

Benilde-St. Margaret's School
Understanding Liturgy/Mass



What exactly is “liturgy”?

The Greek word *leitourgia* originally referred to a political, technical, or religious work that was performed for the people. The early Church used the word when speaking of a worship service, and by the Middle Ages, it simply denoted the official worship of the Church. For us at Benilde-St. Margaret's, our true strength as a community comes from our prayer and worship together. While there are times when we gather for a service of readings and reflection, the important events in the life of the Church and in our life as a school are celebrated through the Mass which has, at its heart, a celebration of the Eucharist.

What is the ministry of the Assembly?

There are many defined roles within the Mass such as those of Presider, Lector, Cantor, Choir, and Eucharistic Minister. Some people stop there, forgetting that all those who are present – the Assembly – also share a most important ministry. We are not attending a sacred play where we can just sit back, watch, and listen. Through prayer and song and acclamations and responses, we are called to full and active participation, coming together as the community of Benilde-St. Margaret's to worship our God.

What is the structure of the Mass?

Gathering

Regardless of where we may be coming together for worship, whether it be as small groups or classes in our chapel or as the larger community in the Great Hall or in the Haben Center, we gather as family, the people of God, bringing our individual needs and prayers and those of each other before our God. We come from our homerooms, knowing that we are gathered to share in something beyond the ordinary.

Introductory Rites

We are welcomed, we are called together, and we are united as a community, prepared to hear the Word of God and to celebrate the Eucharist.

Liturgy of the Word

We are given the opportunity to listen to and reflect on the greatest love story ever written: What our God has done in the past and what our God did and continues to do in the most perfect way through Jesus. Our God is not distant but very near with a deep love and care for each of us.

Preparation of the Gifts

This is known as a “Transitional Rite,” showing movement from the Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We give of ourselves through our Common Basket collection, we prepare the altar, light the candles, and offer our gifts, not only the bread and the wine, but the gift of ourselves. There is no greater gift that we can give to our Creator than to offer the gift of ourselves!

Liturgy of the Eucharist

This section of the Mass contains the Eucharistic Prayer – a great prayer of praise and thanks to God. During the central part of this prayer – the Institution Narrative – we hear again the story of Jesus’ institution of the Eucharist on the feast of Passover, the night before his death. It is at this time that we, as Catholic Christians, believe that Jesus is fully present under the forms of bread and wine. We refer to this as the Real Presence. Throughout the Eucharistic Prayer, we are called to join together in the Eucharistic Acclamations, again, part of our ministry as the Assembly.

As we prepare to receive Eucharist, we join our hands together, praying the beautiful prayer of mercy and peace given to us by Jesus our Brother. We are then called to share with one another a Greeting of Peace. We all need a deeper understanding of what this “Greeting of Peace” really means. It is so much more than a social greeting. From the earliest days of the Church, Christians greeted one another with the “kiss of peace,” as a sign that they were one and that all differences were put aside. The Second Vatican Council reintroduced the rite of peace, and its placement following the Lord’s Prayer and before Communion is no accident. “So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go, first to be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23-24) In other words, we have joined our hands together and prayed for forgiveness; we now offer Christ’s peace to each other – just as our brothers and sisters did centuries ago, we offer this as a sign that we are one and that all differences are put aside. In a real way, we are recognizing Christ’s presence in our brothers and sisters before we receive Christ truly present in the Eucharist.

We encourage everyone to come forward during the Communion Procession. If you are not receiving Eucharist, we still encourage you to come forward to receive a blessing from the presider or from one of the Eucharistic Ministers. For the blessing, you simply come before them, cross your arms over your chest, and bow your head. They will place a hand on your shoulder as a form of blessing and say “The Love of Christ!” We live in a world filled with distractions. That’s what sometimes makes the Communion time difficult for us. When you return to your seat after receiving Eucharist or the Blessing, we ask that you keep a reverent silence to reflect on what you have heard and what you have just received and to give others around you the opportunity to do the same.

Concluding Rites

We bring our celebration to a close. The central part of this section of the Mass is the “Blessing.” Following this blessing is the “Dismissal” which is also a commissioning, a being sent out on a mission. The presider says, “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” In other words, we are being sent out with that mission – to love and serve the Lord in all that we do and through all that we say. The Mass, then, doesn’t really end; it is lived out in our lives every single day! To the presider’s words, we respond: “Thanks be to God!”

Mike Jeremiah
2017