



RITENOTES

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EASTERTIDE I

— From the Director of the Archdiocesan Office of Worship & Spiritual Life —



The Conclave and the Liturgy: Sacred Ritual in the Sistine Chapel

THE papal conclave, the solemn assembly convening this week to elect the Bishop of Rome, is not merely a political or administrative procedure; it is a profoundly liturgical act. Rooted in centuries of tradition, the conclave is enveloped in prayer, sacred ritual, and theological symbolism, all of which underscore the Church's reliance on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Central to this sacred event is the Sistine Chapel, whose artistic and architectural splendor provides a spiritually charged environment that deepens the gravity of the proceedings.

The liturgical framework for the conclave is laid out in the Apostolic Constitution *Universi Dominici Gregis*, promulgated by Saint John Paul II in 1996 and amended by Pope Benedict XVI in 2007. This document outlines the procedural norms and the spiritual dispositions required of the cardinal electors. The process begins with the “Mass for the Election of the Roman Pontiff,” during which the cardinals invoke the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Following the Mass, they process into the Sistine Chapel, chanting *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*, a solemn hymn pleading for divine inspiration.

Once inside the chapel, the cardinals take a solemn oath of secrecy and fidelity, pledging to protect the integrity of the process and to vote according to conscience and the promptings of the Spirit. The voting itself is marked by reverent silence. Ballots are cast discreetly, collected, and then burned—the smoke rising as a visible sign to the world: black for an inconclusive vote, white for a successful election.

Consecrated in 1483, the Sistine Chapel serves not simply as the location for the conclave but as a liturgical space saturated with theological meaning. Michelangelo's frescoes, especially *The Last Judgment* on the altar wall, confront the cardinal electors with

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a vivid portrayal of Christ's return in glory and the final judgment. This powerful image is not incidental; it serves as a profound reminder that their vote carries eschatological weight. Each decision is made under the gaze of Christ the Judge, calling the electors to humility and deep discernment.

The ceiling frescoes, also by Michelangelo, depict scenes from Genesis—Creation, the Fall, and the early human story—reflecting themes of divine authority, human responsibility, and the drama of salvation. These masterpieces transform the chapel into a catechetical space, reinforcing the spiritual nature of the conclave—here, in the art, the preachers are being preached to. All of this draws the electors' hearts toward contemplation and openness to grace.

Integrating sacred art and ritual in the Sistine Chapel exemplifies the Church's tradition of visual theology, where beauty serves the liturgy and opens the soul to mystery. During the conclave, this interplay fosters a spiritual atmosphere in which discernment becomes an actual act of prayer.

The liturgy intensifies as the doors of the Sistine Chapel are closed with the command *"Extra omnes!"*—"Everyone out!" From that moment, only the cardinal electors remain, enclosed in silence and solemn obligation. Each cardinal, vested in scarlet—the color of martyrdom and fidelity—approaches the Book of the Gospels placed on the altar. With his right hand upon it, he swears to uphold the conclave procedures, preserve its secrecy, and cast his vote in obedience to his conscience and the Holy Spirit. This moment is not a mere formality; it is a sacred rite in which the Church entrusts herself anew to divine providence. Before Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, this act becomes one of liturgical gravitas—an offering of fidelity before the judgment seat of Christ.

The papal conclave, deeply rooted in the Church's liturgical life, stands as a powerful testament to her trust in the Spirit's unfailing guidance. It affirms the conviction that the Holy Spirit—not political strategy or human ambition—moves and governs the Church through her most vital decisions. Within the Sistine Chapel's unparalleled theological and artistic framework, the cardinal electors gather beneath the vaults of sacred history to engage in an act that is, above all, worship. Their task is momentous, but it is ultimately God's will that is to be discerned and obeyed.

– Fr. Vigoa





LITURGICAL PRESS

Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery outside Mass



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This story is a reminder that these Communion services must remain distinct in appearance and spirit from the celebration of the Mass. The faithful should not confuse the two. Communion services are not “Mass without a priest,” and every effort should be made to emphasize that distinction.

The Church envisions using this rite primarily for those who cannot attend Mass—such as the sick, the homebound, or those in remote locations. When celebrated in the parish church on a weekday, it should only be done out of pastoral necessity and not simply to preserve a schedule or provide a role for ministers. The sacred liturgy is not about filling a function or maintaining convenience but about worshiping God rightly and faithfully.

It’s worth emphasizing that these celebrations are not to be scheduled merely to provide a visible role for a deacon or lay minister. Their purpose is not to “fill in” for the priest. Likewise, in the case of funerals, a Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass should not be used to give the deacon a role when a priest is available to offer the Funeral Mass. Our liturgical decisions must always reflect what is pastorally best and theologically faithful—not what is logistically easier.

