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Video Guide

Preparing for Worship: Four Movements of the Mass

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Preparing for Worship: Four Movements of the Mass

Insights from the Video Presentation

You Belong in the Story

Think about the absolute best moments in your life. Maybe it's scoring the winning goal, celebrating a birthday with all your favorite people, or just having someone give you a giant hug right when you need it most.

What do we naturally want to do at moments like that? We want to gather together, share the joy, and say a huge 'thank you' to God!

Well, as Catholics, we have a beautiful, ancient way of doing exactly that. We call it celebrating liturgy.

Now, don't let that big word scare you! Liturgy isn't a theater performance where you just sit back, eat popcorn, and watch someone else act and talk. No way! Liturgy literally means "the work of the people." That means it belongs to you. It needs your voice, your smile, and your heart.

The liturgy we are talking about today is the Celebration of the Eucharist, or the Mass.

Whether you are a first grader, a middle schooler, a teacher, or a parent – the second you walk through your church's doors, you become part of the Assembly. And the Assembly is just a beautiful word for God's family, gathered together in one place. We're going to discover how we:

1. Gather as God's family
2. Listen to God's voice
3. Receive God's greatest gift
4. And go out to change the world!

Part 1: Introductory Rites – Gathering the Family

Think about how busy your life is. School, sports, games, activities...

Pope Leo XIV once said that Mass is like a pause button for our hearts. The moment you enter the church, something different begins. Mass is meant to interrupt all the rushing. It gives our busy minds a chance to slow down and to encounter Jesus together as one big family.

As we come in, we dip our fingers in holy water and make the Sign of the Cross to remember our Baptism – reminding us that we are God's chosen children.

We genuflect toward the tabernacle or bow deeply to the altar to show respect to Jesus present in the Eucharist. We might greet and say hello to those around us. Then, when we find a seat and all is ready, we are invited to stand and begin to sing. Why sing? Because many voices become one family.

You'll see that the church uses beautiful physical items to help us pray with our whole selves and our senses.

- The flickering candles, vibrant liturgical colors, stained glass, and holy gestures.
- Candle wax melting, the smell of worship aids, and soft-rising incense that shows our prayers floating straight up to heaven.
- Spoken responses, prayers and music.

We've gathered as one family...now we get ready to listen.

Part 2. Liturgy of the Word – Listening with Heart and Body

God is always speaking to us, but listening takes practice.

Take a look right here. This beautiful podium or reading desk is called an Ambo. The Church describes it as the "Table of the Word of God." Just like when your family gathers in the living room to talk and catch up, we remember what happened when Jesus went to the synagogue to pray, teach and learn. Now, God's family gathers around the ambo to hear his voice.

Resting on it is the **Lectionary**. Think of it as a book filled with bible stories, promises and God's message for you today. When we sit down to listen to the Bible readings, we aren't just listening to stories from an old book. In fact, Pope Leo pointed out that the whole setup of the Mass is designed to teach us a special way to listen.

We aren't just listening with our ears like we do when watching a movie; we are listening with our hearts. God is sharing words meant exactly for you today, giving you the advice you need to change how you live and love your family this week.

Because God is talking to us, our body language and how we pay attention matters! During Mass, posture is prayer.

- Sitting and sitting up straight shows we are paying close attention with our minds.
- Standing tall demonstrates deep honor and respect.
- Responding boldly with responses like, "Thanks be to God!" lets our physical presence declare: "Speak, Lord, I'm listening."

As we prepare for Mass, explore praying in different positions – arms lifted, hands folded, head lifted, head bowed, eyes open, eyes shut, kneeling and standing. How does your prayer change when your body posture changes?

Often you will hear three readings from the Bible and a Psalm response that we sing together. The First Reading usually comes from the Old Testament, showing us how God looked after His people long ago. Then, we sing a Psalm to give God our answer! After that, the Second Reading comes from the New Testament, teaching us how to live like Jesus every single day.

Then the energy in the room shifts: We stand to sing the Alleluia, welcoming Jesus Himself. (During Lent, we use another sung acclamation to welcome the gospel.) The priest or deacon holds up the highly decorated Book of the Gospels and processes from the altar to the ambo. This book is incredibly special because it contains the actions, miracles, and words of Jesus.

