

# PREPARATION RITES

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## Introduction

The Preparation Rite is the first movement in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. (Because of its complexity, it is being explained separately, here). Preparation rites are central to our Judeo-Christian identity. Consider the Passover celebration. The Book of Exodus details the preparations necessary for the sacrificial meal. The act of preparation for the Israelites is the offering from the people, from every household, to ready the ritual of the lamb to celebrate life given to God's chosen ones.

## Structure of the Preparation Rites

The Preparation of the Gifts in the New Roman Missal speaks well of those gathered, the assembly of the faithful, making an offering.

This begins with the preparation of the altar by the deacons (when present), a priest concelebrant assisted by altar servers, or just servers in the absence of others. Once prepared, the faithful present bread and wine to the priest or deacon (when present). In addition, money or other gifts for the poor and the Church are brought forward in the procession and placed in a suitable location away from the Eucharistic table (GIRM 73). These are gifts of the people given by representatives of the people. Accompanying the procession of gifts is an offertory chant which will continue at least until the priest, having received the gifts of bread and wine, places them upon the altar (GIRM 74).

All gathered are asked to participate not simply as observers of the procession of bread, wine, and other offerings for the poor and the Church, but also with reflection on the questions St. Cyprian posed when he asked, "Who comes to the Lord's Supper without a sacrifice, and yet takes part of the sacrifice which the poor man has offered?" Each and every person should reflect upon such a question and act accordingly prior to Mass to ensure that real and felt sacrifices are united concretely to the spiritual offering that is presented in this procession.

Once the bread and wine have been brought to the altar, the priest, in an audible or inaudible voice, prepares them and offers prayer patterned on the ancient Jewish Kiddish of the Passover meal. In the new Roman Missal, this is translated as "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread/wine we offer you..." Bread and wine symbolize a wonderful cooperation between God and humans. We lay upon the altar not only the goodness of creation, but our goods, too. The gifts are not merely wheat and grapes, but "the work of human hands." Symbolically, through these elements we offer ourselves on the altar, an offering to God through Christ.

The priest adds a drop of water to the wine - a tradition from the early Church symbolic of the union of Christ's humanity and divinity, or of Christ with his Church - before offering the prayer patterned on the Jewish Kiddish. Then he washes his hands, as did Jewish leaders before a ritual meal. Many tend to believe that the washing of his hands is an external washing. Rather, the priest's prayer during the washing is about the interior dimension of the priest so that he may be purified. The prayer also confirms this desire so that he may be cleansed from his sin and freed from iniquity. According to the instruction, the washing of hands is to be done at the side of the altar (GIRM 76).

Once these accompanying rites have been completed, there is a rich invitation to pray as one, priest and people united. "Pray, brethren (brother and sisters), that our sacrifice..." - not only bread and wine, but what they symbolize; our work, struggles, joys, money, our very lives - "...may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father."

Second, following the people's response, "May the Lord accept the sacrifice..." the priest offers the one prayer over the gifts. Finally, united in the prayer over the offerings, the assembly in faith responds with a resounding "Amen."

### **Conclusion**

The Preparation Rites are rich in symbolic value. Here we unite what we sacrifice and offer patterned by the one whose life giving sacrifice is the first and last of all gifts, Jesus the Christ. This preparation allows us to take what we have received in the Liturgy of the Word, unite that gift with our sacrifices, and so ready ourselves to give resounding thanks for the great mystery made real in the Eucharistic Prayer.