

The Most Important Response of the Congregation at Mass

A Homily in Four Parts

This series homilies by Deacon Mike Walsh given as part of the Daily TV Mass over four Tuesdays in September 2024 and focuses on the importance and structure of the Catholic Mass, emphasizing its role as a sacred story that unites the community.

The homilies reflect on the different parts of the Mass: the Introductory Rites, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Dismissal.

Key themes include acknowledging our human imperfection, seeking God's mercy, the centrality of the Eucharist, and the mission to Go in Peace to live out the faith.

The homilies also share a personal interaction between long time celebrant of the Daily TV Mass, Father Dan Donovan and Deacon Mike. This discussion revolved around a question raised by Fr. Dan - **“What is the most important prayer response of the congregation during the Mass.”**

The series explores the various congregational responses in search of the most important one.

Key points in the homilies include:

Stories as a Medium of Connection: The importance of storytelling is underlined, with the Mass itself being a sacred story that connects believers to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This storytelling is essential for understanding and living the faith.

Role of the Congregation: The congregation's role is to participate actively, not just in words but in spirit, understanding the Mass as a communal journey toward salvation and peace.

Significance of the Mass: The Mass is described as a sacred story divided into four parts:

- the Introductory Rites,
- the Liturgy of the Word,
- the Liturgy of the Eucharist,
- and the Dismissal.

Each part has its role in preparing the faithful for deeper communion with God and each other.

Importance of the Eucharist: The Eucharistic celebration is more than a ritual; it is seen as the memorial of Jesus' paschal sacrifice and is central to Christian salvation, as emphasized by the following quote from Pope Francis:

“The Eucharistic celebration is much more than a simple banquet. He described it as the memorial of Jesus' paschal sacrifice. The words that really caught me were when he said, “It is the mystery at the center of our salvation.”

Personal Reflection on Prayer: The homilies reflect on what might be considered the most important prayer of the congregation.

Themes of Peace and Mercy: Acknowledging our human imperfection and asking for God's mercy as we share in the peace of Christ are highlighted as significant themes throughout the Mass, as seen in the Penitential Act and other prayers.

These homilies hopefully encourage the faithful to reflect on their personal connection to the prayers of the Mass and to see how these prayers integrate into their daily lives, helping them live out their faith in practical ways and to Go in peace at the end of each Mass glorifying the Lord by the way they choose to live their lives.

Bio: Fr. Dan Donovan

Fr. Daniel Donovan is a priest of the Archdiocese of Toronto, a graduate of St Michael's College in the University of Toronto, BA, 1958, Université Laval, STL, 1962, The Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, SSL, 1965, and the Wilhelmsuniversität, Münster, 1971, DrTheol. He has taught a range of courses in Systematic Theology at St Augustine's Seminary and, between 1971 and 2002, at the Faculty of Theology in St. Michel's College where he also directed some 20 doctoral theses. Since retiring in 2002, he has continued to teach on a part time basis in the Christianity and Culture programme at St. Michael's.

Having been in Rome 1963-1965 when Vatican II was unfolding and having had among his professors in Germany Joseph Ratzinger and Karl Rahner, two influential figures at the Council, Father Donovan developed a special interest in the Council and in the difficult process of its implementation in the life of the Church, a process that continues today. Father Donovan's interest in the visual arts was awakened by the four years he spent in Europe and has led to the assembling of a collection of Contemporary Canadian art that now numbers some 400 works which have been donated to St. Michael's College.

Daily TV Mass Sept 7, 2024

The Most Important Response of the Congregation at Mass

Part 1: The Introductory Rite

Readings of the Day:

- **1st Reading: 1 Corinthians 2.10b-16**
- **Gospel- Luke 4.31-37**

Homily

Being a part of the celebration of the Daily TV Mass has been one of the great joys of my life. In fact, I'm coming up on my eighth anniversary of being part of the Daily TV Mass team. When I started, I found a quote from Pope Francis that really struck me.

Pope Francis said that *"the Eucharistic celebration is much more than a simple banquet.* He described it as the memorial of Jesus' paschal sacrifice. The words that really caught me were when he said, *"It is the mystery at the center of our salvation."*

In our first reading today from Paul, he said, *"These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit."* The Mass is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth. It is a glorious ray of the heavenly Jerusalem which pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey.