Guidelines for Communion Services

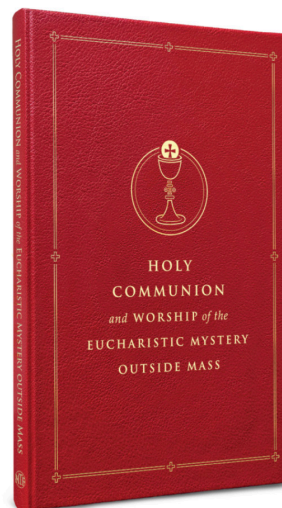
THE Church’s life flows from the Eucharist, and whenever possible, the daily celebration of the Mass should shape the rhythm of our parish communities. Daily Mass, though often quieter and simpler than Sunday liturgies, remains a vital moment of grace—where Christ feeds His people with both Word and Sacrament.

However, on rare occasions, a priest is not present due to illness, pastoral emergencies, etc. In such cases, the Church provides a way for the faithful to receive Holy Communion through a special rite: *The Distribution of Holy Communion Outside Mass with a Celebration of the Word*. This is a carefully prescribed liturgical action—not a substitute for Mass, nor a parallel option, but a temporary and pastoral solution in extraordinary circumstances.

Just recently, a priest called me in distress. He had experienced an unforeseen emergency and, despite every effort, could not arrive in time to celebrate the scheduled daily Mass. Out of pastoral concern, he called ahead to ask that a Communion service be conducted for the waiting faithful. Later, he expressed deep regret for not having made it in time. He walked me through exactly how it had been carried out and asked, with sincerity and humility, if it had been done correctly and in accordance with archdiocesan guidelines. What struck me most was not the procedural question but the weight he carried in his heart. His concern reflected a deep reverence for the Eucharist and the proper celebration of the Church’s liturgy.

The proper text and format for weekday Communion services are in the Church’s official ritual book: *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*. This should be followed precisely, and the specialized Sunday provisions for the absence of a priest (found in *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*) are not appropriate for weekday use.

Ultimately, we must always keep the Eucharist at the center of our lives. When we cannot celebrate Mass, we wait with longing and trust, still gathering in prayer and hope. But when Mass is available, we should choose the full banquet of the Lord’s Sacrifice and not a lesser expression. Let our liturgical practices always point to the truth that Christ gives us His very Body and Blood through the hands of the priest at the altar. Nothing can replace that mystery. -RJV



Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery outside Mass

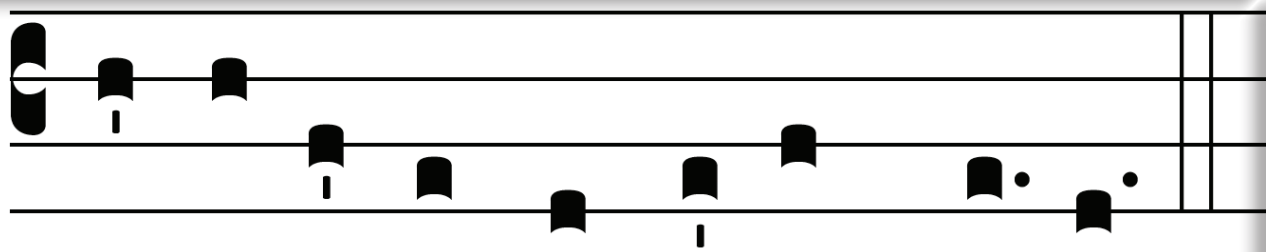
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Let Us Now Give Glory to God:

The Importance of Saying the Gloria When the Liturgy Requires It

OVER the past several newsletters, I've often emphasized that the liturgy is not a space for personal preference or pastoral improvisation. It is the Church's prayer—ordered, beautiful, and faithful. One often-overlooked example of this is the proper inclusion of the *Gloria* during Mass when the liturgical calendar calls for it.

The *Gloria* is not optional on feast days, even when the feast falls on a weekday. Yet, it is increasingly common to see it omitted—especially during ritual celebrations like weddings—despite the fact that it appears clearly in the Missal for the Mass of the day. This omission is not simply a pastoral shortcut; it is a liturgical oversight.

Consider a wedding Mass- *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony* does not include a formal invitation to the Gloria within its text, which can lead some to skip it mistakenly. But the rubrics of the Roman Missal take precedence in governing the Mass. In these cases, the priest may simply say, "Let us now give glory to God," or move seamlessly into the hymn. It is important that the *Gloria* is sung or said—because the Church requires it.

