

# Glossary of Catholic Terms

## I. Celebration of Mass

**Mass:** The common name for the Eucharistic liturgy of the Catholic Church. Also called Eucharist (derived from the Greek word *eucharistia*, which literally means thanksgiving), celebration of the liturgy, Eucharistic celebration, sacrifice of the Mass, Lord's Supper.

**Liturgy:** The public prayer of the church.

**Liturgy of the Word:** Section of the Mass where the Scriptures are proclaimed and reflected upon. On Sundays and major feasts, there are three readings, from the Old Testament, New Testament, and the Gospels (the four books in the New Testament — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John — that tell the story of Jesus Christ's life, ministry, death and resurrection).

**Liturgy of the Eucharist:** Section of the Mass when the gifts are prepared and the Eucharistic Prayer is proclaimed by the celebrant.

**Entrance procession:** Bishops, priests, deacons, altar servers and lectors enter the church or designated place for celebration of the liturgy.

**Entrance song/music:** The song/music that takes place during the entrance procession.

**Veneration of the altar:** Reverencing of the altar with a kiss and the optional use of incense.

**Greeting:** The celebrant greets all present at the liturgy, expressing the presence of the Lord to the assembled community.

**Penitential rite:** General acknowledgment by the entire assembly of sinfulness and the need for God's mercy.

**Gloria:** Ancient hymn of praise in which the church prays to the Father. It is used on all Sundays (outside of Advent and Lent) and at solemn celebrations.

**Opening prayer:** This prayer by the celebrant expresses the general theme of the celebration.

**Responsorial psalm:** After the first reading, there is a psalm as a response to the reading. The response, repeated after verses, is sung by the assembly, while a cantor or choir sings the verses of the psalm.

**Gospel acclamation:** Acclamation of praise to God follows the second reading and serves to prepare the assembly for the Gospel.

**Homily:** The homily (sermon) is a reflection by the celebrant or other ministers on the Scripture readings and the application of the texts to the assembled community.

**Profession of faith:** The people together recall and proclaim the fundamental teachings of the faith. The profession of faith is recited on all Sundays and solemnities. Also called the Creed.

**General intercessions:** Prayer of intercession for all of humankind, for the church, civil authorities, those in various needs, and for the salvation of the world. The celebrant invites all to pray and another minister announces the petitions, and the community responds.

**Blessed Sacrament:** The Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ, whether at the Mass or reserved in a special place in the church.

**Preparation of the gifts:** Time in the Mass when the bread and wine to be used in the celebration are brought to the celebrant, usually by representatives of the faithful.

**Offertory song:** Music used during the procession of gifts to the celebrant and as the altar is prepared.

**Incense:** Incense (material used to produce a fragrant odor when burned) is used as a symbol of the church's offering and prayer going up to God.

**Washing of hands:** An expression of the desire for inward purification.

**Prayer over the gifts:** Prayer by the celebrant asking that the gifts to be offered be made holy and acceptable.

**Eucharistic Prayer:** Prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. It is the center and high point for the entire celebration.

**Preface dialogue:** Introductory dialogue between the celebrant and assembly in which all are invited to join in prayer and thanksgiving to God.

**Preface:** First element of the Eucharistic Prayer said or sung by the celebrant, it means "proclamation." The celebrant praises the Father and gives him thanks for the work of salvation accomplished in Christ and in general, and the special reason for giving thanks on this particular day.

**The Holy, Holy, Holy:** Response of the community to the preface and a continuation of the general theme of praise and thanksgiving.

**Epiclesis:** Prayer in which the church calls on the Holy Spirit and asks that the gifts being offered be consecrated, that is, become the Body and Blood of Christ and that the victim (Christ) may become the source of salvation for all.

**Institution narrative:** The words and actions of Christ at the Last Supper when he instituted the sacrifice of the Mass.

**Anamnesis:** Prayer that recalls the passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ.

**Second epiclesis:** Calling down of the Holy Spirit upon the church that, by sharing the Eucharist, it became and remains one body, one Spirit in Christ.

**Final Doxology:** A final prayer of praise to God.

**Amen:** Called the Great Amen, it is the acclamation by the people expressing their agreement with all that has been said and done in the Eucharistic Prayer.

**Communion rite:** Section of the celebration that leads to the communion of the people.

**Our Father (Lord's Prayer):** Prayer of petition for both daily food (which for Christians means also the Eucharistic bread) and the forgiveness of sins.

**Embolism:** The celebrant's prayer immediately after the Our Father in which the same themes are developed: deliverance from evil, enjoyment of peace and divine protection.

**Sign of Peace:** Before sharing the Body of Christ, the members of the community are invited to express their love and peace with one another.

**Breaking of the bread:** The celebrant recreates gestures of Christ at the Last Supper when He broke the bread to give to His disciples. The action signifies that in Communion, we who are many are made one in the one Bread of Life, which is Christ.

**Lamb of God:** Invocation during the breaking of the bread in which the assembly petitions for mercy and peace.

**Doxology:** Response of the people acclaiming the sovereignty of God at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer.

