

# CATHOLIC CHURCH OF EASTERN MONTANA DIOCESE OF GREAT FALLS-BILLINGS

## How we Catholics Worship: What we do and why we do it. Presentation and Preparation of the Gifts #13

Anyone who has ever cooked a family meal knows that the preparation often takes longer than the time taken to eat it together. Eat and run is often our practice. Nonetheless, the preparation of a meal, by its very nature, demands a love of the task and praise to God who freely shares with us the fruits of the earth's harvest.

So it is also with the meal we name Christ's Eucharist: we obviously have some elements, bread and wine, that will eventually be eaten and drunk together as a family. It is appropriate therefore that these offerings of the people be brought to the table and set apart for this assembly's common meal by two prayers of praise which much resemble the ancient Jewish table prayer said by the father of the family. One blesses or praises God for the gift of bread. The second praises God for the wine "The work of human hands." After each blessing, the assembly responds with the words "Blessed be God forever."

In the early days of our Church, the faithful were acutely aware that many of their number were poor and others were confined to prison for their faith. With that in mind, the Christian

assembly would bring large amounts of bread to the altar at the time of the preparation of the gifts. The deacons would then set apart a certain amount of this bread for Eucharist as the priest or bishop said a prayer over it. The remainder would later be taken to Christians in need or who could not join the community at Mass.

The sign value in all this was meant to say that the Eucharist is a communal action. We cannot bring our gifts to the table and, at the same time, fail to remember the rest of our brothers and sisters who are both without bread and without access to the Eucharist as well.

In our own day, of course, most churches honor this custom by designating special Sundays when food is collected and distributed by certain Christian social service agencies. Again, all this is meant to say that we can hardly afford to come to the Lord's table for Eucharistic food, go home and have our meal, all the while forgetting about our brother and sister Christians who go hungry.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) specifies only one rubric

regarding the Rite of the Preparation of the Gifts. Only the bread and wine are brought to the table, that is, the same elements that Christ took into his hands. No other items, except money or food for the poor, are to be brought forward at this time, unless in the case of a special cultural celebration.

This short preparation rite, repeated Sunday after Sunday, may seem rather inconsequential. Yet, the words themselves remind us that we are recipients of God's generous benefaction. And when we respond: "Blessed be God forever," we proclaim that these simple gifts of the earth and made by human hands, will become the body and blood of Christ. They deserve our deepest appreciation and need to be set apart with utmost care.