Why does this matter? Because the *Gloria* is not a filler or flourish—it is a solemn hymn of praise, rooted in Scripture, expressing the joy of salvation. It is particularly fitting on feast days, when the Church rejoices in the mysteries of Christ and the saints. Omitting it, whether for the sake of brevity or out of habit, diminishes the liturgical celebration.

The rubrics are not arbitrary instructions. They are a way the Church guards our worship's unity and theological integrity. Following them is an act of fidelity, not rigidity. When we observe them—even in moments as seemingly minor as remembering the *Gloria*—we enter more fully into the mind and heart of the Church.

The liturgy is not something we craft; it is something we receive. And in receiving it reverently, we give glory to God—not only with our words but with our obedience. -RJV



Dressing for the Lord: Modesty, Reverence, and the Liturgy

AS THE humidity and heat intensify in South Florida, it's easy to understand why people reach for lighter clothing. But as pastors, we must gently but clearly remind our communities that when we come to Mass, we are not going to the beach or the mall—we are entering into sacred worship, standing in the presence of the Living God.

Some might say, “But Father, at least they’re coming to Mass,” and there is truth in that. We are always grateful to see people in the pews. But presence is only the beginning of participation. How we present ourselves at Mass, including how we dress, speaks volumes about how we understand what is happening. If the Eucharist is truly the source and summit of our faith—if it is Christ Himself we receive—then our outward reverence should reflect the inward reality.

Modesty isn't just about avoiding scandal or preventing distraction—though those are important reasons, especially in a mixed and intergenerational congregation. Modesty is ultimately about humility. It's about recognizing that we are in a sacred space, participating in a sacred mystery. Just as the priest vests for the altar, the faithful, too, should consider how they clothe themselves for the Lord's house. We dress not to impress but to express reverence.

This doesn't mean people must wear formal or uncomfortable clothing, especially in the heat. One can dress appropriately and still be comfortable. What's needed is a spirit of respect—respect for the sacred liturgy, respect for fellow worshippers, and respect for one's own dignity. Our choices in clothing should not be a cause of distraction, discomfort, or—more seriously—a source of temptation or scandal to others.

It's time we begin gently and pastorally re-teaching that the way we dress for Mass is part of our offering. It's one more way we give glory to God. Just as we would dress with care to meet someone important, how much more should we be mindful when coming before the King of Kings? - RJV



Suggested Bulletin Note for Pastors:

A Gentle Reminder About Modesty at Mass

As warmer weather approaches, it's a good time to gently remind our parish family about the importance of dressing modestly and respectfully for Mass.

When we come to mass, we enter a sacred space to worship the Lord. Just as we dress with care for special occasions or important meetings, our clothing at Mass should reflect our reverence for the Holy Eucharist. Modesty is not about being overly formal or uncomfortable—it's about showing respect for God, for ourselves, and for others.

Let's be mindful to avoid clothing that is too revealing or casual. Choosing attire that is modest and dignified is one small but meaningful way we honor the sacredness of the liturgy and help create a prayerful environment for all.

Thank you for helping us maintain a spirit of reverence, beauty, and charity in the Lord's house.

Safeguarding the Eucharist: A Wake-Up Call to Reverence



ON DIVINE Mercy Sunday, I witnessed something that left me shaken. A young woman from out of town visiting her grandmother approached to receive Holy Communion. She took the Host in her hand, appeared to consume it, and returned to her pew. What she didn't realize was that I was watching. As she sat down, I saw her place the consecrated Host into the bookholder in front of her. Quietly but urgently, I went over, retrieved the Host, and consumed it myself.

It was deeply upsetting. There was something about the way she looked around—almost knowingly—that made the act feel not just careless but deceitful. I can't describe how sick to my stomach I felt afterward. A couple of days ago, over lunch with a few fellow priests, I brought it up, and one priest said: "This is very common." I've been asking myself: Should I be more upset at the person who treated our Lord so irreverently or at myself for not doing enough to teach and form the faithful on receiving the Eucharist with proper reverence?

Priests and extraordinary ministers must be vigilant, watching carefully to ensure that the Host is consumed reverently, immediately, and in the presence of the minister. It may even be appropriate in some parishes to have an usher discreetly near the front to help safeguard this practice—not as a security guard, but as a fellow disciple protecting what is holy.

I'm not that old, but I remember well how my parents, the nuns, and our parish priests taught me as a child to approach the Eucharist with awe. I received my First Holy Communion in 1976. We were taught very precisely this is not a "piece of bread," but the very Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ—true Bread from Heaven. I remember being taught to receive on the tongue and that we should not chew the Host. That particular instruction may have been overly scrupulous, but its intention was crystal clear: reverence.

