

When we look back at the history of the early Church under the direction of the first Apostles and their early Disciples, we find that the Mass - Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist formed the foundation of the Practice of the Faith. Following the liturgical rites of the Jewish synagogues and the daily Toda Temple sacrifices conducted in Jerusalem, the early Christians began with what they knew. As more documents about the teachings of Christ found in the Words of the Gospel writers and the letters of Peter and Paul became available, these texts formed the New Testament, the good news, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Liturgical practices continued to evolve as the doctrines became more concrete. Copies of the texts circulated throughout the Roman Empire. The primary purpose of the texts enhanced the basis of weekly gatherings for teaching, worship and praise of God and Jesus through the celebration of the meal of thanksgiving or the sharing of the Bread and Wine becoming the Body and Blood of Christ. Discussion and debates most likely filled the remaining hours of the day, particularly when visiting missionaries passed through particular towns.

After the deaths of the first Apostles, the early Church Fathers continued to study and reflect on the Gospel and other books of what has become known as the New Testament. These early Church Fathers also wrote commentaries related to the Gospel verses. We find these insights in a book called the Catena Aurea.

In our present day, we can continue this practice of using the Mass as our primary tool of Evangelization. From a structure standpoint, we can outline the major components of a Mass and use some variables to bring our current practices to the ears that need to hear (those that wonder what we do on Sundays or question our understanding on the identity of God.)

An outline of the key components of our Catholic Mass:

1. Prayers

- Fixed: Introductory Rites & Sign of the Cross, Gloria, liturgy of the Word responses, Creed, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord's Prayer, Sign of Peace, Communion prayers [Lamb of God, Lord – I am not worthy,] Final Blessing
- Variable: Penitential rite, Opening Prayer (Collect), Intercessory prayers, Offertory Prayer, Post Communion Prayer

2. Liturgy of the Word

The Liturgy of the Word finds its readings in Sacred Scripture and are contained in a book called the Lectionary. During Sunday Mass, the Gospel is available in the Book of the Gospels. Additional information can be found at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website: <http://usccb.org/bible/liturgy/index.cfm>. See the Calendar at the right side of the site for accessing specific daily readings. Details regarding the four Mass readings follow:

- 1st Reading – generally taken from the Old or Hebrew Testament; during the Easter season – taken from the New Testament
- Psalm and Response – generally taken from one of the 150 Psalms, or the Prophets
- 2nd Reading, - mainly taken from the letters of Paul; the other letters are interspersed depending on the Liturgical Calendar
- Gospel – Three annual Lectionary Cycles: **A** – Matthew, **B** – Mark, & **C** – Luke; some passages are fixed on an annual basis, such as the major feasts of Christmas, Epiphany, Easter Vigil and Easter, John’s Gospel used on special occasions and periodically through the various cycles

3. Liturgy of the Eucharist

- a. Prefaces – particular prayers based on the Seasons of the Liturgical Year
 - b. Eucharistic Prayers – prayers of **Consecration** with the common elements of recognizing the Pascal mystery and miracle of Bread and Wine becoming the Body and Blood of Christ; four main prayers based either on ancient canons or practices
 - Prayer I – from the Roman Canon – lengthy prayers with various options usually used during solemn feasts or special liturgies
 - Prayer II – shortest prayers used on various occasions, typically daily masses
 - Prayer III – a more solemn version of Prayer II commonly used during Sunday Mass or Funeral Mass
 - Prayer IV – contains a summary of the history of salvation
 - Other options are available depending on the Season and the choice of the Celebrant, two major categories are: Reconciliation and Various Needs
4. **Communion Rite** – mention of the various prayers was made above, mainly in the fixed section; the key action of the communion rite is the procession of the people toward the altar (table) of the Lord. Stopping short of the sanctuary, the people of the assembly receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Included in the section is the variable Prayer after Communion
 5. **Concluding Rites** – as the Mass draws to a close, the people are dismissed with a final blessing and one of four commands:
 - Go forth, the Mass is ended.
 - Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.
 - Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.
 - Go in peace

ⁱ This Summary provided by Deacon Tom Concitis on February 25, 2019