

# *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* An Update

## **The General Principals of the** *General Instruction to the Roman Missal* (third typical edition)

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (third typical edition) contains the norms for our Eucharistic celebrations. As with all our endeavors, concepts change and are updated over time. Through the GIRM, the Church strives to revise and help its members to “grow continually in holiness by its conscious, active, and fruitful participation in the mystery of the Eucharist.” Since the second edition of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* in 1975, the Church has experienced a diversity of ways in which the GIRM has been interpreted and expressed.

Our culture seems to promote a rugged individuality. Even though humans enjoy their independence at times, they also know that without others, they would not be who they are capable of becoming. The Church calls us to **community** in order to give glory, praise, and thanksgiving to God. Our presence is important not just for our own salvation, but the salvation of everyone.

**Unity** is important in our celebrations. St. Paul reminded his community that, “there is neither Jew or Greek, slave or free man.” Oneness has always been a trademark of the Church. But unity and oneness do not equal uniformity that demands conformity to some ridged standards, rules, or patterns. The Bishop of the diocese, in union with all

the bishops, has the ultimate say in the established standards for worship set within the diocese. This may answer some questions of why some dioceses you visit have minor differences in the way they worship.

We express our unity by consciously and actively participating through our outward behavior and gestures. When we stand in respect, kneel in adoration, raise our hands in praise, and join our voices in song, we engage ourselves in every aspect of our being in our worship of God. Our non-verbal expressions throughout the Liturgy express what cannot be articulated in words, and at times, these non-verbal expressions enhance the words we use. A **common posture** observed by all participants is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community. It expresses the spiritual attitude of all who are present.

While the Church emphasizes unity through the expressions of community, silence is essential in our celebration. **Silence** allows the voice of the Holy Spirit to be heard in our hearts. Through this silence, our response to the divine moment becomes less of a habit and more of a healthy response to the God who loves us.

Excerpts taken from the *General Instruction to the Roman Missal* (third typical edition) and the *Directives for the Implementation of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal in the Diocese of Columbus*

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## **GIRM: Preparation for The Celebration**

You have been invited to a festive gathering. Important dignitaries will be there along with your family and friends. You know that it is extremely important for you to be there because you will be a part of the program. When preparing for the occasion, you clear your schedule so that nothing else will conflict with this occasion. You plan on what you are going to wear for the occasion. Since you are not the focus of the event, you dress in a way that does not draw attention to yourself. Your family and friends probably will not recognize you since they always see you in shorts or jeans, t-shirts or tank tops, flip-flops or exercise shoes.

You plan to arrive early so that you will not show disrespect for the gathering. You make sure that your electronic devices such as your cell phone and pager are turned off or at least placed in the vibrating mode. You've decided to bring your young ones, but you have made sure they are well prepared to entertain themselves, if their attention span is short. Before the festive program begins, you make sure that your children go to the restroom so that others will not be distracted with a trip to the facility. And even when one plans so carefully for any unforeseen event, you still take a seat close to the exit and restroom so that you can leave quietly without interrupting the program. While waiting for the festivities to begin, you quietly reflect upon your role in the program so that when the program begins, you will be able to give your full attention to this wonderful celebration.

The preceding description of preparing for a festive gathering would not shock us if we were invited to a celebration involving a famous celebrity that we admired and respected. So why wouldn't the same description apply to our preparation for Mass? Good liturgy requires preparation by all who are involved. From the presider preparing to energize us in leading the assembly and creating a well-constructed homily to the liturgical ministers who have rehearsed and prayed that their roles would bring others closer to God, all of us as participants need to prepare our minds and hearts to celebrate a festive meal with the *King of Kings* and the *Lord of Lords*.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* emphasizes the importance in preparation for the sacred liturgy. The focal points within our worship space should always be the assembly, altar, ambo, and presider's chair. Art and environment of our sacred space should enhance and not distract from our focal points. Every parish follows the guidelines set out by the GIRM. Not only is the sacred space carefully prepared, but the whole liturgy is well versed. An essential part of every liturgy is the assembly. The people of God as the Body of Christ are prepared to participate actively in celebrating the Lord's feast.

