

## **LET'S TALK LITURGY! – Liturgy of the Eucharist: Preparation of the Gifts and Altar**

*Prepared for the Liturgy Committee by Charlette Buescher (published originally in the January 2017 edition of QAC Spirit)*

This month we return to the detailed discussion of the parts of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. You might recall that there are three major divisions within the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The first of those is the Preparation of the Gifts and the Altar. While this is a secondary element, there are many small parts that make up the larger division. And many of those small parts occur almost simultaneously!

- Presentation of the gifts of bread and wine by representatives of the community;
- Presentation of gifts for the poor and the Church (collection offerings);
- Preparation of the table (altar);
- Song or musical accompaniment to the presentation procession;
- BRK or Berakah;
- Placing the bread and wine on the table by the presiding priest;
- Mixing of wine and water;
- Incensing of the gifts and those offering the gifts (at certain Masses);
- Washing of hands;
- Invitation to the Prayer over the Gifts;
- Prayer over the Gifts.

To make this a bit more simple, the elements to “key” on here are the bringing of the bread and wine to the altar by members of the Assembly, the placing of the gifts on the table by the presider, and the Prayer Over the Gifts.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) on their website under the “Order of the Mass” gives a succinct explanation of the Preparation of the Gifts and the Altar:

“The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the preparation of the gifts and the altar. As the ministers prepare the altar, representatives of the people bring forward the bread and wine that will become the Body and Blood of Christ. The celebrant blesses and praises God for these gifts and places them on the altar, the place of the Eucharistic sacrifice. In addition to the bread and wine, monetary gifts for the support of the Church and the care of the poor may be brought forward. The Prayer over the Offerings concludes this preparation and disposes all for the Eucharistic Prayer.”

As a matter of interest: the mixing of the wine and water and the washing of the hands are two actions that Jesus, the observant Jew, would have done at any meal. These are a part of our celebration now to remind us of the meal aspect of what we are about. Over years/centuries past, these actions were imbued with pietistic meaning but they are in their roots a part of the meal at the time of Jesus.

Another thought to consider: most of the major parts of our celebration conclude with a prayer proclaimed by the presider. These prayers are always in the first person plural (we/us) so that the presider is proclaiming the prayers in the name of those assembled –

in OUR name. It is the prayer of the Church. We assent to these prayers and make them our own by proclaiming our **AMEN**, our **YES**. Think about that at our next celebration. How enthusiastically do you assent to what is being prayed in YOUR name??