

**Combined Homilies on the Mass by Fr. Steve Lampe June 30 & July 7, 2024**  
Divine Savior-Fredonia and Our Lady of the Lakes-Random Lake

***13<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time***

Dear Friends, our older members may remember that prior to Vatican II (that is prior to 1970), the Sunday homily often had little to do with the readings. In fact, it was typical for the priest to preach on one of three topics: the ten commandments, the articles of the creed, or the sacraments. Vatican II taught that the homily should nearly always flow from the readings, and that is how I and priests of my generation were taught. So, it is very rare for me to depart from the readings. However, with our emphasis this year on the Eucharist, I thought it would be beneficial to review what we do every week when we celebrate the mass. Vatican II teaches us that the celebration of the mass, especially on Sunday, is the “source and summit of the Christian life.” If it is that important, then it is worth dedicating one or two homilies to it. It is my intention to dedicate this weekend’s homily to the Liturgy of the Word, and next week to the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

To begin, I must make a few comments. **First**, we must recognize that we have come a long way from Jesus’ meal with his disciples that serves as the foundation of our mass. As Christians moved into different communities, cities, and lands, and their assemblies grew larger, cultural elements from those communities became part of the meal, which by about 200 AD, had moved from an actual meal to a more ritual celebration. What remained constant were the reading of and reflection on the word, the breaking of bread and sharing the cup, and the commitment to Sunday. **Second**, cultural and geographic diversity pointed to the need for a standard of comparison, and the Roman form became that standard. Today’s mass is an English translation of the Roman Rite. **Third**, for the first 1,000 years, the language of the liturgy was the vernacular: first Greek, and then (beginning around the 4<sup>th</sup> century) Latin. However, as ever fewer people spoke and understood Latin, they were increasingly less engaged so that by around 1,000 AD, most people no longer understood Latin and became spectators who silently attended the mass. **Fourth**, in 1570 AD, following the Protestant Reformation, the Roman Rite of the time (which was called the Tridentine Mass) became the norm. In spite of other forms, the Tridentine Mass was the norm until the 1970 Paul VI mass of Vatican II.

When we look at the Mass itself and focus our attention on the first half, the Liturgy of the Word, we find that it can be divided into three parts: the introductory

rite, the readings and homily, and the General Intercessions. When we look at the earliest examples of mass, we find three possible models for this “Liturgy of the Word.” **First**, in Greco-Roman societies, it was common before a meal to have a lively and engaged discussion on a topic. This was called a *symposium*. **Second**, when early Christians baptized someone, there would be a reading of the Scripture and an explanation given followed by the meal. **Third**, the Synagogue service was well known to early Christians, many of whom were Jewish. With these three models in mind (especially the Synagogue service), we turn to the Liturgy of the Word as we have inherited it.

It begins with an introductory rite which helps us get ready to pray. Of course, we have to gather together. We do this formally in our opening procession and our opening song. Following a ritualized welcome and invocation of the Trinity given by the priest, everyone is invited to get ready by a confession of sin. In this way, we recognize that we are sinners, even as we recognize that God has called us together to honor Him on this day by celebrating the Eucharist. Various formulas are possible, but they all lead to an absolution of sin. This is followed by giving praise to God in the Gloria, which is best sung, as it is based on the song of the angels in Bethlehem. If we are looking for a reason for the Gloria, we may think of it as giving thanks to God for his great mercy that we just experienced. Then comes the prayer of that given day, called a Collect, which we pray standing. At that point, we are ready to listen, so we all sit down for the readings and the homily. All Sundays and Solemnities have three readings: the first is from the Old Testament except in the Easter Season when it comes from the Acts of the Apostles. It is followed by a Responsorial Psalm, which is our RESPONSE to the reading. It typically reflects some insight from the reading, and it is best sung, as the psalms are songs. Then comes the second reading, usually from a New Testament letter from Paul, Peter, or James. All of the readings are importantly interspersed with silence, since we are invited to take time to reflect on what we hear. After a suitable pause, we then stand for the Alleluia, again sung, which greets the WORD of GOD in the form of the Gospel book. This celebrates one of the five forms of the Lord’s presence in our midst: God’s Word. We typically hear the Gospel standing as a sign of our respect and attentiveness. The choice of readings was greatly expanded by Vatican II, and we now hear the majority of all four Gospels, and a large portion of the New and Old Testaments over a 3-year cycle. In addition, the readings are now read in the vernacular and, apart from the Gospel, are read by trained members of the community. We then sit again for the homily, which should be an engaging and prayerful reflection on the readings and how they speak to our daily lives. Following the homily, there are two final elements of the Liturgy of the Word. First, again on Sundays and Solemnities, we