So from our appearance to our punctuality, we need to prepare each time we celebrate Mass so that we will lend to the celebration and not distract from it.

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## **GIRM: Introductory Rites to the Celebration of Mass**

The beginning of an event is so important since it sets the stage, so to speak, for a wonderful experience. So too, the beginning of Mass sets the environment for us to have a wonderful communal experience of prayer and celebration with God and the Church.

We separate ourselves from our daily activities and seek to be united with those who have joined with us to be in the presence of God when we come to Mass. Since we have prepared for our celebration, a few minutes of silence within our worship space gives us time to reflect on God's continual presence in our lives.

We have made a journey, an informal procession so to speak, from our homes to our celebration. This journey into the porthole of the church reminds us of our continual journey to heaven through the waters of baptism. We remind ourselves of the life-saving waters when we cross ourselves with baptismal "holy" water. Whenever we enter or leave the church, we should genuflect on the right knee to the tabernacle holding the Eucharistic presence of our Lord. If the tabernacle is in a special chapel, we should stop there either before or after Mass to provide a special sign of reverence and acknowledgement.

Our processions from various places are symbolically collected and completed by the procession of ministers. The presider should be the last to enter the assembly. All ministers, except those holding an object, reverence the altar with a deep bow. The presider and deacon venerate the altar with a kiss, and if the occasion suggests, the

presider may incense the cross and the altar. All of us sing hymns of praise as we participate in the opening procession.

The ministers carry liturgical objects such as the processional cross, processional candles, and may carry the thurible (incense pot) if the occasion suggests. The *Lectionary*, the liturgical book of biblical readings, is placed on the ambo before Mass begins and is prepared for the first reader.

The *Book of the Gospels* is venerated above all the books containing scripture by the Church and is carried in procession by the deacon. It may be carried by a lector if no deacon is present, or it may be placed on the altar before Mass begins.

The presider greets us officially and in a unified way so as to join us with all other Catholics throughout the world who are celebrating liturgy. We are asked to reflect in silence on the times we have sinned and failed to live up to our baptismal call before confessing our sinfulness and praise God for his mercy.

The ancient and venerable hymn known as the "Gloria" is sung or said on Sundays outside the seasons of Advent and Lent, and on solemnities and feasts, and at special celebrations of a more solemn character. This hymn gathers the Church together in the Holy Spirit, glorifies and entreats God the Father and the Lamb.

Our introductory rite concludes with the *Opening Prayer*, when the presider says the one prayer that brings all of our individual prayers into one.

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### **GIRM: The Liturgy of the Word in the Celebration of Mass**

The Liturgy of the Word is the moment within our celebration when we share our stories, the stories of salvation. Our Sunday celebrations incorporate different readings from holy Scripture. The first reading generally comes from the Old Testament, the second reading from the New Testament letters, and the third reading comes from the gospels. The readings are also chosen by the Church to emphasize particular seasonal themes as well. The readings are organized in a three-year cycle so that over a three-year time, we have the opportunity to reflect on the richness of God's Word.

Since our stories of salvation are important and special to us, we focus in on the revealed word. Lectors have prepared to proclaim the Word in order for it to come alive. As listeners, we don't want to be distracted by unnecessary moment, noise or following along in a missalette. This is why you might be asked to wait in the doorway by the ushers until the reading is finished before taking your place.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* calls for a lector for each of the readings. Since the readings are usually of two different styles of writing, they need to be proclaimed with different intonations. While a single lector is capable of mastering the readings, the sharing of the readings between two lectors allows for better proclamation since the lectors can prepare and focus their skills on their particular reading.

The responsorial psalm is taken from one of the psalms found in the Old Testament. The psalms should be sung since they are songs. A psalmist (one who leads the assembly in the Responsorial Psalm) goes to the ambo and leads the assembly.

Silence is important after each of the two readings. These periods of silence allow time for the assembly to savor the inspired words they have heard and to ponder their meaning in their hearts. This silence should not be disturbed

with movement from either the ministers or the assembly.

