Parts of the Mass for the People

The celebration of Mass is an action of Christ and the Church. Christ is made manifest in the Church for the celebration of the Eucharist when the priest and people are assembled as head and members of his body. This representation of Christ’s body is possible through the sacraments. The Sacrament of Holy Orders gives a unique grace, a special character, to the priest to act in the person of Christ as head of the body. The Sacrament of Baptism gives a unique grace, a special character, to the people to act in the person of Christ as particular members of his body. Thus, all throughout the celebration of Mass, in the dialogues that occur between the priest and the people, this sacramental reality and relationship is expressed and deepened. The revised English translation of these dialogues from the original Latin provide for a more authentic presentation of this most important theological and liturgical truth, especially through the responses of the people.

The most frequent dialogue that occurs in the course of the celebration of the Mass is the priest celebrant’s, “The Lord be with you,” with the people’s response, “And with your spirit.” This dialogue takes place at the very beginning of the Mass, before the Holy Gospel, before the Eucharistic Prayer, and before the end of the Mass. Each time the dialogue is sung or said, at each of these parts of the Mass, there is a renewed indication that it is the whole Christ, as head and members in the Church, who celebrates the sacred mysteries. While the priest’s part of the dialogue remains unchanged, the people’s response is more faithful to the original Latin. What must be noticed outright is the word “spirit” has the “s” in the lower case. This is not a reference to the Holy Spirit but to the unique grace, the special character, in the priest who acts in the person of Christ the head who receives the response from the people who act in the person of Christ as well as members of his body, as together they are the whole Christ in the Church for the great act of worship in the Eucharist.

During the Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts another dialogue takes place that is both important for the priest and the people in understanding the one priesthood of Jesus, the great High Priest, and how he shares his priesthood with the ministerial priest, the priest celebrant of the Mass, and the baptized. After the altar is prepared, the gifts of bread and wine brought forward, the accompanying prayers said as the paten and chalice are placed upon the altar, the priest addresses the people:

Pray, brethren (brothers and sisters), The people then stand and respond:
that my sacrifice and yours
may be acceptable to God,
the almighty Father.

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.

Our present English translation says, “that our sacrifice may be acceptable.” The revised English translation from the original Latin more accurately says, “that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable.” Jesus is the great High Priest. The Mass is the sacrifice of Jesus, the High Priest, on the cross that continues forever and occurs in every celebration of the Eucharist. In Holy Orders, the priest celebrant is given a share in the ministerial priesthood of Jesus so that at the altar the priest acts in his person to bring about the same sacrifice of the cross in the bread and wine that becomes the Body and Blood of Christ. This is the “my sacrifice.” However, the “my sacrifice” of the ministerial priest does not stand alone. Rather, joined to it, as the bringing forward of the gifts of bread and wine symbolize, are the priestly offerings of the people. In Baptism, all the members of Christ’s body, are given a share in the priesthood of Christ, although different from that of the ministerial priest, but no less real. With this baptismal priesthood, the people offer their lives, and all that makes up their lives, during the celebration of the Mass. This is the “yours.” The revised English translation makes more evident how the one priesthood of Jesus, with its two sacramental expressions in the priest celebrant and the baptized, participates in the sacrifice of the Mass. Thus, the response of the people becomes even more clear in the phrase, “May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands.” The sacrifice at the hands of the priest celebrant is the Eucharistic offering of the Body and Blood of Christ with all the offerings of the people united to it, all for the glory of God and our holiness.

There are several instances of dialogues between the priest and the people during the Eucharistic Prayer. The introductory dialogue to the preface is slightly revised. However, the dialogue that calls for some more explanation is the Mystery of Faith which the priest sings or says after the words of consecration. The people respond in one of three possible ways. The mystery of faith is the divine event unfolding upon the altar through the power of the Holy Spirit and the words of the priest, the real event of the death and resurrection of the Lord. No single set of words will ever adequately express so great a mystery. You will notice that all three of the possible ways for the people to respond are in the present tense and acclaim the event of the Lord actually occurring in the Eucharistic Prayer. They are three of four that we presently use but with a revised translation.

We proclaim your Death, O Lord,
and profess your Resurrection
until you come again.

Or. We when eat this Bread and drink this Cup,
we proclaim your Death, O Lord,
until you come again.

Or.

Save us, Savior of the world,
for by your Cross and Resurrection
you have set us free.
The frequently used “Christ has died” will not be included among the choices in the new English edition of the Roman Missal for two reasons. The first: this response does not exist in the Latin edition that has been translated into English. The second: the text is not directed to the divine event that is recalled and made present with the Eucharistic Prayer.

The final dialogue to consider is the invitation the priest gives to Holy Communion and the response of the people. The priest, holding the Body and Blood before the people, says:

Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb. And together with the people he adds once: Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

The more faithful translation of the revised texts from the Latin brings forth the heavenly reality of this invitation. The Lamb of God, the slain and risen Lord, from his place at the right hand of the Father, invites us to the eternal banquet in heaven, of which the Mass is a foretaste and which awaits all of us because of Christ’s victory over death. Also, the gospel words of the centurian in the people’s response remind us that even our unworthiness does not impede the Lord from coming to us in the great healing gift of his holy Body and Blood.

**Reflection Questions:**
1. In what ways can I become more aware of my participation in Mass as a baptized Christian?
2. How can I better prepare to unite my offering to the offering of Christ in the Sacrifice of the Mass?
3. What can I do to unite my own thoughts with the heavenly Lamb of God when I am invited to receive Holy Communion at Mass?

**Prayer:**

God our Father, 
may we look forward with hope to 
our resurrection, 
for you have made us your sons and 
daughters, 
and restored the joy of our youth. 

We ask this through our Lord 
Jesus Christ, your Son, 
who lives and reigns with you and 
the Holy Spirit 
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.