recite the creed. Two versions are possible: the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed. In a very real way, they state the same mysteries of salvation that we heard in the readings, but in more theological language. Second, and finally, are the General Intercessions. This is a very ancient element when the people of God in prayer present their petitions to God. We often move from the most universal to the most particular, praying for the universal church and our leaders, for important dispositions to be held by Christians everywhere, to specific groups in need of prayer, and concluding with our local concerns. It is a powerful exercise of our ability to appeal to God as priests who are all baptized into the priesthood of Christ. And we trust that God listens to our prayer. That concludes the Liturgy of the Word. Next week we'll take up the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

### *14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (2024)*

Dear Friends, Jesuit theologian Fr. John Baldovin recently wrote that Christ is the primary actor in the liturgy. None would argue, I'm sure. But he went on to that Christ presides not just through the words and actions of the priest, but as Christ the head together with all the baptized, who are the body. In other words, the presider is Christ in the fullness of his presence as the head and the body. Fr. Baldovin concludes by saying that "the primary manifestation of the church takes place when the church, the particular assembly of the faithful, gathers to worship God." But for this to happen, the mass demands our full, conscious, and active participation, and not simply our physical presence. So, today, I would like to continue the reflection upon the mass that I began last week, turning my attention to the second half: the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Before I begin, I would like to clarify a few points that will help our examination. **First**, posture. We assume three postures during mass: standing, sitting, and kneeling. Standing is the primary posture, and it expresses respect, readiness, and human dignity. We stand during public prayer. Just as we would if an important person entered the room, we stand to respect and attend to God's presence in our midst. The next is sitting, and it signifies attentiveness and openness to receiving instruction. Finally, there is kneeling, which signifies private prayer, supplication, adoration, and it can also be penitential. Standing predominates; sitting prevails in the liturgy of the word; and kneeling is our posture during the Eucharistic prayer. **Second**, to whom do we pray? The mass is predominantly addressed to God, mostly the Father. At times, the priest addresses God on behalf of all, such as in the

Opening and Closing Prayers and the Eucharistic Prayer. At other times, we all pray, as in the Lord's Prayer. On rare occasions, I (as priest) address you, inviting you to prayer. **Third**, participation. As the Body of Christ, we are to be conscious and active participants. When we pray, it is important to join in the prayer and direct it to God. When I (as priest) pray to God on our behalf, support me with attentive prayer. When the choir leads us in the acclamations: the Kyrie, the Gloria, the responsorial psalm, the alleluia, the Holy, Holy, the Memorial Acclamation, the Great Amen, and the Lamb of God, join them in full voice. The acclamations do not belong to the choir...they belong to all of us. With that, let's turn to the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The second part of the mass is the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and it is inspired by Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples. The beginning actions are important. We sit down, collect our gifts in the form of a collection, and members of the community bring forward gifts of bread and wine. This is NOT an afterthought. Bread and wine are essential, and they come from the community. In bringing them forward, we not only do what Jesus asked, but the bread and wine represent our lives. Just as they will be transformed into the body and blood of Christ, we will be confirmed again as the BODY OF CHRIST. There are prayers over the gifts, often silent whenever we sing a song, but recited silently by the priest. If they are prayed aloud, we respond, recognizing God as the giver of gifts, by proclaiming: BLESSED BE GOD FOREVER. Once the gifts are prepared, we all stand for an offertory prayer. This leads to the Preface Dialogue and Preface. This is an instance when the priest speaks to you, inviting you to pray. After you conclude with: "It is right and just," the priest prays to God on behalf of all. The preface to the Eucharist Prayer can vary, but it always praises God for the gift of salvation we recall in the Eucharistic Prayer. Still standing, we all sing the Holy, Holy, echoing words from the Book of Revelation. Then we kneel for the Eucharistic Prayer.