I wanted to share a story with you. This happened a few years ago. I was waiting for the beginning of the Daily TV Mass, and Father Dan Donovan was going to be the celebrant. He had arrived, and as is often the case, we would chat before the Mass. Father Dan, a long-time celebrant of the Daily TV Mass, is now fully retired and doing well. But this was a few years back, and he came in looking a bit quizzical. He said to me, "You know, Mike, something happened to me today during the celebration of Mass that has never happened in 60 years of priesthood."

He had just been at the local parish, where he celebrated the morning Mass before coming to Loretto Abbey for the Daily TV Mass. He said that at the Mass in the parish, the congregation did not offer the most important prayer response of the congregation, something that had never happened to him before.

Then there was a moment of terror in my life as he looked at me and said, "Mike, can answer the question: What is the most important prayer of the people, of the congregation?"

Now, this is different from the most important prayer of the Mass. The most important prayer of the Mass comes directly from the Gospels, and the priest, in the person of Jesus, will pray it. This is how Mark tells this prayer, which is very familiar to you: "*While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, he broke it, gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.' Then he took the cup, and after giving thanks, he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.'*"

That's the most important prayer of the Mass. But what is our most important prayer?

It got me thinking that the Mass is really the most sacred story that we celebrate as a community each day that we come together. And story is so important.

Sue Monk Kidd said, "*Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here.*"

If you look at the Mass, it's a story in four parts. The first part is the Introductory Rite. The second part is the Liturgy of the Word. The third part, the key part, is the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and finally, part four is the often-overlooked Dismissal.

Let me start today by going through the Introductory Rite. We begin this sacred celebration of the Mass the way we begin all our sacred celebrations: In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Right there, we have the mystery in just that one prayer. The priest will greet us, and we will respond by saying, "And with your spirit."

Art many but not all Masses, there are two forms of what's called the Penitential Act—the longer form and the shorter form. The longer form is called the Confiteor. This is an important moment, which is why I always encourage people to be on time for Mass. In this prayer, the Penitential Act, we acknowledge that we are not perfect people. It's not that we're bad people, just that we're not perfect, and we have sinned.

The key line to me is when we say, "*We have sinned through our fault, through our fault, through our most grievous fault.*" One of the reasons I like that line is that it's one of the few I remember from the Latin: "*Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.*" In that

one moment, we say, "Listen, Lord, we come to you in this great mystery, but we're not perfect people."

Next comes the Kyrie eleison, and we uncover one of the great themes of the Mass: asking for God's mercy. Why do we do this? Because we are not perfect people.

Then, at some Masses, especially on Sundays outside of Advent and Lent, on our great solemnities and major feasts, we pray the Gloria, and many times we'll sing it. It's a beautiful prayer, and it's a prayer in four parts. It begins with the song of the angels, which comes right from Luke's Gospel: *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of goodwill."*

Then there's a litany to God where *we praise Him, bless Him, adore Him, glorify Him, and give thanks for His great glory*. The third part is where we praise our Lord Jesus Christ, and again, we ask Him for mercy. You remember this line: *"You take away the sins of the world. Have mercy on us."* Finally, it ends with a doxology, a term often used to describe the prayers of the Mass. All it really means is an expression of praise to God. In the closing doxology of this great prayer, we pray to the Trinity: *"For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father."*

That's part one, and it's very important. St. Paul reminds us today that we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. The Mass is perhaps the greatest gift that has been bestowed on us by our God. Jesus broke the bread, shared the cup, and asked us to do this in remembrance of Him. And that's what we do today.

So, part one of the Mass prepares us to share in the mystery that is at the center of our salvation. When it's finished, we sit down, and we move to part two, the Liturgy of the Word, where we hear our stories within the story. Next week, I'll be here to talk about that. But until then, the Introductory Rite of the Mass prepares us, as every part of the Mass does, to leave in peace and to glorify the Lord by our lives.