The high point of the Liturgy of the Word is the proclamation of the gospel. The gospel proclamation is marked with special actions, signs, and symbols. *The Book of the Gospels* is a sign of the presence of Christ and is proclaimed with great honor in the Church's liturgy. The deacon, or in his absence a priest carries the gospel book to the ambo in solemn procession from the altar where the book is enthroned. The Gospel procession marks the coming of Christ and may be accompanied by incense and candles. The actions of the deacon preparing himself with a blessing and the assembly standing and listening acknowledges and confesses Christ is present and is speaking to them.

Although the gospel is the summit of the Liturgy of the Word, the homily is no less important. The homily is different from a sermon. A sermon is a religious lecture, but a homily is intended to break open the Word and make the connection between the life of Christ and our journey in his salvation.

Silence after the homily allows the assembly to reflect on the words of wisdom and how the scripture may be applied to their lives and to see better God's action in their daily activities.

Within the "Profession of Faith" we state our belief in the incarnation of our Lord. This statement is our belief that God through his Son became one of us. We are asked to bow in gesture when we say, "by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man."

The deacon normally leads the petitions of the General Intercessions. The Intercessions always incorporate the needs of the Church, of the nations in the world, of the sick and the poor, of the local community, and intentions for the dead.

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### **GIRM: The Liturgy of the Eucharist in the Celebration of Mass**

Now that the Word of God has been opened for us to feast upon, we are ready to prepare the gifts for the “Eucharistic Prayer” and “Holy Communion”. The gifts of bread and wine are brought forward as a symbol of ourselves. The collection of financial offerings is a visible sign of our weekly concern for the community, especially the poor and the needy. The presider or deacon accepts the gifts from those representing the community. The altar is prepared with the gifts. It is a norm and not an exception that the Precious Blood is distributed to the community. A few drops of water are placed into the carafe of wine before the wine is poured into the chalice and communion cups during the preparation. After the wine has been consecrated, the Precious Blood is not poured from one vessel to another.

The communion cups may be filled before Mass begins and placed on the credence table. As the altar is prepared, the filled cups are placed on the altar around the chalice. The chalice is prepared in the normal fashion.

A slight revision for the assembly according to the GIRM is for all to share in the common posture of standing before the invitation to prayer when the presider says, “Pray my brothers and sisters, that our sacrifice may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.” Most of us are already accustomed to standing before the invitation when incense is used since the assembly stands to receive the incensation of the deacon.

We along with our gifts are now prepared to be vessels of God’s transforming love that makes the paschal mystery a reality.

The Eucharistic Prayer begins with a “preface” to our thanksgiving. We respond with the sung acclamation commonly known as the “Holy, Holy, Holy” acclamation. Our common posture is kneeling during the Eucharistic prayer. Those parishes and schools which do not have kneelers are to contact the bishop to request a temporary continuance for the practice of standing. Those who do not kneel are to make a profound bow, as do the ministers at the altar when the presider genuflects after the consecration.

The posture of the deacons and other ministers within the sanctuary should be the same as that of the presider, thus creating a unity in their posture and service in the sanctuary. Altar servers who are positioned in the assembly are to follow the common posture of the assembly either kneeling or standing.

Thus the great prayer of thanksgiving, the Eucharistic Prayer, helps all of us to enter into the paschal mystery of our Lord.

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## **GIRM: The Communion Rite in the Liturgy of the Eucharist**

The Communion Rite begins with the Prayer that Jesus taught us. Our unity is expressed through common posture and gesture. Our common posture is standing and the gesture that expresses our unity is the *orans* position. The presider, with outstretched hands facing upward, models this position for us.

