful by listening to the readings from the sacred texts may develop in their hearts a warm and living love for Sacred Scripture.* (GIRM, no. 101)

The key word in all of this is *listening*. We are called to *listen* attentively as the reader, deacon or priest proclaims God's Word. Unless one is unable to hear, one should not be reading along with a text from a missal or missalette. Rather, taking our cue from the *General Instruction* itself, we should *listen* as we would if Christ himself were standing at the ambo, for in fact it *is* God who speaks when the Scriptures are proclaimed. Carefully following along with the printed word can cause us to miss the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit, the message that the Spirit may have for us in one of the passages because we are anxious to 'keep up,' to move along with the reader.

Perhaps the best way to understand the readings at Mass and our response to them is offered by Pope John Paul II in his Instruction *Dies Domini*. He encourages *those who take part in the Eucharist, priest, ministers and faithful ... to prepare the Sunday liturgy, reflecting beforehand upon the Word of God which will be proclaimed* and adds that if we do not, *it is difficult for the liturgical proclamation of the Word of God alone to produce the fruit we might expect.* (n. 40) In this way we till the soil, preparing our souls to receive the seeds to be planted by the Word of God so that seed may bear fruit.

The Word of God, then calls for our listening and our response in silent reflection, as well as in word and song. Most important of all, the Word of God, which is living and active, calls each of us individually and all of us together for a response that moves beyond the liturgy itself and affects our daily lives, leading us to engage fully in the task of making Christ known to the world by all that we do and say.



Bulletin Inserts

Ministries and Roles

Within the Liturgical Assembly at Mass

When the Church comes together in the liturgical assembly to celebrate the Mass, or any other sacrament, her members do not gather simply as a crowd, as an amorphous, undifferentiated group of people. They gather in a variety of ministries and roles. If we are to understand the significance of these ministries and roles, we must begin with Baptism, for only one who through Baptism has been given a share in the priesthood of Christ is capable of participating in the public worship which is the liturgy of the Church. In fact, the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* of the Second Vatican Council tells us that participation in the liturgy is the **right** and **duty** of all the baptized.

The first qualification, then, for any participant in the celebration of the Eucharist is that he or she has been baptized into the Body of Christ, the Church. Each time the members of the Church gather to worship, they do so because their baptism demands this of them. While all share in the priesthood of Christ which delegates them to worship, some members of the Church are called by God to serve in the ministerial priesthood as bishops and priests. Bishops and priests are privileged to act in the liturgy in the very person of Christ, on behalf of his people, pronouncing the most sacred prayers of our faith, presiding over the celebration of the sacred mysteries, explaining God's Word and feeding God's people on the body and blood of Christ. A bishop has the added responsibility of being the chief shepherd, the principal liturgist of his diocese and in that role is the successor of the Apostles. Others by God's grace are ordained to the ministry of deacon. In the celebration of the Mass deacons proclaim the Gospel and assist the bishop and priest in exercising their sacred duties.

In addition to the ordained ministries there are roles in the liturgy which are exercised by lay people who place their time and talent at the service of the liturgical assembly as acolytes (altar servers), lectors, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, cantors, choir members, instrumentalists, leaders of song and ushers. Others contribute their time and talent to planning and organizing the liturgy, to keeping the church and the vestments, vessels and appointments clean and well-ordered or to providing decorations that reflect the spirit of the liturgical feast or season.

The *General Instruction* makes it very clear that this variety of offices and roles is desirable and should be maintained. In fact it goes so far as to state: ... *all, therefore, whether they are ordained ministers or Christian faithful, in fulfilling their offices or their duty, should carry out solely but completely that which pertains to them.*" Not only, therefore, is it desirable that individuals function in roles of service at Mass, it is clear from the *Instruction* that if a deacon, for example, is present, the priest celebrant or a concelebrant should not read the Gospel. And the lector should not also take on the role of server and/or extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. There is a wide variety of services to be performed, and it is desirable that different individuals exercise those services so that the talents and gifts God has placed within the Christian community are fully utilized and these roles of service are not monopolized by a few.