Before we listen to the gospel reading, we trace three tiny crosses on ourselves - on my mind, our lips and our heart. As we trace the cross, we pray this silent prayer: "May God's Word be in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart."

After the Gospel, we sit and listen to the Homily, where the priest or deacon helps connect these bible stories to our modern struggles, questions, and joys at school and home. Even when we don't understand all the words and ideas that are spoken, the practice of listening – with ears, body, and heart – prepares us to hear God speaking in our lives.

Afterward, we pause in silence. Silence isn't empty space – it's where God speaks to your heart. During silence, pay attention to your own breath. Follow the air as it moves in and out of your body. Can you hear it? Can you feel it? What else can you hear and feel in the silence?

Finally, we stand to declare our faith together in the Creed and lift our voices for the Universal Prayer. Prayer is important work. It is work that belongs to all of us. Where there are needs, we pray for God's mercy. We pray using our own words, and we pray using shared words.

Having listened to God's word, we move our attention towards the Table.

3. Liturgy of the Eucharist – The Sacred Feast

What happens next is something like what happened when Jesus shared his Last Supper with his friends.

First we have to prepare the table! Just like setting the table at home before a grand dinner, the priest or deacon prepares the Altar with objects that carry big meaning:

- The Corporal: A square white cloth is laid down first. Think of it as a holy placemat.
- The Chalice: The cup that holds the wine.
- The Paten: the plate that holds the altar bread.
- The Purificator: The white napkin - often rectangular - used to wipe and keep the chalice clean.
- The Roman Missal: a large, heavy book that contains all the special prayers and instructions the priest needs to lead us through the celebration.

Every detail is meaningful.

Members of the parish walk down the center aisle, carrying the bread, wine, and collection baskets forward to the priest. During the Presentation of the Gifts, bread and wine are brought forward. This moment is deeply symbolic. Those simple gifts represent you. They represent your week, efforts, joys and struggles. They are humble, everyday things. But when we give them to God completely, God transforms them into something extraordinary.

Once the table is set, we pray the Eucharistic Prayer. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and the words of Christ, a miracle happens on the altar. The bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Pope Leo reminded us that the bread and wine have a 'transforming power.' God takes simple, physical, everyday food from our lives and changes them completely so they can change us from the inside out. So, when the priest lifts them up the bread and wine, look up! Fix your eyes on the consecrated bread and wine, and say a silent prayer in your heart, like: "My Lord and my God."

Then, we finish the long prayer by singing out our loudest, grandest amen called the Great Amen! – telling the whole world, “Yes! I believe this with my entire heart!”

Next, we stand as one family to pray the Our Father, share Christ's peace, and begin the Communion Procession. Walking down the aisle during communion isn't like waiting in a school lunch line or a grocery line; it is a sacred, prayerful walk side-by-side. As we share the bread and wine, Jesus is becoming part of us, and we are becoming part of Jesus and part of each other.

When Communion concludes, everyone is invited to sit in silence or sing a communal song of praise. During that time, consecrated hosts that remain are collected into a ciborium, a vessel that looks like a chalice, but it has a lid. This is then put into the Tabernacle: a holy, beautiful chest or cupboard used to store the Eucharist - also known as the Blessed Sacrament.

It is stored safely so people can bring Holy Communion to those who are sick or elderly. Because Jesus is truly present inside, we always genuflect – bending our right knee completely to the floor - whenever we walk past it, as a sign of love and respect to God.

Part 4. Concluding Rites – Sent Out on Mission

We have gathered as a family. We have listened to how God has been active in the past and continues to be present in our lives today. And we have been fed by God with the Eucharist.

The journey doesn't end here. In fact, it's just getting started! The word “Mass” comes from the Latin word *Missa*, which literally means “Sent.” When the priest gives the Final Blessing, God is equipping us with strength for the week ahead. When you hear, “Go forth, the Mass is ended,” – it means: “Now, go live what you received!” You are being sent to be the face of Jesus to everyone you meet.

Because God's power lives inside you, you have the power to bring joy to the sad, stand up for the kid who is left out, and change your community with love. Pope Leo even reminded us that the Mass bonds us together like a family. We don't keep God's love locked inside this building. We take the joy we found here and march it right out the front doors into our homes, schools, and neighborhoods!