The title for those lay people who help the presider and deacon share Holy Communion has been changed from “Eucharistic Ministers” to *Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion*. The “ordinary” ministers of sharing the Body and Blood of Christ are bishops, priests, and deacons. The *Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion* approach the sanctuary during the “Lamb of God”. They should not extend the sign of peace to one another, but simply move to a place within the sanctuary unique to them. There should be no movement within the sanctuary and the assembly following the “Lamb of God” in order to prepare for the sacred moment of unity between ourselves and God. After the presider and deacon receive communion, then communion is offered to the *Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion* and altar servers. These extraordinary ministers are handed their vessels to show their extraordinary role as *helpers* in the distribution of Communion.

The communion hymn helps the assembly to praise and thank God for his love and should be sung by the assembly. The music begins after the presider has received Holy Communion. The assembly is encouraged to sing while waiting for their time to process, during the procession, and after receiving Holy Communion as a common gesture that unifies the assembly in their thanksgiving to God.

Another sign of unity is our common posture of movement and standing when receiving communion. Our procession reminds us of our life-long procession to the heavenly banquet. The gesture of bowing the head before receiving the Eucharist is a sign of reverence for the true presence of Christ in the Precious Body and the Precious Blood.

Since our celebration of the Mass encourages all to be conscious, active and fully participating, the assembly should receive both the Precious Body and Blood at each Mass. The Eucharist consecrated during the Mass should be shared at that Mass. Only when it becomes apparent that not enough host have been consecrated should the reserved sacrament in the tabernacle be used and brought forward after the distribution to the assembly begins. Sharing the Precious Body and Blood of our Lord in the action of Holy Communion makes real the very nature of our calling as Christians, to become Christ for others.

Another practice that has become a part of some parishes is the blessing of non-communicants. This action is confusing and runs the risk of diminishing the unique importance of the common unity.

After the action of Holy Communion, the ordinary and extraordinary ministers of communion consume the excess Precious Blood. Some of the extra Consecrated Hosts may be taken to the tabernacle in order to be reserved for the sick and for adoration. The communion vessels are placed on the credence table, covered, and cleansed after Mass. After a period of silence to reflect and give thanks for Christ’s presence within us, we stand to end the communion rite with a communal prayer led by the presider.

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## **GIRM: The Concluding Rite of the Mass**

As with all actions they come to an end. We must soon depart from each other's company in order to "go forth to love and serve the Lord." We carry within us the Sacramental presence of Christ who helps us to continue the work that was begun in us at our baptisms.

The concluding rite consists of gestures with the emphasis on community. Announcements are made before the blessing and dismissal to inform the community of the need for their time, talent, and camaraderie. The blessing can either be simple or solemn based on the occasion. "The sending of the faithful" is to put into effect in our daily lives the Paschal Mystery and unity in Christ we have just celebrated. Recessional music, which has always been a part of the tradition of the Church, reminds us of our joy in the Risen Christ.

The recessional procession mirrors the opening procession. The presider leads us forth to our service in the Lord. The Book of the Gospels is not carried out at the end of Mass since the words of everlasting life have been poured out into the assembly. We are now the containers of God's Word sown within our hearts. We are sent forth to share the Word and be witnesses of Christ to the world around us.

In many parishes the habit of leaving the assembly before the concluding rite has been a reality. When a member of the

assembly leaves before Mass has ended, it becomes a distraction and also gives the indication that the community of faith in which the person has just prayed is not important to them. This habit may have developed from the understanding that the Mass is a private encounter with God and that receiving the Precious Body and Blood is more important than the relational focus of being united with each other as an Eucharistic community. This type of thinking has become easier today since our fast pace society supports it. Even though many reasons are given, this thinking lends itself to the fast food restaurant atmosphere where let's hurry up with the prayers so we can get our food and run. It is sad that some have made the heavenly banquet into an "eat and run" experience.

Overall, the purpose of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* is to encourage unity throughout the whole Church. The reading and application of the document should not be so literal that they become ridged rules and one-dimensional interpretations. The goal of our liturgies is not a strict adherence to a uniformity of rubrics, but to be open to God with a well trained heart.

The rites and prayers that the Church gives us has as its primary means to bring all into a full, conscious, and active participation in the Paschal Mystery through which Christ redeems his beloved and joins us to himself in glory.