It is not sufficient, however, simply to have a "warm body" filling a given role. Those engaged in liturgical roles need to be well-prepared for those roles and to know how to carry them out with reverence, dignity and understanding. Obtaining the proper preparation requires a further gift of time on the part of the person being prepared as well as on the part of those in the parish

responsible for the training of liturgical ministers. Finally, the practical task of assigning individuals to particular Masses and organizing the distribution of roles is another indispensable element in the fabric of well-ordered liturgical ministry in a parish.

But before individuals can be prepared for liturgical roles, there must first be individuals who are willing to assume those roles. All the baptized need to understand that part of their duty regarding liturgy is to accept some responsibility for the liturgy, to place themselves and their God-given talents at the service of the liturgical community whenever possible. If liturgy is a duty as well as a right, then part of that duty for those able to undertake these tasks is the responsibility to assume such key roles as those of lector, server or acolyte, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, usher, choir member, etc. . Whether one brings up the gifts at the Presentation, reads the Word of God, assists with the distribution of Communion and brings the Eucharist to those unable to be present at Mass, serves at the altar, provides music that augments the joy, solemnity and festivity of the celebration or serves the assembled community as an usher, he or she is contributing to the worship of the community and fulfilling the responsibility that comes with Baptism.

Not all members of the parish community will have the time, energy, strength or ability to serve in these roles, however, individuals must be careful not to excuse themselves too easily. And it might also be helpful for us to reexamine our situation every so often. The time available to a business person or to parents with young children may be very limited. But eventually business people retire and children grow up, leaving those individuals with more free time at their disposal. What is important is that all understand that the celebration of liturgy is not just the responsibility of the pastor, although he is delegated by the Bishop to oversee the liturgical life of the parish. Pastors need the help of their people, the people who are serious about living out their baptismal right and responsibility to worship.

Finally, this catalogue of specialized roles might give the impression that those who are not exercising one of these roles are free to sit back passively and simply let the liturgy happen around them. Nothing could be further from the truth. Those who come together for liturgy do not have the luxury of acting as passive "pew potatoes," waiting for all to be done for them. The liturgy is not only their right, it is their duty, their responsibility, and that responsibility includes full engagement throughout the liturgical celebration. The baptized faithful who form the congregation are called to join in praise and thanksgiving in song and spoken word; to listen attentively to God's Word, to exercise their baptismal priesthood in prayer for the Church, the world and all in need during the General Intercessions. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist they join their prayer to that of the priest celebrant, offering Christ the Victim, *not only through the hands of the priest, but also together with him* and offer themselves as well (*GIRM n.95*) and their participation culminates in the reception of the Body and Blood of the Lord, the sacrament which unites them more fully with Christ their Head and with one another.

In their sincere efforts to participate, those present minister to the priest celebrant, to others who serve in liturgical roles, and to one another. Their attention and active engagement in the celebration can draw from the priest celebrant and the other ministers the best they have to offer. Their enthusiastic song and verbal responses made with conviction can encourage others to sing and respond; their very presence at the celebration of Mass when so many other enticing options might have been chosen instead supports and reinforces others who have made the same choice.

The liturgy, then, is about the action of God's own people, each with different offices and roles, each office and role, from that of bishop and priest to that of usher and sacristan, one of service, not of privilege, a mirror of Christ who washed the feet of his disciples and instructed his followers to imitate his example of service.

Bulletin Inserts

Postures and Gestures at Mass



In the celebration of Mass we raise our hearts, minds and voices to God, but we are creatures composed of body as well as spirit and so our prayer is not confined to our minds, hearts and voices, but is expressed by our bodies as well. When our bodies participate in our prayer we pray with our whole person, as the embodied spirits God created us to be, and this engagement of our entire being in prayer helps us to pray with greater attention

During Mass we assume different postures: standing, kneeling, sitting, and we are also invited to make a variety of gestures. These postures and gestures are not merely ceremonial. They have profound meaning and, when done with understanding, can enhance our personal participation in Mass. In fact, these actions are the way in which we engage our bodies in the prayer that is the Mass.