The Sunday Challenge

So, here is the grand invitation for this coming Sunday:

1. *Enter joyfully*: Notice your breath, use the holy water, and genuflect with deep purpose. Smile and say hi to those around you.
2. *Keep your eyes wide open*: Watch for the gospel procession and later the priest as he sets the altar table and look up high during the elevation.
3. *Use your voice*: Sing the songs, say out loud your responses and your “Amen” so the entire church can hear your faith!
4. *Live the mission*: Every single day, ask yourself: “How can I show God's unstoppable love to someone else today?”

Listen. Receive. Become. Go.

Preparing for Worship: The Parts of the Mass

Part One: Gathering

- ❖ The Entrance Procession
- ❖ The Greeting: We begin in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- ❖ The Penitential Rite: We recall our sins, and pray for God's mercy and forgiveness.
- ❖ Glory to God: We sing or pray an ancient hymn in honor of God's goodness.
- ❖ The Opening Prayer

Part Two: Storytelling (Liturgy of the Word)

- ❖ The First Reading: We read from the Old Testament.
- ❖ Psalm Response: We sing or pray a psalm together.
- ❖ The Second Reading: We read from the letters of Saint Paul or another part of the New Testament.
- ❖ Alleluia: We sing or pray a verse in honor of Jesus.
- ❖ The Gospel: We read a story of Jesus' life or teachings from Matthew, Mark, Luke or John.
- ❖ The Homily: The priest or deacon helps us understand God's Word.
- ❖ The Creed: We proclaim our beliefs.
- ❖ The Prayer of the Faithful: We pray to God for the needs of God's family everywhere.

Part Three: Meal Sharing (Liturgy of the Eucharist)

- ❖ The Preparation of the Gifts: The gifts of bread and wine are brought to the altar.
- ❖ The Offering of Gifts: The priest prepares the bread and wine, and prays a blessing.
- ❖ The Preface: The priest prays a prayer of introduction to the Eucharistic Prayer. We respond by praising God, saying or singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord..."
- ❖ The Eucharistic Prayer: The priest prays a special prayer of thanksgiving to God. Using the words of Jesus, he consecrates the bread and wine, which become the Body and Blood of Jesus. We proclaim our faith in Jesus. The priest remembers all the members of God's Family, living and dead. He closes this prayer by honoring the Blessed Trinity.
- ❖ The Great Amen: We say yes to the Eucharistic Prayer.
- ❖ The Lord's Prayer
- ❖ The Sign of Peace
- ❖ The Breaking of the Bread: The priest breaks the Host and mixes part of it with the consecrated Wine. We pray "Lamb of God..."
- ❖ The Communion: We receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

Part: Sending Forth

- ❖ The Closing Prayer
- ❖ The Blessing: The priest blesses us in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- ❖ The Dismissal: We are sent forth to love and serve the Lord.

Preparing Children for the Mass: Strategies

Children are far more likely to participate meaningfully in the Mass — rather than merely sit through it — when they understand its structure, know what the words and gestures mean, and have something concrete to notice, do, or listen for. Preparation doesn't just teach children the mechanics of Mass; over time, it helps the Mass become a place where they genuinely expect to encounter Christ. (Show the video: "Four Movements of the Mass" by JohnMichael Reyes as part of the preparation process.)

1. Teach the Structure, Not Just the Words

Children participate more fully when they understand the shape of what's happening, not just the responses to recite.

- Walk through the four main parts of the Mass — Introductory Rites, Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist, Concluding Rites — using simple language and visuals.
- Use a picture sequence, felt board, or simple flip book showing each part in order so children can "see" the Mass before they experience the whole thing.
- Revisit the structure regularly, not just once, so it becomes familiar rather than a one-time lesson.

2. Practice the Physical Postures and Gestures

Movement and gesture are half of how children participate in the Mass — practicing them builds confidence and comfort.

- Practice standing, sitting, kneeling, and bowing in sequence, explaining briefly why we do each one (e.g., standing for the Gospel shows respect for Christ's own words).
- Teach the Sign of the Cross slowly, including at the Gospel (small cross on forehead, lips, heart) and at the final blessing.
- Practice the gesture of receiving Communion or a blessing, including hand position, so it feels natural rather than confusing in the moment.