Daily TV Mass Sept 10, 2024

The Most Important Response of the Congregation at Mass

Part 2: The Liturgy of the Word

Readings of the Day:

- **1st Reading: 1 Corinthians 6.1-11**
- **Gospel: Luke 6.12-19**

Homily

Many of you will remember, Father Dan Donovan, a long-time celebrant of the Daily TV Mass, who is now in retirement. He is a very thoughtful man. One day, I met him just before we were going to tape the Daily TV Mass. He was looking a little quizzical, as if deep in thought. He said, "You know, Mike, I had an experience this morning that I've never had in 60 years of priesthood." He had celebrated Mass at a local parish before coming to be with us.

He mentioned that the congregation asked him a question that he wasn't ready to answer immediately. He asked me to reflect on it as well.

Last week, we looked at the Mass, and I said it was a story given to us—a sacred story in four parts. The first part is the Introductory Rites, where we come together, greeted by the priest. We have a beautiful prayer that we say, especially during the long form of the Penitential Act, the Confiteor.

What I love about that prayer is that it acknowledges we are not perfect people and that we are asking for mercy. That's a major theme of the Mass.

Today, I'd like to look at part two of the Mass, which is the Liturgy of the Word.

We started today with the Gospel story from Luke, where Jesus chooses the twelve apostles. We see how Jesus prays: He goes up the mountain, is quiet, then comes down and chooses these twelve, calling them apostles.

The word "apostle" means "the ones who are sent." What are they sent to do? In Matthew, we learn that they are sent to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those

with skin disease, and cast out demons. Most importantly, they are sent to continue the mission of Jesus.

NT Wright, prominent Anglican theologian says that The Church is like the final act of the ongoing bible story, one that is unfinished because we continue that mission today.

To understand our story as followers of Chris, we focus on the Liturgy of the Word, where we hear the stories on which our story is based. Normally, the first reading is from the Jewish Scriptures—creation, the fall, and the history of the people of Israel. After we finish the first reading, we say, "The Word of the Lord," affirming that this is a story given to us directly from God.

On Sundays or solemnities, there is a second reading, often from the epistles, like today's reading from Paul, where he is addressing some dispute in the early Church. Remember, the Church is an ongoing act. After these first readings, we come together, proclaim the Gospel acclamation, and tell the story of Jesus Christ through one of the four evangelists.

One of my favorite writers on this topic is Alexander Shaia, who wrote "The Heart and the Soul: The Four Gospel Journey to Radical Transformation." He explores how we move through the Gospel stories. He says that Jesus first challenges us to change, most notably during the Sermon on the Mount. Once we accept the challenge to seek change and go out into the world, life is not be without suffering, and Mark's Gospel helps us navigate suffering, often depicted as crossing stormy seas. We move through suffering into joy, symbolized by the glorious garden of John. But we can't stay in that garden; like the apostles, we are sent out into the world.

After we reflect on our stories we often (not always) profess our faith. This prayer of the congregation firmly establishes that we believe in the Virgin Mary and that Jesus was born, that He came, suffered, and died, but that's not the end of the story. He rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, and will come at the end of time to judge the living and the dead.

We confirm that we believe in the Holy Spirit. We believe in our Church. We believe in the communion of saints. Most importantly, we believe in the forgiveness of sins and we believe in life everlasting.

In part 3 of the series, I want to explore the third part of the Mass: The Liturgy of the Eucharist, the main part of the Mass, where we come together to celebrate the mystery at the very center of our salvation.

It is the Eucharist that allows us to leave each Mass in peace and to undertake the mission of the Apostles in modern times by glorifying the Lord through the way we choose to live our lives.

Daily TV Mass September 17,2024

The Most Important Response of the Congregation at Mass

Part 3: The Liturgy of the Eucharist-The Eucharistic Prayer

Readings of the Day:

- **1st Reading: 1 Corinthians 12.12-14, 27-31a**
- **Gospel: Luke 7.11-17**

Homily

Father Dan once shared a story about a day when he came in after celebrating Mass at his local parish. He said, "You know, the congregation failed to say their most important prayer—the most important prayer of the people within the Mass." Then he asked me, "Mike, do you know what that is?" Over the last few weeks, we've been exploring that question, and now we arrive at the third part of this homily.