Each posture we assume at Mass underlines and reinforces the meaning of the action in which we are taking part at that moment in our worship. Standing is a sign of respect and honor, so we stand as the celebrant who represents Christ enters and leaves the assembly. This posture, from the earliest days of the Church, has been understood as the stance of those who are *risen with Christ and seek the things that are above*. When we stand for prayer we assume our full stature before God, not in pride, but in humble gratitude for the marvelous thing God has done in creating and redeeming each one of us. By Baptism we have been given a share in the life of God, and the posture of standing is an acknowledgment of this wonderful gift. We stand for the Gospel, the pinnacle of revelation, the words and deeds of the Lord, and the bishops of the United States have chosen standing as the posture to be observed in this country for the reception of Communion, the sacrament which unites us in the most profound way possible with Christ who, now gloriously risen from the dead, is the cause of our salvation.

The posture of kneeling signified penance in the early Church: the awareness of sin casts us to the ground! So thoroughly was kneeling identified with penance that the early Christians were forbidden to kneel on Sundays and during the Easter Season when the prevailing spirit of the liturgy was that of joy and thanksgiving. In the Middle Ages kneeling came to signify the homage of a vassal to his lord, and more recently this posture has come to signify adoration. It is for this reason that the bishops of this country have chosen the posture of kneeling for the entire Eucharistic Prayer.

Sitting is the posture of listening and meditation, so the congregation sits for the pre-Gospel readings and may also sit for the period of meditation following Communion.

Gestures too involve our bodies in prayer. The most familiar of these is the Sign of the Cross with which we begin Mass and with which, in the form of a blessing, the Mass concludes. Because it was by his death on the cross that Christ redeemed humankind, we trace the sign of

the cross on our foreheads, lips and hearts at the beginning of the Gospel. Fr. Romano Guardini, a scholar and professor of liturgy wrote of this gesture:

When we cross ourselves, let it be with a real sign of the cross. Instead of a small, cramped gesture that gives no notion of its meaning, let us make a large, unhurried sign, from forehead to breast, from shoulder to shoulder, consciously feeling how it includes the whole of us, our thoughts, our attitudes, our body and soul, every part of us all at once, how it consecrates and sanctifies us ... (Romano Guardini, **Sacred Signs**, 1927)

But there are other gestures that intensify our prayer at Mass. During the Confiteor the action of striking our breasts at the words *through my own fault* can strengthen my awareness that *my sin is my fault*. In the Creed we are invited to bow at the words which commemorate the Incarnation: *by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man*. This gesture signifies our profound respect and gratitude to Christ who, though God, did not hesitate to come among us as a human being, sharing our human condition in order to save us from sin and restore us to friendship with God. This gratitude is expressed with even greater solemnity on the Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord and on Christmas when we genuflect at these words.

The *Our Father* is followed by the Exchange of Peace, the gesture which we express through a prayerful greeting of peace, that we are at peace, not enmity, with others. This exchange is symbolic. The persons near me with whom I share the peace signify for me, as I do for them, the broader community of the Church and all humankind.

Finally, with the new *General Instruction*, we are asked to make a sign of reverence, to be determined by the bishops of each country or region, before receiving Communion standing. The bishops of this country have determined that the sign which we will give before Communion is to be a bow, a gesture through which we express our reverence and give honor to Christ who comes to us as our spiritual food.

In addition to serving as a vehicle for the prayer of beings composed of body and spirit, the postures and gestures in which we engage at Mass have another very important function. The Church sees in these common postures and gestures both a symbol of the unity of those who have come together to worship and a means of fostering that unity. We are not free to change these postures to suit our own individual piety, for the Church makes it clear that our unity of posture and gesture is an expression of our participation in the one Body formed by the baptized with Christ, our head. When we stand, kneel, sit, bow and sign ourselves in common action, we given unambiguous witness that we are indeed the Body of Christ, united in heart, mind and spirit.



Bulletin Inserts

The Eucharistic Prayer

The Eucharistic Prayer or Canon of the Mass is the central prayer of the entire celebration. Most Catholics have been made aware from their earliest days that during the Eucharistic Prayer the bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. What many Catholics are not aware of, however, is that the Eucharistic Prayer is about more than adoring Christ who becomes present in our midst.

