

Question in red indicate newly submitted questions

Fr. Ken's answers printed in blue

St. Ambrose

About the Mass

How is the Eucharistic prayer that is used at each Mass selected?

This largely comes down to the choice of the priest celebrant. There are four Eucharistic Prayers used throughout the liturgical year. The first, known commonly as the Roman Canon, is the longest and most elaborate. The fourth can only be used during Ordinary Time when there is no proper feast, and has an integrated preface; this means it is not commonly used. The second Eucharistic prayer is the shortest and most ancient, attested in the writings of Hippolytus of Rome in the third century. This is often used on weekdays and Sundays. The third Eucharistic prayer is of intermediate length and often used on Sundays.

Why are some parts of the Mass sung on different occasions?

All the Mass orations (collect or opening prayer, prayer over the gifts, and post-communion prayer) as well as the Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer may be sung. There is in liturgical celebrations a notion called progressive solemnity, which means that we aim for more liturgical embellishment the higher the feast or celebration. So you'll often what the chanting of the Mass prayers used during seasons like Christmas, Easter, Advent, and Lent, and less frequently during Ordinary Time, although a priest is permitted to chant the MAss whenever he wants.

Doctrine/Biblical Interpretation

Why do Catholics, Jews, Orthodox, and Protestants have different 10 commandments?

The nature of the Ten Commandments remain the same for all Christian denominations and Jews, but the way they are numbered differ slightly. For instance, some creeds might group what we consider the ninth and ten commandments against coveting thy neighbor's wife or property as one commandment. But you'll find all the tenets remain however they are numbered.

What is the Filioque clause in the creed?

The Filioque clause in the Nicene Creed was a source of major theological controversy in the fourth century. It was an addition suggested at the Council of Constantinople that the Holy Spirit proceeds "from the Father and the Son" (in Latin *qui ex Patre Filioque procedit*). The previous Nicene Creed had only "from the Father." While Latin Christendom embraced the Filioque, by and large Orthodox churches rejected it, insisting that the Father is the soul source for both the Son and Holy Spirit. Scripturally, the Holy Spirit is said in St. Paul's epistles to be the Spirit of Christ, and in the Gospels, we are told that Jesus breathed on the Apostles, saying to them "Receive the Holy Spirit", indicating that there is a strong Biblical warrant for the Filioque clause.

What is the apostolic pardon?

The Apostolic Pardon is often granted during the celebration of the Anointing of the Sick, particularly to someone who is in danger of death. It is an indulgence which grants the remittance of all temporal punishment due to sin, provided that the person receiving it is properly disposed, i.e. is not conscious of mortal sin or has been absolved.

What year was God born?

God, in His divine nature, the Blessed Trinity, has no birthdate; but we often date the birth of Jesus Christ among us to A.D. 1. Scholars differ about this, though, and some might cite dates anywhere from 3 B.C. to A.D. 3. You might be tempted to ask "How could Christ be born three years... before Christ?? I can only answer that academics must publish or perish, so finding complications to traditional dating will always get mentioned in scholarly literature.

Interfaith

I recently attended a funeral of a friend I used to work with at Sacred Heart Ukrainian Catholic Church in Johnson City. I found the Liturgy to be outstandingly beautiful and sacred. The pastor, Father Ted, explained to me that these people are part of the Catholic Church and use the Byzantine Rite. He also said that, locally, Holy Spirit Church on Clinton St. and Sts. Peter and Paul Church on Watson Blvd. are also Catholic Churches using the Byzantine Rite. *Could you please explain more to me about this and why this fact is not well known among the general Catholic population?*

The word "Rite" here signifies a different liturgical tradition, and a different Code of Canon Law which is observed by the Ukrainian Catholic Church, among others. While they are in union with the Pope and College of Bishops, their liturgical traditions derive from the Orthodox Church. Most Catholic Churches are Roman Catholic, and follow the Latin Rite. This is probably not as widely known as there has been some tension between our churches historically, sometimes owing to ethnic differences, which is unfortunate. In recent years, though, close working relationships and friendships between bishops, priests, and lay people of the different Rites have smoothed over some of the historical difficulties.

