

## SEPTEMBER 24 DEACON MIKE WALSH

Today, I have reached the fourth part of this series based on a question posed by Father Donovan one morning, just as we were about to begin the Daily TV Mass. After celebrating Mass with his parish congregation, he remarked, "You know, the people missed the most important prayer of the congregation." He then asked me what that prayer was. As I reflected on it, I was inspired to explore the Mass as part of a sacred, four-part story—one that we don't just attend but actively participate in.

The first part of this sacred story is the introductory rites, which emphasize the importance of being present from the beginning of Mass. During this time, we are greeted and reminded that we are imperfect beings. We confess our sins, acknowledging them through the words, "through my fault, through my most grievous fault," and we ask for mercy—"Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy."

The second part is the liturgy of the word, where we listen to Scripture, our stories within the larger story of faith. In some Masses, we respond with our profession of faith through the Creed: "This is our faith, and we are proud to profess it." We also offer the prayers of the faithful.

Part three, which we discussed last week, is the most central and significant part of the Mass: the liturgy of the Eucharist, the source and summit of Christian life. This is where Father Donovan's "most important prayer" occurs—when the priest elevates the paten and the chalice, declaring, "Through him, with him, and in him." At the conclusion of this Eucharistic prayer, we respond with the "Great Amen," which signifies the end of the prayer, but not the entire liturgy of the Eucharist.

This brings us to part four: the dismissal, often overlooked but vital. As Father mentioned at the beginning of today's Mass, the Gospel speaks to

this theme, reminding us that communion with Jesus involves action. Jesus tells us, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." As disciples, we are called to listen, be nourished by the word and the Eucharist, and then go forth to live what we have received.

The communion rite begins with the Lord's Prayer, the greatest prayer given to us by Jesus. In this prayer, we acknowledge our faith in God ("Our Father, who art in heaven"), our trust in God's provision ("Give us this day our daily bread"), and our need for forgiveness ("Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"). We then ask for deliverance from evil before offering one another a sign of peace.

As the priest breaks the bread, we witness the "fractioning," mirroring what Jesus did at the Last Supper. During this moment, we recite the Lamb of God, a prayer rooted in John the Baptist's words in the Gospel: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." We ask for mercy and peace, which are the central themes of the Mass.

Now, we come to Holy Communion. If I were to debate with Father Donovan, I might argue that this is the most important prayer of the congregation, as it is certainly one of the most meaningful. The priest holds up the host and chalice, instructing us to "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." We are all invited to the "supper of the Lamb."

We then respond with a profound prayer: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed." This prayer highlights a paradox of the Christian faith—we can never truly be worthy of this gift, yet nothing can make us unworthy either, for we can always turn to Christ for healing.

In the personal moment of receiving Communion, we say "Amen," affirming our belief in the Body of Christ. At the Daily TV Mass, we participate through the prayer of spiritual communion. As Pope Francis reminds us, "United to Christ, we are never alone." Even when we cannot physically receive the Eucharist, we can still form part of one body through spiritual communion.

Finally, we arrive at the concluding rite. After the priest blesses us, we are dismissed with various options: "Go forth, the Mass has ended," "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord," or simply, "Go in peace." My preferred dismissal sums up the purpose of the Mass: "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life." And our final response, the last words we say at every Mass, is: "Thanks be to God." God bless.