There are 10 versions of this prayer, but we usually use #2. All ten follow the same pattern. Near the beginning, the priest calls upon *the Holy Spirit* to transform the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, and to transform us who will consume them into the Body of Christ. This is called the "epiclesis," and its action (stretching out my hands over the bread and wine) and words are so important that they must be said to assure validity of the action. In the Latin Mass, this was the first time that the bells rang (not to make the action "holy," but rather) to get the attention of the faithful that something really important was happening. This is followed by the Institution Narrative. Catholic often focus on this as the "moment." In that moment, the priest "tells the story" of what happened: on the night before HE died.... and recites the words of Christ. Christ, who is the presider,

transforms the gifts through those words, uniting us with his loving sacrifice. For our part, we are doing what he asked his disciples and us to do. We all respond with the memorial acclamation, *telling God* that we believe in the power of Christ's sacrifice in our lives. This is followed by a *prayer to God*, prayed by the priest, that the Spirit will work in us as it has in the bread and wine. Finally, the last part of the Eucharistic prayer consists of a series of intercessions *to God* on behalf of the Church, its leaders, the dead, and interceding through Mary and all the saints. It concludes with a big YES on all our part in the word: AMEN!

Then comes the Communion Rite. We prepare ourselves by standing and praying together the Lord's Prayer and making peace with one another through the rite of peace. Immediately before communion, while still standing, we sing the Lamb of God, recognizing the connection between Christ's death and our salvation: Lamb of God...have mercy on us. Then, kneeling, we declare our unworthiness one more time. This is followed by the communion procession, and the reception of communion, which we receive standing. Communion may be received in the form of bread, either in the hand (the more ancient tradition) or on the tongue...both are equally legitimate and reverent and determined by the individual communicant. In addition, those who wish, may receive the Blood of Christ, communicating from the cup. In either form, or both, we receive the fullness of the Body of Christ. At the end of communion, we perform an ancient tradition by inviting those bringing communion to the sick to come forward to collect the hosts needed for those absent. Having been fed and strengthened by the Body and Blood of Christ, we move to the conclusion. The chalices and bowls are best cleaned out of sight or at a side table. We stand for a concluding prayer, a final blessing, and we leave. Of course, at times the announcements keep us longer. And it is for that reason that we usually sit for that final prayer rather than stand.

So, some final thoughts. I repeat again that the weekly celebration of the Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith. It is a fundamental expression of our baptismal dignity, and deserves our full, conscious and active participation. And it is a balancing act! What do I mean? It is a time that invites both reverence and joy, and both are important. *Reverence*, because we are in the presence of God in multiple ways: Christ in the Word, in the Eucharist, in the Priest, in the Community, and in the Sacrament. But also, *joy*. The mass is not about rigidity, fear, stiffness, distance, trembling or rules. Joy is not rigid or fearful. The rules exist to create order, but not scrupulosity. For example, the postures are not absolutes. If you can't kneel or stand, you sit! We and God are delighted that you are here. So, for those inclined to fear or distance, loosen up and accept the invitation. The mass is not intended to be some weekly requirement, or a painful

and frightening experience of submission to a vengeful God. No, God delights in our presence and longs to feed us and give us peace. On the other side, those who are inclined to casualness are reminded that we are in the presence of greatness. Enjoy the celebration, by all means, but realize that what we do deserves our reverence, wonder, and joy! The Latin mass had a great opening line: Let us go to the altar of God...the God who gives *joy* to my youth. So, whether we are young, middle aged, or old, every Sunday we claim our baptismal dignity as the Body of Christ, and joyfully reach down to the source, and climb to the summit of our faith. It is our 2,000-year-old tradition of the mass that we celebrate with reverence and joy. Amen.