The Mass, as I was reflecting on it, really struck me as perhaps the greatest of all the sacred stories that we have been given throughout time. It is a four-part story in which we fully participate each time we come to Mass. Part one is the Introductory Rites, where we greet each other, acknowledge that we are not perfect people, and confess, "*Through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.*" We ask for mercy, which is one of the key themes of the Mass.

Following the Introductory Rites we sit down and we listen to our stories withing the story of the Mass during the Liturgy of the Word.

Following our profession of faith and our prayers to our God we begin part 3 of the Mass the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

If you look at our readings today, you can see how they both tie into the Eucharist. In Paul's letter, we hear his teaching: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ."

When you look at the Daily TV Mass community—all of you here today, whether you are watching on TV, on the internet, on our website, or on an app—wherever you may be, from all over the world, there are many members of the Daily TV Mass community, but we are all gathered together as one body in Christ through the Eucharist.

The story in Luke's Gospel, where Jesus raises the young man from the dead and gives him back to his mother, is a story of new life. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist together, it is a story of new life.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist, Part 3 of our 4 part story which is the Mass, begins with the preparation of the gifts. Though I don't have time to go into all the details, it is a unique part of the Mass. It dates to the very beginning of the Church when early Christians met in small homes, and people would bring the gifts to be prepared.

Today, we still do this with great care. The priest says, *"Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the Almighty Father."* And we respond, *"May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church."* This response reflects the unity of the one body made up of many members.

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, there are three doxologies, or prayers of praise.

The first is the Sanctus, the "Holy, Holy, Holy," beautifully sung by our cantors. It is a prayer of the people. The first part comes from the Jewish scriptures: *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of your glory."* The second part comes from Matthew's Gospel, during Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem: *"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"*

After this, we have what I mentioned in the first homily as the most important prayer of the Mass: the Consecration. Here, the words from the Gospel are spoken, where Jesus says, *"This is my body, this is my blood,"* and the priest, in the person of Jesus, offers this in remembrance of Him. Afterward, the words of consecration the priest will say, *"The mystery of faith,"* and we will all proclaim the mystery of faith.

There are three different forms of this proclamation that may be used during Mass, but they all express the same sentiment: that Jesus' died, he rose from the dead, and he will come again. This short prayer is central to our faith.

After this, we come to the **Great Amen which is the answer to Fr. Donvan's question- What is the most important response of the congregation at Mass?**

The instructions for the Mass state that the priest takes the chalice and the paten with the host, raising both. As he does this, he says, *"Through him, and with him, and in him, O God, Almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, forever and ever."* And then we, the congregation, respond with a strong *"Amen."* This "Amen" means "So be it," and it signifies our agreement with all that has been prayed.

I imagine that Father Dan must have felt disoriented when he didn't hear the "Amen" at that moment from the congregation.

We will conclude our reflections on the prayers of response in the Mass next week when examine the concluding part of the Liturgy of the Eucharist- the Communion Rite and Part Four of the Mass, the Dismissal.

I would suggest that the most important personal prayer (not the prayer of the congregation but personal prayer) of the Mass happens during this time. If you don't know what that is, think about it as we come together next week.

The Dismissal is often the forgotten part of the Mass, and people often ask, "Do I have to stay for that?" It is crucial, though, because, in the Dismissal, we are given the second important theme of the Mass. After we have been fed at the altar, we are sent forth with the words, "Go in peace." We go out into the world to glorify the Lord by our lives. We are called to be the living proof of God's story in a secular world.

Daily TV Mass September 24,2024

The Most Important Response of the Congregation at Mass

Part 4: The Liturgy of the Eucharist-Rite of Communion & the Dismissal

Readings of the Day:

- **1st Reading: Proverbs 21.1-6, 10-13**
- **Gospel: Luke 8.19-21**

Homily

Today, we have arrived at the fourth part of this series based on Father Donovan's question to me one morning as we were about to start the Daily TV Mass. He had celebrated Mass earlier with his parish congregation and mentioned, "You know, the people missed the most important prayer of the congregation." Then he asked me what that was.

As I thought about it, this led me to the idea of viewing the Mass as a sacred story—a four-part sacred story, one that we don't just attend but actively participate in. As I've been discussing, part one of this sacred story is the Introductory Rites, which is why it's important to be there at the beginning of Mass. Here, we are greeted, and we acknowledge that we are not perfect people. We confess, "Through my fault, through my most grievous fault," and we ask for mercy: "Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy."

