



## **History of the Mass – Part III 8<sup>th</sup> thru 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

To prepare for next year's homilies on the prayers of the Mass, newly-translated for the *Roman Missal*, we're continuing our look at the evolution of the Mass. Today we'll cover the 8<sup>th</sup> thru 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## 8th Century

- **Procession of gifts becomes offering of money**
- **“Pay and pray”**

By the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the participation of the people in the Mass comes down to one thing: the Procession of Gifts, which now is just the collection. For the people, it's come down to “pay and pray.”

The people's role has changed from active participation, to passive inspiration and adoration.

## 8th Century - Switch to unleavened bread



In the 8<sup>th</sup> century there is a switch from regular bread to unleavened bread for the Mass. The Roman church wanted to more faithfully reflect the *matzah* bread, the unleavened bread, that Jesus used at the Passover in its liturgy. But the Eastern churches continue to use regular bread, because that is the tradition of the early church.

## 8th Century - Prayers spoken softly, Altar moved, & Priest's back faces the assembly



Now the Western Church begins to emphasize the element of mystery in the liturgy. The priest says the prayers of the Mass in a very hushed tone, to enhance the mystery of the Mass.

The people aren't participating in the Mass anymore. There's no more sense of the people gathering around the altar for a sacrifice which they all offered – only the priest does it. Since the priest is doing the entire liturgy by himself, and the people are just looking at him, the moment arrives when the free-standing altar is pushed up against the back wall of the church, and the priest turns around and celebrates Mass with his back to the people.

## 9th Century

- **People's understanding of the Mass**
- **Prayer posture changes**

Most people in the 9th century were uneducated. They understood the mass as a sacrifice in which the flesh and blood of God's Son became present on the altar, was offered for their sins, and was eaten and drunk.

When the priest prayed, instead of his arms outstretched in thanksgiving, now he prays with his hands folded in supplication. The prayers formerly led by the priest as one with the people were now said by the priest intervening for the people.

And now the Church creates its first invention:

# Communion Hosts



The host! ... Since hardly anybody is going to communion anymore in the 9th century, the loaves of bread used for Mass were made smaller and smaller. Until finally, someone came up with the idea of using a wheat wafer: it was technically bread, because it was flour, and water, and baked, and it's unleavened. Plus, wafers have the added advantage of longer shelf lives, they don't have to be consumed immediately.

But is a sad invention, because it would have never happened if God's people had kept going to communion.

## 9<sup>th</sup> century paten: from large platter to tiny plate



So along with this, the large platter that used to be used for distributing the Eucharist, after the bread was broken, now turns into a tiny plate that stacks on top of the chalice.

# 9th Century - Preaching changes

from  
**Homilies**  
... to  
**Sermons**



Since the people didn't understand the scriptures anymore, because they were proclaimed in Latin, priests stopped preaching homilies about them. Instead, they started preaching sermons, on whatever topic they wanted. There was no more connection between the scripture readings and the preaching.

## 10<sup>th</sup> Century - From Communion in the hand to on the tongue



By the 10th century it gets to the point where the few people who do go to communion, don't even dare touch the body of Christ, or the chalice of his blood, with their hands. Now people receive these from the priest.

Late in this century, the communion posture will change. People will receive communion kneeling. That brings us to the Church's next great invention:

# The Communion Rail



The communion rail.

This is strictly an ergonomic device, to help people kneel down and also to help them get up.

## 11th Century – Tabernacle & Sanctuary Lamp



Prior to the 11th century, churches had kept one or two portions of consecrated bread or hosts in a cupboard near the altar. The only purpose for reserving communion was for the sick, and one or two portions was just enough, so that communion could be given to the dying in an emergency. But in the year 1059, the reserved communion began to be placed on the altar to give it more prominence, and it was kept in a more upscale home, the tabernacle. And a lamp was kept lit in the sanctuary to remind those who entered the church that God was present there.

# 11th Century



Another shift happens. Since most people have stopped going to communion altogether, and since they can't participate in Mass because they don't understand the language, the people's worship changes, and becomes adoring the host.

So now the high points of the liturgy aren't the prayer of thanksgiving and the reception of communion -- now the consecration and the elevation come to be regarded as the high points of the Mass. Seeing the host was all that mattered.

## 11<sup>th</sup> Century - Altar Bells



Later on, the host and the chalice are elevated, and a bell is rung so people who had been praying privately would know when to look up to adore the sacrament.