Is it true that non-Catholics can receive the sacrament of the sick if they are very sick?

Only a baptized Catholic can receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, but a priest may offer a blessing to a non-Catholic person, and will happily pray with them for their healing.

Is there a remedy for a Catholic and non-Catholic couple not married in the Church to elevate the marriage to a sacramental union without the non-Catholic converting to Catholicism?

There is indeed a remedy for this situation, and it is fairly routine. The couple in question can ask their priest to perform a convalidation. The couple can renew their vows before a priest in the appropriate canonical form and their marriage is then considered a full sacramental union. The non-Catholic spouse need not convert to Catholicism, although we would certainly welcome them either way.

Other?

If it is God's will, why do we pray for change?

An insightful question; all of us have likely experienced the disappointment of praying for something which we do not receive- most people who have ever prayed for patience report that they rarely become infinitely patient right away. We pray not so much to change God's mind or even to receive something in particular, but to draw closer in a relationship with Him. Prayer, then, is intended not so much to change things or circumstances, but to change us, and to draw our will closer to God's.

Does the Church still teach the works of mercy? If yes, what are we doing to shelter the homeless?

The Church still teaches the corporal and spiritual works of mercy; there is also a significant need for shelter for homeless people in our community, and particularly this past winter. We often find our resources are limited, and so we welcome any assistance people can offer.

These two were written by the same person and are more opinions than questions but I figured I'd include them.

Do you think that we have lost our focus as God's people? We ask Him to change us. We ask Him for His blessings and graces. Rather we have been given free will, we must practice and use this gift. Change must be self directed, come from within and rooted in God. As far as God's gifts, He has already given us everything we need; we fail to recognize this. We must re-awaken the Spirit within us.

Individuals must freely choose to love others and to be of selfless service to them. Yes, we can set examples, make suggestions, have dialogues, pray, etc. What would you do to inspire and motivate myself and others?

Inspire is an interesting word, and provides something of an answer- you'll note it comes from the same root as "spirit"; thus, the source of our inspiration is the Holy Spirit. My sense is that in prayer, and by specifically asking for inspiration and motivation, you might find that these are precisely what God wants to give you.

St. Anthony

About the Mass

Are there any rituals a priest/deacon must perform before Mass starts?

There are not any required rituals, but a priest should take time to prayerfully prepare to celebrate Mass. 15 minutes seems like a good number, but often, because of a hectic schedule, that gets whittled down to 10... or 5. A priest or deacon may also pray the vesting prayers, which are said as each different vestment is donned: amice, alb, cincture, stole, and dalmatic (for a deacon) or chasuble (for a priest).

Why do we do the cross over our mind, lips, and heart?

This is a visual symbol and a prayer that, as we hear the Gospel, Jesus may be in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts.

What relic is in/under the altar at St. Anthony's?

Good question! Our parish historian Laurie Forrest has been on an Indiana Jones-level quest to find this out. Each consecrated altar has a relic placed in the mensa (the table portion) under the altar stone, which is then sealed. I have not been able to find any documentation for which relic we have at St. Anthony's (or our other parishes), and the diocesan archives were not able to find any. It's a strong likelihood that the relics would be from a saint connected to the ethnic identity of the parish, but we just don't know for sure.

Can you explain more fully the role that music plays in the Mass?

Since the days of Moses, music has been an integral part of the worship which the People of God offer to Him. Singing goes along with celebrating, and so our music is part of what we offer to God. This means, incidentally, that we should, indeed, sing. No one should worry that they sound out of tune; for the most part, you will naturally attune to the people around you. And the more people who sing, the easier it is.

Communion

What is done with any Communion wafers that are left over after Mass?

Any hosts which are not consumed at Mass are reserved in the tabernacle. They could be offered at the next Mass in addition to newly consecrated hosts, and are brought to the sick who were not able to attend Mass.

Are you supposed to do the sign of the cross after you take Communion?

This is not a requirement, but a practice that many people have adopted. There is nothing wrong with it, nor is it wrong to omit it.

