



Step-by-Step Walk Through the Mass
Do This in Remembrance of Me
Part 1: Holy Water and Sacramentals
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(This is the first of a year-long series)



Why is the Mass so important?

Why do we stand, sit, and kneel at specific times during the Mass?

Where did the prayers we say at Mass come from?

When does Jesus actually become present in his Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity?

How do I pray better at Mass?

These are just some of the many questions parishioners have asked me through the years. They're really great questions! The goal of this series is to explore the most common things Catholics want to know about the Mass.

What is the Mass?

The first question that we need to talk about, the one that underlies all the other questions you might have regarding the Mass, and the question you probably haven't asked yourself, is this: What is the Mass? This is a really important question, and we'll be deepening the answer to this throughout the series. However, as we begin, I want to give you for starters a way you can think about the Mass:

- The Mass is our participation in the one perfect Sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross.
 - The Mass is our participation in true communion with God and one another.
 - And the Mass is our taste on this earth of the full perfection we will experience in the Kingdom of Heaven.
- The Mass is the perfect worship of the Father in heaven, and it is an inestimable source of gifts and blessings for us as well.

In this series, we will be exploring each of the parts of the Mass, beginning from that first moment when we walk through the church doors. So let's begin.

Holy Water

What is one of the first things you do when entering the body of a Catholic church? You reach down and dip your fingers in the holy water font and make the Sign of the Cross on yourself. We do this seemingly small gesture so often that sometimes we may not think about its meaning.

First, have you ever wondered why there are holy water fonts located near the entrance of the church? Msgr. Peter Elliott explains, "The holy water stoups [fonts] at the doors of the church are signs which recall the baptismal washing of the faithful" (Ceremonies for the Modern Rite, no. 44). In many traditional church layouts, the baptistry was located near the main door of the church. So just as the Sacrament of Baptism is our entrance into the life of God and the Christian Faith, it's symbolic that baptistries and fonts are located at the entrance of churches. Their location just inside the church doors recalls for us our entrance into the life of the Church when we were baptized with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (the Sign of the Cross).

So as you enter the body of the church, you bless yourself with holy water to recall the sacrament through which you entered into God's family, the Church. When you enter the church for Mass, you are, we could say, entering the place of "family celebration." We have been given tremendous gifts as members of God's family, and holy water reminds us of these gifts. By blessing ourselves with holy water, we recommit ourselves to living holy lives in fidelity to Christ, and we prepare ourselves to participate fruitfully in the Holy Mass.

Sacramentals

Holy water is water blessed by a bishop, priest, or deacon and is among holy things that fall into the category called "sacramentals." The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that sacramentals "are sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments" (CCC, no. 1667). That means that these holy things or actions remind us of sacraments in some way. They help us recall the graces of the sacraments. They don't confer grace, but prepare us to receive grace and help us be ready to cooperate with those graces so we can grow in faith and holiness.

Beloved Children of the Father

I mentioned earlier that holy water recalls our Baptism. Dipping our fingers into the holy water and making the Sign of the Cross as we enter the church for Mass is certainly not the same as our Baptism, when water was poured upon us and baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. However, intentionally blessing ourselves with holy water as we enter the church recalls the day that we were brought into God's family, and it reminds us we are beloved children of the Father.

As we prepare to join together with Christ in his perfect offering to the Father, this first gesture as we enter the body of the church helps us to know that we belong and that we have been invited to take part in the Sacrifice of Christ.