Today, our demeanor toward the Blessed Sacrament has grown far too casual—too familiar. We have lost something of the holy fear and deep reverence that should accompany every reception of Communion. And yet, this is not a call for stricter rules or shaming people. It is a call to renewed Eucharistic catechesis.

We must continue to teach—patiently, persistently, and clearly—about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. We must remind our parishioners that to receive Communion is to touch Heaven, to welcome God into our very bodies. It is never just a ritual or a routine. It is sacred.

As priests, deacons, and lay leaders, we must take our role as guardians of the Eucharist seriously—not out of suspicion but out of love. Love for the Lord who humbles Himself to be placed in our hands and love for the souls who come forward, often unprepared, unaware, or uncatechized. -RJV

A Time and a Place: When to Make Announcements at Mass

IN SOME parishes, it has become common practice to make announcements before the final prayer of the Mass. The reason most often given is simple: “If we wait until after the prayer, people leave early.” It’s a fair concern. No pastor wants his flock to miss important information. But good intentions do not justify liturgical shortcuts. The structure of the Mass has meaning, and how we handle even something as ordinary as announcements says something about our reverence for the liturgy.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* is clear: announcements are permitted at the *conclusion* of the Mass—not during it. The proper time is after the Prayer after Communion, and before the Final Blessing. This placement respects the internal coherence of the Mass and avoids disrupting its sacred flow. The Eucharist has been celebrated, and before the assembly is sent forth with the blessing, a brief moment is allowed for practical matters concerning the life of the parish community.

Put simply: the priest should not interrupt the sacred liturgy. As the instruction *Inter Oecumenici* reminds us, “No one may stop the Mass to make announcements, give financial reports, or make pleas for funds.” Likewise, *Inaestimabile Donum* and other liturgical documents reiterate that activities not integral to the rite—like extra homilies, theatrical skits, or “liturgical dance”—have no place within the celebration of the Eucharist.

This doesn’t mean announcements are unimportant. On the contrary, they serve the real-life needs of a parish community. But like everything else in the liturgy, they must be done *in order*, and with a spirit of reverence. When we move announcements to an earlier, more prominent part of the liturgy, we inadvertently treat the concluding rites as filler—something less essential, less worthy of attention. But the final blessing is not just a formality; it is a commissioning. The priest, in the person of Christ, sends the faithful forth to live the Gospel.

Respecting the designated time for announcements is about more than just liturgical precision. It’s about preserving the integrity of the Eucharistic celebration. The faithful deserve the Mass in its fullness—from the opening Sign of the Cross to the final blessing and dismissal—without unnecessary interruptions or improvisations.

So yes, announcements should be made. But they should be made at the right time: after the Prayer after Communion and before the Final Blessing. This simple act of obedience honors the wisdom of the Church and allows the Mass to unfold with the beauty and reverence it deserves. -RJV



Preaching the Word: Priests, Deacons, and the Homily at Mass



It's a question that often arises among deacons—sometimes in formation, in fraternal gatherings, or even after a diocesan event: “*Does your Pastor give you opportunities to preach at Mass?*” The answer is more nuanced than many realize, and as with all things liturgical, it deserves a thoughtful and charitable response.

Let's begin by saying what's true: deacons are ordained clergy. Upon ordination, most are granted faculties to preach by their bishop. That's a serious trust, and many deacons do exercise that ministry well—whether at baptisms, weddings, funerals, Holy Hours, or the Liturgy of the Hours. The Church even allows deacons to give the homily at Mass, *when invited to do so* by the priest who presides. But here's the essential point: the homily at Mass belongs, first and foremost, to the celebrant.

There's no injustice in this arrangement—it simply reflects the structure of the liturgy. The one who presides over the Eucharistic celebration is responsible for preaching the Word. He may occasionally invite a deacon (or another priest) to preach in his place, but he is never obligated to do so. And in the case of Sunday or Holy Day Masses, the homily is not optional. It must be given, and it must be rooted in the readings of the day and applied to the lives of the faithful.

That's why some pastors prefer to preach at all the Masses they celebrate. It's not necessarily a slight against the deacon. It could be a matter of pastoral consistency or simply a recognition that preaching is one of the most effective ways of delivering the same message to all the faithful and a direct moment a pastor has to engage with his people. Other priests may gladly rotate the preaching duties with deacons, especially those well-formed and gifted in proclaiming the Word. Both approaches are valid within the Church's norms.

