

**Homily for July 10, 2005
15th Sunday of the Year
in the Year of the Eucharist**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Isaiah 55:10-11
Romans 8:18-23
Matthew 13:1-23**

The gifts we prepare at Mass are expressions of our own preparation, our own living, all week long.

In this Year devoted to a heightened awareness of the Eucharist requested by the Pope, we continue our reflections...this week focusing on the Preparation of the Gifts.

What do you call the part of the Mass that includes the collection? Many people still use its old name and talk about the offertory of the Mass. The current liturgical books, on the other hand, call this part of the Mass the Preparation of the Gifts. This change in terminology was a deliberate one, as was noted by the Pope's representative when the new missal was released in 1969.

The reason for changing the name of this section of the liturgy is that the real offertory of the Mass occurs in the Eucharistic Prayer. The sacrifice we offer is the sacrifice of Christ. No other sacrifice is acceptable, and no other sacrifice is needed...as the Letter to the Hebrews insists. It is Christ who offers himself, and we join in that offering as we proclaim the Eucharistic Prayer.

So, then, what are we doing during the Preparation of the Gifts? The key word is preparation. In this part of the Mass, we are preparing for what is

to come. This is symbolized by our preparation of the gifts of bread and wine that will become Christ's body and blood. In these few moments between the Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharistic Prayer, we make the preparations for the Eucharistic Meal and the great prayer of thanksgiving over the meal.

The key action during the Preparation of the Gifts is the procession to bring the gifts to the altar. This procession, though brief and generally simple, is more than merely a practical matter of getting the bread and wine to the altar. As I tell our altar servers, "Efficiency is the enemy of liturgy." Just getting the gifts up here is only half the fun – the movement through the assembly of these gifts carried by people from the assembly is itself a prayer, a gesture to which we can all be connected through our contribution. So it is that the procession is slow and deliberate, prayerful – allowing the folks in it and all of us to be aware of what is happening. It is an expression of our own preparation for entering into Christ's sacrifice.

On Holy Thursday, the rubrics suggest that the whole assembly process to the altar with gifts for the poor. Even when only a few members of the assembly form the procession, they represent all of us. Their movement to the altar suggests the movement of our hearts toward the Lord and our willingness to share in

the sacrifice offered on that altar. Notice that in the procession of the gifts, we bring not only bread and wine but also our financial contributions for our parish and for the poor and for other needs of service. All these things are expressions of who we are and of what we hold dear.

Senior citizens among us may remember being taught to place themselves on the paten with the host when it was offered to God during the offertory. The only problem with that approach is that the bread and wine are not being offered to God. Only after they become the body and blood of Christ is the sacrifice offered, and it is the Lord Jesus who does the offering, the Lord Jesus who offers his gift to the Father, a gift that includes all of us.

Yet the image still has value. As the bread and the wine are prepared and placed on the altar, we can mentally place ourselves there, too, prepared to give of ourselves as Christ did, ready to share in his sacrificial offering.

This time to prepare ourselves during Mass can bring to completion our efforts to prepare ourselves all week. We are continually called to give of ourselves as Christ did, in loving service to our neighbors.

The gifts we prepare at Mass are expressions of our own preparation, our own living, all week long.