3. Teach the Responses Through Repetition and Rhythm

Children learn spoken and sung responses best through repeated, playful practice.

- Practice call-and-response prayers ("The Lord be with you" / "And with your spirit") as a game, back and forth, until it becomes natural.
- Sing or chant familiar Mass parts (Holy, Holy, Holy; the Great Amen) during class so children recognize and can join in during Mass.
- Use simple hand motions or rhythm to help younger children remember longer prayers like the Our Father.

4. Explain the Meaning Behind Key Symbols and Objects

When children understand what an object or symbol represents, they engage with it rather than simply watching it happen.

- Show and explain sacred objects up close when possible — the chalice, paten, altar cloth, candles, incense — ideally through a sacristy visit or show-and-tell with a priest or deacon.
- Explain colors of the liturgical seasons (purple for Advent/Lent, white for Christmas/Easter, green for Ordinary Time) so children notice and understand what they see.
- Connect symbols to sensory experience: incense (prayers rising to God), holy water (new life, cleansing), bread and wine (nourishment and gift).

5. Walk Through the Liturgy of the Word

Helping children actively listen for God's Word turns the readings into something personal.

- Preview the upcoming Sunday's readings in class ahead of time, so children recognize the story or theme when they hear it at Mass.
- Teach children to physically engage during the Gospel — standing, tracing the small cross, and listening for one word or phrase that stands out to them.
- After Mass or in the following class, ask: "What did you hear in the readings this week?" to reinforce that listening matters.

6. Prepare Children for the Liturgy of the Eucharist

This is often the part of Mass children find hardest to follow — concrete preparation makes a real difference.

- Use simple, age-appropriate language to explain what happens at the consecration (bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ) without over-complicating the theology.
- Practice the physical experience of the Communion procession — walking in line, receiving with reverence, returning to the pew — especially before First Communion.
- For children not yet receiving Communion, teach them how to make a Spiritual Communion or simply pray quietly and reverently as others receive.

7. Give Children a Job or Role, When Age-Appropriate

Active participation increases significantly when a child has something specific to do, not just watch.

- Encourage age-appropriate roles: carrying the offertory gifts, singing in a children's choir, or serving as an altar server once trained and old enough.
- Even without an official role, give children something to "do" during Mass — follow along in a children's missal, look for specific symbols, or count how many times they hear a certain word.

8. Use a Children's Missal or Mass Journal

A hands-on tool gives children something to actively engage with during Mass, especially during longer or quieter moments.

- Provide picture-based missals for younger children to follow along with each part of the Mass.
- For older children, offer a simple Mass journal with space to write one thing they noticed, one prayer request, or a word from the homily.

9. Debrief and Reflect After Mass

Talking about Mass afterward reinforces understanding and shows children that their experience of it matters.

- Ask simple reflection questions after attending Mass: "What did you notice? What part did you like? What was confusing?"
- In the next class session, revisit the previous Sunday's readings or theme to reinforce the connection between class and Mass.
- Normalize questions and confusion — Mass has a lot of moving parts, and it's okay for children (and adults) to still be learning.

10. Model Reverence and Enthusiasm Yourself

Children absorb attitudes about the Mass as much as information about it.

- Speak about the Mass with genuine enthusiasm and reverence, not as an obligation to get through.
- Share your own experience of a moment in the Mass that's meaningful to you, modeling that engagement with the Mass is personal and ongoing, not just something children are being taught to perform.

Preparing Adolescents for the Mass: Strategies

Adolescents are capable of moving beyond simply knowing the mechanics of Mass into real theological understanding, honest questioning, and active participation — but this requires catechists and educators to engage their doubts directly rather than assume automatic buy-in. When teens are given room to question, a role to play, and language for connecting the Mass to their own lives, the liturgy has a much better chance of becoming something they choose to enter into, not just something they're required to attend.

1. Address the “Why” Directly

Many teens attend Mass out of obligation or habit without ever examining why it matters — naming that tension honestly builds trust.

- Openly acknowledge that Mass can feel repetitive, boring, or disconnected from teens' daily lives — and invite honest conversation about that rather than assuming enthusiasm.
- Explore the theological “why” behind the Mass: it's not a performance to watch, but the Church's participation in Christ's own sacrifice and a real encounter with Him in Word and Eucharist.
- Ask directly: “What would make Mass feel less like an obligation and more like something you wanted to be part of?” and take their answers seriously.