The Church tells us that liturgy (and the Mass is the highpoint and heart of liturgy) is the *action* of Christ the priest and His Body, the Church. In the celebration of Mass, during the Eucharistic Prayer, not only does Christ become present, body and blood, soul and divinity, under the forms of bread and wine, but Christ's saving action, His passion, death and resurrection are once again enacted and offered to the Father by Christ Himself in the person of the priest, and by all present.

This is a truth of enormous significance!. This action of Christ which brought about our redemption from sin and eternal death, offered once for all on Calvary, becomes present again for us, here and now, in this time and place, so that we can join in Christ's perfect offering and can ourselves participate in His perfect worship.

Read carefully any of the Eucharistic Prayers. You will see that that prayer is offered, not to Christ, but to the Father: *Father, you are holy indeed ...; Father, we bring you these gifts ...; Father, we ask you* It is worship offered to the Father by Christ as it was at the moment of His passion, death and resurrection, but now it is offered through the priest acting in the person of Christ, and it is offered as well by all of us who are part of Christ's Body, the Church. *This* is the action of Christ's Body, the Church at Mass.

When the priest prays this prayer he prays *we bring you these gifts; we ask you ...; we offer*. That *we* signifies that all the baptized present at this Eucharistic celebration make this offering in union with Christ, pray this prayer in union with Him. And what is most important, we do not offer Christ alone; we are called to *offer ourselves*, our lives, our individual efforts to grow more like Christ and our efforts as a community of believers to spread God's Word and to serve God's people, to the Father in union with Christ through the hands of the priest. Most wonderful of all, although our offering is in itself imperfect, joined with the offering of Christ it becomes *perfect* praise and thanksgiving to the Father.

And so, during the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass, we have more to do than to look forward to the moment of consecration and remain there while the prayer of the priest continues. Before the consecration we join in the prayer of praise and thanksgiving to the Father known as the Preface and affirm that praise and thanksgiving in our singing of the Holy, Holy, Holy. Following the Consecration we join together in the Memorial Acclamation which proclaims our common faith in Christ's real presence and is an acclamation expressing our gratitude to Christ for His wonderful gift of salvation. But then our prayer moves on and we are called to offer Christ, and ourselves with Christ to the Father: 'We offer to you, Father, this holy and living sacrifice...' and to pray with the priest that 'we who are nourished by His Body and Blood may be filled with the Holy Spirit and become one body, one spirit in Christ...'; we then join our prayers with the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints for our Holy Father the Pope, our bishops and clergy and all God's people, living and dead. At the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer the priest sums up all that has gone before: 'Through Him (Christ), with Him (Christ), in Him (Christ) in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, forever and ever.' And we who are privileged to make our own offering through, with and in Christ, respond with the most important acclamation of the Mass, the great AMEN by which we profess the action of Christ to be our action as well.



Bulletin Inserts

The Reception of Holy Communion at Mass

The Church understands the Communion Procession, in fact every procession in liturgy, as a sign of the pilgrim Church, the body of those who believe in Christ, on their way to the Heavenly Jerusalem. All our lives we who believe in Christ are moving in time toward that moment when we will be taken by death from this world and enter into the joy of the Lord in the eternal Kingdom

he has prepared for us.

The liturgical assembly of the baptized that comes together for the celebration of the Eucharist is a witness to, a manifestation of, the pilgrim Church. When we move in procession, particularly the procession to receive the body and blood of Christ in Communion, we are a sign, a symbol of that pilgrim Church 'on the way.' For some, however, the experience of the Communion Procession is far more prosaic, analogous perhaps to standing on line in the supermarket or at the motor vehicle bureau. A perception such as this is a dreadfully inaccurate and impoverished understanding of what is a significant religious action.

The Communion Procession is an action of the Body of Christ. At Christ's invitation, extended by the priest acting in Christ's person: *Happy are they who are called to his supper*, the members of the community move forward to share in the sacred meal, to receive the body and blood of Christ which is the sign and the source of their unity. In fact, each time we move forward together to receive the body and blood of the Lord, we join the countless ranks of all the baptized who have gone before us, our loved ones, the canonized and uncanonized saints down through the ages, who at their time in history formed a part of this mighty stream of believers.

This action by Christ's body, the Church assembled for the Eucharist, is manifested and supported by the Communion Hymn, a hymn in praise of Christ sung by the united voices of those who believe in him and share his life. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* takes this hymn very seriously, mandating that it should begin at the Communion of the priest and extend until the last person has received Communion.