Is there a "right" way to take Communion? Some take on the tongue, kneel, others stand.

Either way of receiving communion is acceptable, and some people have learned or come to value one way or the other. In our parishes, if ever in doubt about receiving on the tongue from a Eucharistic minister, you can always come to the priest to receive in that manner.

Should we make the sign of the cross?

We'll leave that up to you!

Can you explain the philosophy of transubstantiation? The difference between transubstantiation and consubstantiation?

This is getting into technical Eucharistic theology. The formal Catholic teaching on “what happens” to the bread and wine in the Eucharist is transubstantiation. According to Aristotelian philosophy, which formed the backbone of much of our theological reasoning for centuries, every “thing” in the world was comprised of “substance” (its underlying reality) and “accidents” (its outward, physical characteristics). In the Eucharist, then, the substance of the Bread and Wine become the Body and Blood of Christ (that is to say, their underlying reality changes) while their accidents (the outward physical characteristics which we can see, and taste, and so forth) remain the same. This is why the bread still tastes like bread and the wine like wine. They have truly become the Body and Blood of Christ, but their physical state is something we can consume as food.

Consubstantiation was an alternative belief in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist which was popularized by Martin Luther. Rejecting transubstantiation, he argued that Christ would become “truly present” in the Eucharistic species, but only for the duration of the celebration of the Eucharist. Once the congregation dispersed, so too, did Christ’s presence in the bread and wine. A problem with this view comes from the narrative of the institution of the Eucharist we find in the Gospels and Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians- Jesus says explicitly, “This is my body,” and “This is my blood.” This does not seem to indicate that what has become His Body and Blood will revert to what it was before.

Death

What’s the deal with Purgatory?

Purgatory is the state or experience of purification through which a soul must pass after death if any temporal punishment due to sin must still occur. There is a misconception that Heaven is for really good people, Hell is for really bad people, and Purgatory is for just okay people. In reality, every holy soul in Purgatory is destined for Heaven. What they are doing is undergoing a process whereby anything in their nature and personality that was broken or disfigured by sin is repaired. Anyone who has struggled with an addiction or habitual sin knows how difficult and painful a process this can be, and for that reason, Purgatory is often presented as a difficult experience. But Dante, in his Divine Comedy, while not a canonical text, provides us a valid understanding of how a soul might ascend to God from Purgatory: the higher up Mount Purgatory one climbs, the easier the climb becomes; the closer one draws to God, the faster one runs.

Will we see our family when we pass?

Yes. Heaven is the state of perfect communion with God, and all who dwell in Him.

Will St. Michael the Archangel be present when we die?

All the angels and saints will be present when we die, as indeed they are present with us even now, albeit not in ways that we can see and hear. Traditionally, St. Michael was held to have the special role of bringing souls to Heaven. We don’t know for certain that this is how that happens, but there is no harm in believing it.

Other

No question, just a comment. Thank you.

You're welcome.

At Saint Anthony's on the Altar there is a wooden door next to the Blessed Mother that is off the ground, what is that used for?

The small cabinet set into the wall in the sanctuary is not where Father hides his snacks. It's an ambry, the cabinet where se tore the oils used in sacraments: the oil of catechumens in the Rite of Baptism, the oil of the sick for the Anointing of the Sick, and the Sacred Chrism for baptism, confirmation, and Holy Orders. You'll see similar structures on the wall at St. Joseph's, and on a table at St. Ambrose.

St. Joseph

About the Mass

Why do we use incense and when?

The meaning of using incense during the Mass?

The use of incense in worship goes back to the Old Testament, and is common in other religions as well. Its use is largely symbolic- we pray that, as the smoke of the incense rises, so our prayers might rise to heaven as well. That incense is fragrant extends the symbol further. When it is used, the priest will incense the altar at the beginning of Mass, the priest or deacon will incense the book of the Gospels before the Gospel is proclaimed, and the priest will incense the altar and the gifts on the altar during the offertory. Also, at funeral Masses, we incense the casket of the deceased.

Is it okay to use incense during any Mass, or is it only allowed for specific kinds of Masses?

Is there any Liturgy that incense absolutely has to be used?

