



Little Teaching

Preparation of the gifts

The three key elements in the Preparation of the Gifts are 1) bringing the bread and wine from the assembly, 2) placing them on the altar/table and 3) praying over the gifts. The mixing of water in the wine and the washing of hands are actions which Jews perform at every ritual meal and which Jesus, no doubt, performed at the Last Supper. These rituals remind us of the meal dimension of the Eucharist.

In the days before money became the ordinary means of exchange, the procession to bring forward the bread and wine to set the table for the Lord's Supper was also the occasion when people brought forward bread and wine, oil and cheese, and other items to sustain the church ministers, the poor and the imprisoned.

Today, this procession is the time when we also offer our monetary gifts. In sharing the fruits of our labor, we each in our own way participate in the mission of the Church to announce to the ends of the earth the Good News that we have been saved by the cross of Christ and to fulfill the Lord's command to feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty.

Here at Saint John Vianney – and in many other churches – a basket of food is also presented to recall our Catholic community's care for those in need, for example, through our support to the food pantry at our sister-parish – St. Elizabeth of Hungary in Oakland, the North Concord Homeless Shelter, the Monument Crisis Center, Loaves and Fishes, and our Saint Vincent de Paul Society, among others.

This offering of our gifts and the gesture of the priest lifting up the bread and wine are the reasons we formerly called this part of the Mass the Offertory. Today our prayer of offering takes place during the Eucharistic Prayer; the preferred name for this part of the Mass is now Preparation of the Gifts.

The Preparation of the Gifts concludes with the priest inviting us to pray that our sacrifice be acceptable to God. The priest then recites the Prayer Over the Gifts. Note that each of the major parts of the Mass concludes with a prayer proclaimed by the presiding priest. The priest leads these prayers, but he always prays in the first person plural. The priest is praying in *our* name, praying the prayer of *the Church*. And we are to make that prayer *our own* and give our assent, our "so be it," our "Amen."

A holy exchange

Early Church authors delighted in explaining the mysterious exchange of gifts that takes place at Mass. We come forward in procession to offer our gifts of bread and wine to God. In turn, God takes our gifts and transforms them into his gift, the Body and Blood of his Son. And we come forward later in a second procession, the Communion procession, to receive a gift, God's gift. Frequently the prayers of the Mass refer to this "holy exchange of gifts."

We have prepared our gifts and "set the table." This brings us to the very heart of the Mass: the *Eucharistic Prayer*.