For some, however, the singing of this hymn is perceived as an intrusion on their own prayer, their private thanksgiving after Communion. In fact, however, this hymn is prayer, the corporate thanksgiving prayer of the members of Christ's Body, united with one another. Over and over again the prayers of the liturgy and the norms of the *General Instruction* emphasize this fundamental concept of the unity of the baptized, stressing that when we come together to participate in the Eucharistic celebration we come, not as individuals, but as united members of Christ's body. In each of the Eucharistic Prayers, though the petition is worded in slightly different ways, God is asked to send his Holy Spirit to make us one body, one spirit in Christ; the *General Instruction* admonishes the faithful that *they should become one body, whether by hearing the word of God, or joining in prayers and singing* ... (GIRM, no. 96) it describes one of the purposes of the opening song of the Mass as to ... *intensify the unity of those who have been gathered* and says of the Communion Chant that *its function is to express outwardly the communicants' union in spirit by means of the unity of their voices, ... and to highlight the communitarian nature of the procession to receive Communion.*

It is difficult for some of us to embrace this emphasis on Mass as the action of a community rather than an individual act of my own faith and piety, but it is important that we make every effort to do so. Christ himself at the Last Supper pleaded with his Father: *Holy Father, keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one like us ... Father may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you ...* Jn. 17: 11; 21. Baptism has joined us to Christ and to one another as the vine and its branches. The life of Christ, the Holy Spirit, animates each of us individually, and all of us corporately and guides us together in our efforts to become one in Christ.

Finally, the fact that the Communion Procession is a profoundly religious action tells us something about the way in which we should participate in this procession. We are the Body of Christ, moving forward to receive the Christ who makes us one with himself and with one another. Our procession should move with dignity; our bearing should be that of those who know they have been redeemed by Christ and are coming to receive their God!

The new edition of the *General Instruction* asks the Conference of Bishops in each country to determine the posture to be used for the reception of Communion and the act of reverence to be made by each person as he or she receives Communion. The Conference of Bishops of the United States has determined that in this country Communion will be received standing and that a bow will be the act of reverence made by those receiving. These norms may require some adjustment on the part of those who have been used to other practices, however the significance of unity in posture and gesture as a symbol of our unity as members of the one body of Christ should be the governing factor in our own actions.

Those who receive Communion may receive either in the hand or on the tongue, and the decision should be that of the individual receiving, not of the person distributing Communion. If Communion is received in the hand, the hands should first of all be clean. If one is right handed the left hand should rest upon the right. The host will then be laid in the palm of the left hand and then taken by the right hand to the mouth. If one is left-handed this is reversed. It is not appropriate to reach out with the fingers and take the host from the person distributing.

The person distributing Communion says audibly to each person approaching, '*The Body of Christ*'. This formula should not be altered, as it is a proclamation which calls for a response of faith on the part of the one who receives. The communicant should audibly respond '*Amen*,' indicating by that response his or her belief that this small wafer of bread, the wine in this chalice are in reality the body and blood of Christ the Lord.

When one receives from the chalice, the same proclamation is made by the person distributing Communion and the Communicant again responds '*Amen*.' It should be noted that it is never permissible for a person to dip the host he or she has received into the chalice. If, for some reason, the communicant is not able or willing to drink from the cup then that person should receive only under the form of bread.

It seems appropriate to conclude this reflection on the Communion Procession and the reception of Communion with a quotation from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

In Baptism we have been called to form but one body. The Eucharist fulfills this call: 'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread (1 Cor 10:16, 17):

If you are the body and members of Christ, then it is your sacrament that is placed on the table of the Lord; it is your sacrament that you receive. To that which you are you respond 'Amen' ('yes,' it is true!') and by responding to it you assent to it. For you hear the words, 'the Body of Christ and respond 'Amen.' Be then a member of the Body of Christ that your Amen may be true. (St. Augustine)'(CCC n.1396)