Outside of Mass, incense is used during Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction, and also during Eucharistic processions. It's appropriate to use it at the more solemn Masses, and is obligatory at Holy Thursday and the Easter Vigil, but could also be used at a Sunday Mass or important feast if the priest feels it's appropriate

Why is Mass called "the Mass?"

The Mass takes its name from a line at the very end; when Mass is in Latin, the priest will announce "Ite, missa est" (transl. "Go, you are sent forth"). Missa in Latin became Misa in Italian, Mesa in Spanish, Messe in French, and so forth, and Mass in the case of English. So Mass is named from the fact that, having been nourished by the Word of God and the Bread of Life, we are sent forth as missionary disciples to proclaim the Gospel to the world.

What is the symbolism of the priestly vestments: alb, chasuble, etc.?

Each vestment worn by a priest or deacon has a symbolic value. Some clerics may wear an amice first of all, and this is a short white cape that goes around the neck and shoulders; it is a symbol of God's protection, and called "the helmet of salvation" because the priest places it over his head first. Then, the alb is donned; the alb is the long white robe priests and deacons wear, and corresponds to the white garment we wear in baptism; it is a symbol of purity. The rope belt or cincture we wear symbolizes continence and self-control. The cincture is also used to hold the stole in place. The stole is the long scarf-like vestment priests wear around their shoulders; for deacons, the stole is worn over the left shoulder. A stole is a symbol of authority, which is bound or held in place by the cincture, and so our exercise of priestly authority is bound by our discipline. Over all these, a deacon will put on a dalmatic, and a priest will put on a chasuble. A dalmatic is a large tunic with sleeves, while the chasuble is essentially a poncho. These are both symbols of charity; the idea here is that as ministers of Christ, our love covers everything else; our authority, discipline, and everything we do.

For the penitential act during Mass, what is the deciding factor for the recitation of the “I confess” prayer or the Kyrie Eleison/Lord Have Mercy or both?

The shortest answer is, “dealer’s choice”. It is up to the priest determine which of the three forms of the Penitential Act is used. The first form contains the Confiteor (“I confess”) and concludes with the “Lord have mercy” sequence. Form two is simply the Lord have mercy sequence introduced by different *tropes* (“You were sent to heal the contrite of heart, Lord, have mercy...”) Form three is a brief dialogue between the priest and people, but not ocmmonly used, as many do not know the responses.

Why should we *all* sing the Psalms?

Throughout the Mass, an important part of our participation in worship is to sing together, representing our unity in Christ and our common offering of praise and thanksgiving to Him. This is especially true of the Psalms, which were composed specifically for this purpose. Coming from the Word of God, they are particularly important to sing or acclaim together.

I was taught that if the Alleluia is not sung it is to be omitted and not recited. Is this still true?

Was I taught incorrectly? Is it at the discretion of the priest?

This is correct; if not sung, the Alleluia and verse should be omitted.

Does the hour fast before receiving Communion start 1 hour before Mass begins or 1 hour before receiving Communion?

I had to look this up in the Code of Canon Law to be sure. The relevant law is Canon 919. The Eucharistic fast begins one hour before receiving communion, and enjoins us to abstain from all food and drink, except water and medicine. If one is required to consume food with medication, particularly if that medication has to be taken at a certain time, this does not break the Eucharistic fast. Additionally, the elderly, the infirm, and those who care for them, are not bound by the Eucharistic fast. Practically, fasting one hour before Mass begins is still entirely acceptable, and it’s the way I typically prefer to plan things, because it’s not always certain how long the Mass will be before the Communion Rite. A good average time to plan on is that communion takes place at or around 20 minutes or more into a daily Mass, and at around 35 minutes or more in a Sunday Mass.

Please explain the Eucharist at the breaking of the bread.

At the end of the Eucharistic prayer there is something called the fraction rite, where the priest breaks the host and holds it over the chalice. It’s a direct reference to Jesus taking the bread at the Last Supper, breaking it, and giving it to His disciples.

During the Eucharistic Prayers it says: Remember also our brothers and sisters who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection, and all who have died in your mercy. What does “fallen asleep” mean? Have they lost their way....sinned?)