Still, it can be difficult for a deacon who desires to preach more often but isn't regularly invited to do so at Mass. In those cases, I always encourage an open and respectful conversation with the pastor. And I often remind deacons: the Sunday Mass is not the only place where your voice matters. Daily mass, a weekly Holy Hour, a public Vespers, a parish mission, a retreat talk—these are all beautiful opportunities to break open the Word and exercise the charism of preaching in ways that can powerfully nourish the people of God.

Deacons stand in a long and noble tradition of preaching. Saints like Stephen, Philip, Francis of Assisi, and Ephraim the Syrian—himself a Doctor of the Church—remind us that diaconal preaching has never been limited to the sanctuary at Sunday Mass. It has often flourished in the streets, in catechesis, and in one-on-one encounters. The important thing is not *where* the preaching happens, but that it remains faithful, humble, and anchored in the Gospel.

Priests should indeed be generous in offering deacons opportunities to preach when appropriate. And deacons, for their part, should receive those invitations with gratitude and humility—always remembering that preaching at Mass is never a *right*, but a ministry shared at the discretion of the celebrant.

Finally, a brief note for us all: preaching is sacred. No one but an ordained minister may give the homily. And while the occasional sentence at the end of a homily may announce a collection or update the parish on a project, the homily itself must always remain a proclamation of the Word.

Whether it's a bishop, priest, or deacon who steps up to the ambo, the goal is the same: to echo the voice of Christ, speaking to His Church. -RJV

Lift Up Your Hearts, Not Your Hands: A Note on the Our Father

NOT long ago, I wrote a short reflection on why the laity should refrain from using the orans position—the gesture of outstretched hands—during the *Our Father* at Mass. In response, a kind priest wrote to ask: “*Father, what about holding hands during the Our Father? Should we discourage that too?*” It’s a good question and a common one.

Let me begin by acknowledging what I believe motivates this practice: a desire for unity. Many people hold hands during the *Our Father* as a gesture of connection—a physical expression of being one family under God. That desire is beautiful. The instinct to express communion with one another is good. But the liturgy already gives us the perfect way to express that unity: we speak the words of the Lord’s Prayer in one voice, and then immediately after, we exchange the Sign of Peace. The liturgy provides what we need, in the way the Church intends.

So what about holding hands?

While the Church has never explicitly forbidden it, she has also never permitted it. In fact, the official publication of the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, *Notitiae* (11 [1975] 226), clearly states that holding hands during the *Our Father* “must be repudiated.” Why? Because it is “a liturgical gesture introduced spontaneously but on personal initiative” and “not in the rubrics.” The Church’s principle is simple: no one—priest or layperson—may introduce new gestures into the liturgy on their own authority (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 22).

Furthermore, *Notitiae* (17 [1981] 186) reaffirms that the priest may never invite the faithful to hold hands, especially not around the altar or during the Eucharistic Prayer. The sanctuary has boundaries that are not merely physical but theological. The priest acts *in persona Christi capitis*—in the person of Christ, the Head—and the faithful remain distinct as the Body. This is not clericalism—these roles are complementary, and the signs and gestures used at Mass are meant to safeguard that sacred order.

This is not about being rigid or unkind. It’s about honoring the liturgy as a gift, not a platform for personal expression. When we all do “our part,” in the way the Church asks, we foster true unity—unity not based on spontaneous creativity but on our common submission to something greater than ourselves: the worship of God in spirit and truth.

So what should we do instead of holding hands?

Simply this: stand together, pray together, and let your heart be lifted with the Church’s prayer. Then, at the Sign of Peace, offer your neighbor a gesture of Christ’s peace—that is the moment the liturgy designates for physical expression. The *Our Father* is directed to God the Father, not to one another.

As we continue to grow in our love for the Mass, may we also grow in our reverence for the Church’s wisdom in shaping how we pray it. Let the liturgy form us—not the other way around.

Suggested Bulletin Note for Pastors:

Dear Parishioners,

As we continue to grow together in our understanding and love for the Holy Mass, I’d like to share with you a reminder from the Office of Worship about a small but meaningful liturgical point: During the Our Father, the Church asks us to pray with one voice—but without the use of additional gestures such as holding hands or adopting the posture known as the orans (hands extended as the priest does). These gestures, while well-meaning, are not part of the liturgical rubrics for the laity and can lead to confusion or distraction during the liturgy.

It’s important to remember that the Our Father is directed to God the Father, not to one another. The most powerful expression of our unity as a community comes immediately afterward, when we share the Sign of Peace—a gesture given by the Church at precisely the right moment in the liturgy.

Let us continue to pray together with reverence and simplicity, allowing the liturgy to guide our worship and draw us ever closer to the heart of Christ.

Thank you for your understanding and for your deep love for the Eucharist.

—Fr. [Name]