Bulletin Inserts

The Worshiping Assembly at Mass



The celebration of Mass is a corporate act, an act of the whole assembly gathered for worship. All the particular ministries serve this corporate function (GIRM, no. 27). In the Mass, the Church is joined to the action of Christ, *the high point both of the action by which God sanctifies the world in Christ and of the worship that the human race offers to the Father, adoring him through Christ, the Son of God, in the Holy Spirit* (no. 16). We are joined to this divine action through baptism, which incorporates us into the risen Christ. This action, which lies at the center of the whole Christian life (no. 16) is not initiated by us but by God acting in and through the Church as the body of the risen Christ. It becomes our action only to the extent that we give ourselves to this mystery of redemptive worship. The liturgy is designed to bring about in all those who make up the worshipping assembly *a participation of the faithful both in body and mind, a participation burning with faithful, hope, and charity* (no. 18). To the extent that we are able to participate in this way, the work of redemption becomes personally effective for each of us. By such participation, the General Instruction says, we make the actions and prayers of the liturgy our own; we enter more fully into our personal communion with Christ's redeeming act and perfect worship (see no. 54, 55, etc.).

In the celebration of Mass the faithful are a holy people, a chosen people, a royal priesthood: they give thanks to God and offer the Victim not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him and learn to offer themselves. They should endeavor to make this clear by their deep sense of reverence for God and their charity toward brothers and sisters who share with them in the celebration (no. 95). They should become one body, whether by hearing the word of God, or joining in prayers and liturgical song, or above all by offering the sacrifice together and sharing together in the Lord's table (no. 96).

Because the whole liturgy is a corporate act of the gathered assembly (GIRM no. 34; Catechism of the Catholic Church no. 1144), there are certain parts of the Mass that are to be done by the whole assembly, the congregation of the faithful and all the ministers, in order to express the corporate nature of this act. Through these actions, the entire congregation of the faithful joins itself to Christ in acknowledging the great things that God has done and in offering the sacrifice (no. 78). These acts include:

- Listening with reverence to the readings of God's word (GIRM no. 29);
- Engaging in the dialogue of prayer through acclamations, greetings, and responses to spoken and sung prayers (no. 34-37) in a tone suitable to the text (no. 38);
- Joining in an action through common postures and gestures (no. 42);
- Participating in communal silence (no. 45);
- Because of their baptismal dignity, letting themselves be included in the offering symbolized by incensation (no. 75);
- Participating in the greeting of peace as a sign of ecclesial communion and love for each other (no. 82);
- Participating in specific spoken prayers and other texts, namely:
 - the formula of general confession during the penitential rite (no. 51);
 - the profession of faith (no. 67-68);
 - the general intercessions (no. 69);
 - the Lord's Prayer (no. 81);
 - the prayer of humility before sacramental communion (no. 84);
- Participating in the offering during the Eucharistic Prayer, which is spoken or chanted by the priest, but in which all should join as the Church to offer the "spotless Victim to the Father in the Holy Spirit" and "offer themselves and so day by day to surrender themselves, through Christ the Mediator, to an ever more complete union with God and with each other, so that at last God may be all in all" (no. 79f);
- Participating in liturgical song, because singing is a way of expressing both the corporate nature of the act of worship and the intense union to be achieved between God and the Church in Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is a union so intense and total that it is described as a union between lovers whose nature is best expressed vocally in song (no. 39). Singing is also an act which unifies and focuses the individual (no. 39), thus encouraging that "participation in body and spirit that is conscious, active, full, and motivated by faith, hope, and charity" (no. 18). These songs and acclamations are normally to be sung, in whole or in part, by all the participants:
 - opening liturgical song (no. 48);
 - Kyrie (no. 52);
 - Gloria (no. 53);
 - Responsorial psalm (no. 61);
 - Gospel acclamation (no. 62);
 - Song at the preparation of gifts (no. 74);
 - Sanctus, memorial acclamation, and Amen (no. 79, 151);
 - The Lord's Prayer (no. 81);
 - Lamb of God (no. 83);
 - the optional psalm, canticle of praise, or hymn after communion (no. 88).
- For those who are properly disposed (no. 80), full, active, and conscious participation is expressed in partaking in the Holy Communion of the Lord, receiving in the one bread consecrated at this Mass the Lord's body and blood, in the same way that the apostles received them from Christ's own hands (no. 72.3).