To “fall asleep” is often a Scriptural metaphor for death, and so in this case we are praying especially for our loved ones who have died, and for everyone else who has died in God’s mercy. It’s also a recognition of our hope in the Resurrection; just as sleep is only a temporary state, so death will give way to eternal life.

What is the proper way to receive the Eucharist at Communion?

One may receive standing on the hand or tongue, or kneeling and on the tongue. For receiving on the hand, it is best to place your dominant hand over your weaker hand, receive the host in the weaker hand, pick it up with your dominant hand and consume it. While receiving on the tongue, it is helpful if you open your mouth wide and stick your tongue out fairly far. This minimizes the risk of dropping the host and makes it easier for us “stick the landing”, so to speak.

Is it permissible to take the Host away from the Eucharistic Minister?

This should not be done as it may increase the risk of dropping the host, which we don’t want to do. Theologically, too, keep in mind that the Eucharist is something we should *receive*, rather than something we should *take*.

After Death

We have been told is it approved by the Roman Catholic Church it is okay to request to be cremated is that correct?

Yes, within the Rite of Christian Funerals, cremation is permitted. There are certain regulations which govern it, however. We prefer that cremation takes place after the wake and funeral Mass, if possible. We also want to stress the importance of treating the cremated remains with the same respect due a body, because of our belief in the bodily Resurrection.

If that is true can the cremains be distributed wherever the family/friends desire, such as their own garden?

Canon law and liturgical rules do not permit the ashes to be separated and distributed. They should be buried or otherwise interred in an urn in a suitable cemetery or columbarium.

Does a person bodily remains need to stay "intact"? I have family members who think it's okay to separate the cremains

We do ask that the cremated remains be kept intact and buried together.

IN addition they think it's okay to to make displays and jewelry with cremains. What can you share on this topic?

This is not something which canon law permits, again, preferring the burial of the remains. There is a practical consideration here, too: jewelry and other keepsakes may break, or be lost, or other damaged.

Other

What is the validity of a grandparent baptizing a grandchild *with* the consent of the parents, but no priest involvement?

Any person can validly baptize as long as they use water and say "I baptize you, N., in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," as they pour the water of the head of the one being baptized. That provision is only for emergency case, we do prefer that this be done in a church by a priest or deacon. This came up a few times throughout the country during COVID- if a baby has a high fever at home, can the parents or grandparents baptize the child at home? Yes, definitely. We would encourage them to contact their parish afterwards to notify them, and so that we can record that baptism in our sacramental register.

What is our parish's process to arrange the sacrament of the anointing of the sick?

If you or a loved one should need the Anointing of the Sick, we encourage you to ask the priest directly, or contact the parish office to arrange a time that works for you. In church, I typically carry the oil of the infirm with me or otherwise have access to it, so you can always ask me before or after Mass or during Confession. Due to HIPAA laws, hospitals no longer provide us with the names and room numbers of parishioners unless they specifically request that we be contacted, which means practically that either the patient or a family member has to contact us to request the Sacrament. When asking us to visit a loved one in the hospital or nursing home, please leave their name and their room number, this is really helpful.

Why is Easter called "Easter?"

"Easter" comes from the word "Eostre" in Old English, meaning spring or dawn. As Easter is the major feast of both spring and the dawning of new light and life, the word came to symbolize the entire Feast. Other Romance languages often use a word derived from Pascha, the Greek word for Passover, so Italian has "Pasqua", French has "Pâques", Spanish has "Pascua", etc.

How often should one receive Penance?

By precept, Catholics are required to confess their sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year. Practically, they should do so whenever they are conscious of having committed a mortal sin. Many Catholics like to go to Confession during the Penitential season of Lent and Advent, and this is a praiseworthy spiritual practice. A regular celebration of this Sacrament monthly or bi-weekly or even weekly is also common.

How did you get so funny?

Just like the directions for getting to Carnegie Hall: practice, practice, practice.

How did you get so funny?? Funniest priest in the diocese!!! - Jim Gill

You got that right.