Then we move into part two, the Liturgy of the Word, where we listen more than we respond. In many Masses, we respond with our Act of Faith, the Creed: "This is our faith; we are proud to profess it," and we offer our prayers of the faithful. Last week, we discussed part three, the most central part of the Mass—the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the very source and summit of all Christian life. It was in this discussion that we found the prayer Father Donovan referred to as the most important prayer of the people. It occurs when the priest elevates the paten and the chalice and says, "Through him, with him, and in him." At the end of this, we respond with our great "Amen," signifying the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, though not the end of the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

This brings us to today's homily, where we will discuss the second part of the Liturgy of the Eucharist—the Communion Rite—and then part four, the often-forgotten part of the Mass: the Dismissal. As Father mentioned at the beginning of Mass today, we have a Gospel that ties into this theme: What does it mean to be in communion with Jesus?

In today's Gospel, Jesus said to the crowd, *"My mother and my brothers are those who hear the Word of God and do it."*

During the Liturgy of the Word, we hear the Word of God and in communion with Jesus, we are nourished by him so that we can go out into the world and do it.

The Communion Rite, which is part of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, starts with the prayer that Jesus taught us the Our Father, during the Sermon on the Mount. It is the prayer where we acknowledge that we are a people who believe in God: "Our Father, who art in heaven." We are a people who trust in God: "Give us this day our daily bread." We are a people who believe in asking for and granting forgiveness: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Finally, it is the prayer where we acknowledge once again that we are not perfect, and we ask for God's help: "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

After the Our Father, we offer each other the Sign of Peace. Then something very interesting happens, something we may not always notice in the church—the priest breaks the bread. This act, called the Fractioning, mirrors what Jesus did at the Last Supper: "He broke the bread and gave it to his disciples."

During this time, we pray the Lamb of God. The phrase "Lamb of God" comes directly from the New Testament. In John Chapter 1, John the Baptist sees Jesus' walking and says, "Look, there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." In this prayer, beautifully sung, we say, "Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us," twice, and then "Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace." Once again we hear the themes of mercy and peace.

Now, we are called to Holy Communion. This is the prayer that might, in my view, be considered the most important. If I were to argue with Father Donovan, which I wouldn't, I might say this could be the most significant prayer.

The priest takes the now broken bread and with the chalice invites us to *Behold the Lamb of God*. The word "behold" means to see or observe something remarkable or impressive. In the case of the body and blood of Jesus, we are beholding the most remarkable and impressive person in the universe and the history of the world. So, we are to behold, to look as the priest prays: *"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those who are called to the supper of the Lamb."*

This begs the question- Who is called to the Supper of the Lamb?

Each one of us here today, at this very moment, in the Daily TV Mass community. Each of us has been invited to the Supper of the Lamb. Now, here comes our prayer, and within it is one of the great paradoxes of the Christian faith. I don't know if you've ever thought about it this way, but we respond along with the priest, saying, *"Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed."* The paradox is that there is nothing we can do to make us worthy of this gift of the Eucharist but there is also nothing we can do to make ourselves unworthy. How is that possible? Whenever we acknowledge our sins, we can always ask Jesus to say the word, and he will say the word and our soul will be healed.

After this, we reach the part of the Mass that I consider to be our most important **personal prayer**. The Mass is primarily a time of community prayer, but there is this one moment of personal reflection. This moment comes when you approach to receive Communion. When the Eucharistic minister says, "The body of Christ," your response—**the most important personal prayer—is the same as the most important community prayer: "Amen."** So be it. At the Daily TV Mass, since many of us are not physically present, we recite the Prayer of Spiritual Communion. Pope Francis said that this prayer acknowledges that God is with us.

Finally, we come to the Dismissal. The Dismissal is often forgotten, with some people wondering if they need to stay for it. It is crucial because, in the Dismissal, we are told the second important theme of the Mass. After we have been nourished at the altar, we are told, "Go in peace." Where do we go? We go out into the world to glorify the Lord by our lives. We are called to be living proof in a secular world of the power of God's story when it is fully lived.