**Communion Song:** Music that is used as the consecrated bread and wine are distributed to the faithful.

**Holy Communion:** After saying a preparatory prayer, the celebrant (or other designated ministers) distributes Communion (the consecrated bread and wine) to himself and the other ministers at the altar, and then to the congregation.

**Prayer after Communion:** The final prayer by the celebrant in which he petitions that the sacrament be beneficial for all.

**Concluding rite:** Brief rite that consists of the celebrant's greeting to all present, final blessing and dismissal.

**NOTE:** Do not call it "saying Mass" or "performing Mass." Instead call it "celebrating Mass," "concelebrating Mass," "celebrating the liturgy" or "celebrating the Eucharist."

## II. Ministers

**Celebrant:** One who presides over the assembly and consecrates the Eucharistic bread.

**Concelebrants:** Those priests and bishops who join the celebrant in celebrating the Mass.

**Deacon:** An ordained minister who assists the celebrant at the Liturgy of the Word and at the altar for the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

**Master of ceremonies:** One who assists in the preparation of the celebration and is present during it to facilitate the movement of the entire rite.

**Acolyte:** One who assists in the celebration (i.e., carrying candles, holding the bishop's staff or miter, etc.).

**Cross bearer:** One who carries the cross in the procession (entrance and recessional).

**Reader:** One who is called upon to proclaim the Scriptures during the Liturgy of the Word.

**Cantor:** One who sings during the liturgy (i.e., the responsorial psalm).

**Leader of song:** Person who leads the community/assembly in the music they sing.

**Extraordinary ministers of holy Communion:** Those who assist in the distribution of Communion.

**Assembly:** Those present to celebrate the liturgy. Other terms to use: "the community," "the church (as people, not building)," "the worshipers," "the faithful" or "the congregation." Avoid: spectators, crowd or audience — all passive words that do not reflect the actions of those present.

**NOTE:** It is the entire assembly (ordained and nonordained) that celebrates the Mass. Therefore, avoid "the bishop's Mass," "his Mass," etc. All terms that give the impression that it is only the clergy who celebrate.

## III. Vestments

**Vestment:** The clothing worn by the ministers.

**Alb:** White garment covering one's street dress for participation in the liturgy.

**Chasuble:** Vestment worn over the alb by priests and bishops when celebrating the Mass.

**Cassock:** A non-liturgical, full-length, close-fitting robe for use by priests and other clerics. Usually black for priests, purple for bishops and other prelates, red for cardinals, white for the pope.

**Surplice:** Loose, flowing vestment of white fabric with wide sleeves. For some functions, it is interchangeable with an alb.

**Dalmatic:** Vestment a deacon wears over the alb on solemn occasions.

**Stole:** Vestment worn around the neck by all ordained ministers. For priests and bishops, it hangs down in front (under the chasuble); deacons wear it over their left shoulder crossed and fastened at the right side.

**Miter:** Headdress worn at some liturgical functions by bishops, abbots and, in certain cases, other ecclesiastics.

**Crosier (pastoral staff):** Staff that a bishop carries when he presides at the liturgy.

**Zucchetto:** Skull cap worn by the pope (white), cardinals (red) and bishops (purple).

**Pallium:** Special stole made of lamb's wool worn over the chasuble by the pope and archbishops; it signifies communion of archbishops with the Holy See.

## IV. Liturgical Objects

**Altar:** Table on which the sacrifice of the Mass is offered. It is the center of importance in the place where the Mass is celebrated. Also called "the table of the Lord."

**Ambo:** Place where the Scriptures are proclaimed. Also called lectern. Avoid "pulpit."

**Aspergillum:** Vessel or device used for sprinkling holy water. The ordinary type is a metallic rod with a bulbous tip which absorbs the water and discharges it at the motion of the user's hand.

**Cathedra:** Bishop's throne or chair.

**Celebrant's chair:** Place where the celebrant sits. It expresses his office of presiding over the assembly and of leading the prayer of those present. Avoid use of the word "throne."

**Processional cross:** Crucifix carried in processions.

**Bread and wine:** The elements used in the Eucharistic celebration (unleavened bread and natural, pure wine). NOTE: After the Eucharistic Prayer, the bread and wine are referred to as “the consecrated bread and wine” or “the body and blood of Christ.”

**Cruets:** Containers/vessels holding the water and wine.

**Tabernacle:** Place in the church where the Eucharist is reserved.

**Chalice:** Cup used to hold the wine.

**Paten:** Plate used to hold the bread that will be consecrated during the Eucharistic Prayer.

**Ciborium:** Vessel used to hold the consecrated bread for the distribution of Communion.

**Cathedral:** Major church in an archdiocese or diocese. It is the seat of the local archbishop/bishop.

**Lectionary:** Book that contains all the readings from Scripture for use in the celebration of the liturgy.

**Sacramentary:** Book used by the celebrant containing all the prayers for the liturgy of the Mass.

**Book of Gospels:** Book that contains the Gospel texts from which the priest or deacon proclaims the Gospel of the day.