Bells are rung at the *Sanctus*, the “Holy, Holy” (sort of a “2 minute warning”), again at the *Epiclesis* (only the altar server can see the priest extend his hands over the bread and wine since the priest’s back is to the people) -- this is the signal that it’s almost time, and finally at the 2 elevations.

# 11th Century - The Nicene Creed



Also in the 11th century, Germany insisted that The Nicene Creed be added to the Mass, to counter the ongoing Arian heresy, and the Pope obliged them. He made it a requirement for all Sunday masses and solemnities.

## 11th Century - Prayers at the foot of the altar



From the Church in France, the rest of the Church picked up on their introductory rite, that became known as the Prayers at the Foot of the Altar. There were 3 parts: the French mass began with Psalm 42 -- our older Altar Servers here will remember how it started: *Introibo ad altare Dei. Ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam.* I go to the altar of God, to God who gives joy to my youth. (We were young once, weren't we?) After the whole psalm was prayed, the *Confiteor* followed, a ritual confession of sinfulness ("I confess to almighty God, and to you my brothers and sisters, that I have sinned) and it ended with an absolution ("May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life").

## 12th Century

- **Communion from the cup ends for the faithful**
- **Beyond Gregorian chant: polyphony**

In the 12th century, communion from the cup ends for the faithful. Communion from now on will only be with the host. The logic was, since Christ is equally present in the bread and the wine, it's not necessary to receive from the cup, and priests stopped passing the chalice to communicants. As long as 1 person drinks from the cup, the priest, Christ's command to drink is complied with.

People still have a desire for communion with God, but feel too unworthy to be united with him. So the desire for God begins to be channeled through music. Now we see music soaring to new heights. Instead of monotone Gregorian chant, polyphony appears: choirs with sopranos, altos, tenors and basses.

## 13th Century: The *Missal* - and it moves!



In the 13th century we see the creation of the *Missal*. It used to be that the Priest's parts were in a book called the *Sacramentary*, the lector's parts were in the *Lectionary*, and the Cantor's or choir's parts were in the *Antiphonary*. Now all the parts of the Mass are put in one book, the *Missal*. Lectors and cantors aren't necessary anymore; the priest does it all.

The priest reads the scriptures from the altar. And he moves the *Missal* from the Epistle side to the Gospel side, sort of imitating the days when lectors read the scriptures from different sides of the sanctuary. It won't be long before everybody forgets why the *Missal* moves.

# 13th Century

- **Liturgical colors**
- **4th Lateran Council orders communion once a year during Easter**

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, liturgical colors for vestments and interiors of churches arise, to coincide with the seasons of the church calendar and celebrations for saints. Purple, a sign of Penance, is for Advent and Lent; white, a sign of joy, is used for Christmas, Easter and for celebrations of saints who died natural deaths; Green, the sign of hope, is used for ordinary time; red, for lifeblood, is used for Palm Sunday, Pentecost, and celebrations for martyrs; black is used for funerals; and Rose, a symbol of subdued joy, is used for one Sunday of Advent and Lent.

We have now arrived at a time when people have altogether stopped going to communion at all. The 4th Lateran Council finds it necessary to make receiving communion a matter of church law, and orders everyone to receive communion at least once a year, during the Easter season. It makes a dent, but priests will continue to hear confessions where people report

they didn't fulfill their Easter duty for the year.

# 14th Century - Eucharistic Adoration



By the 14th century, the desire for longer viewings of the consecrated host kicks in -- even viewings of the consecrated host outside of Mass. We see the Feast of Corpus Christi launched; eucharistic processions; even exposure of the Blessed Sacrament during Mass. Mass has become secondary, it's almost incidental. All the attention is on the sacred host.

## **14th Century**

- **Beginning of genuflections before the Blessed Sacrament**

The 14th century also brings the introduction of genuflections before the Blessed Sacrament. It had never been done prior to this, neither by priests nor the laity.

# 15th Century

**The embers  
of discontent  
begin  
to smolder**

By the 15th century, Mass had been transformed from an act of public worship to a form of clergy prayer. It was done for the people rather than with the people, said in Latin rather than in a living language, and performed mostly in silence rather than out loud. It was a liturgy of sacrifice and supplication rather than communion and thanksgiving. Instead of being a service of scripture readings followed by a communion service, it was a symbolic sacrifice in which the readings were not heard and communion was not distributed. The mass had become a good work performed by priests for the spiritual benefit of the church.

This was the mass the Protestant reformers knew, and this was the mass they rejected. In our next session, we will continue with the 16th century and the Protestant Reform, go up to the present time, and conclude this series of talks on the history of the Mass.