2. Deepen Understanding of the Liturgy of the Word

Teens are ready to engage Scripture at Mass analytically and personally, not just as something read aloud.

- Preview the upcoming Sunday's readings in class, discussing context, meaning, and connections to teens' own lives before they hear them proclaimed.
- Teach teens to actively listen for one line or image in the readings that stands out, and reflect on it afterward — in a journal, small group, or personal prayer.
- Discuss the homily specifically: encourage teens to listen for one idea they agree with, one they're unsure about, and bring that honestly to conversation afterward.

3. Deepen Understanding of the Eucharist

Many teens received First Communion as young children without theological depth — adolescence is the time to revisit it with more maturity.

- Explore the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist more fully than a child-level explanation — addressing common questions or doubts teens may have honestly and directly.
- Discuss the connection between the Eucharist and self-gift — Christ's body “given up” for others — and invite teens to consider what receiving Communion calls them to give in return.
- Address common teen questions directly: Why can't some people receive Communion? What does it mean to receive “worthily”? What if I'm not sure I believe all of it?

4. Reconnect Gesture and Posture to Meaning

Teens often perform the physical postures of Mass automatically — reconnecting gesture to meaning renews their significance.

- Revisit why we stand, sit, and kneel at specific points, connecting each posture to its deeper meaning (e.g., kneeling as humility before the Eucharistic mystery, standing as readiness to go and act).
- Discuss the significance of the Sign of Peace, the Sign of the Cross, and other gestures teens may perform without much thought, and invite them to bring intention back to these movements.

5. Create Space for Doubt and Difficulty

Adolescence is often when real questions about faith and the Mass surface — addressing them openly, rather than suppressing them, builds authentic engagement.

- Normalize that many teens (and adults) go through periods of boredom, doubt, or disconnection at Mass, and that this doesn't disqualify them from participating or growing.
- Invite teens to bring their real questions about the Mass — Why do we have to go every week? What if I don't feel anything? — into open, non-judgmental discussion.
- Share your own honest experience of struggling with or growing in appreciation for the Mass over time, modeling that this is a lifelong journey, not something fully “solved” at any age.

6. Offer Concrete Ways to Engage Actively

Teens participate more fully when they have something specific to notice, do, or reflect on.

- Encourage age-appropriate liturgical roles: lector, altar server, choir or music ministry, greeter/usher, or helping with younger children's liturgy of the Word.
- Give teens something to actively track during Mass — a phrase from the readings, one moment of the Eucharistic Prayer, or a specific intention to pray for during the Prayers of the Faithful.
- Offer a simple Mass journal or reflection card for teens to jot one insight, question, or prayer after Mass, building a habit of ongoing reflection rather than a one-time class discussion.

7. Connect the Mass to Real-World Mission

Teens respond well to a sense of purpose — connecting the Mass's ending (“Go and announce the Gospel”) to concrete action gives it ongoing relevance.

- Discuss the dismissal (“Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life”) as a real commissioning, not just a formality — ask: “What does it look like to actually live that out this week?”
- Connect specific parts of the Mass to social action or service — for example, tying the Prayers of the Faithful to a class service project or current event teens care about.

8. Use Peer Discussion and Small Groups

Teens often engage more honestly with peers than in a lecture-style format about something as personal as faith and worship.

- Facilitate small-group discussion around real questions: “What part of Mass is hardest for you to connect with? What part means the most to you?”
- Let teens who serve in liturgical roles (altar servers, lectors, musicians) share with peers what that experience has been like, and something teens themselves choose and value.

9. Address Mass Beyond Sunday Obligation

Introducing teens to other liturgical experiences broadens their sense of what “Mass” and worship can look like.

- Offer opportunities to experience Mass in different contexts — a weekday Mass, a retreat Mass, a Mass in a different language or cultural tradition — to widen their sense of the liturgy's universality.
- Discuss Eucharistic Adoration as a complementary, quieter way of encountering Christ present in the Eucharist outside of Mass itself.

10. Model Ongoing, Honest Engagement Yourself

Teens are highly attuned to whether adults' practice of faith feels authentic or performative.

- Speak about your own experience of Mass honestly — including moments of distraction, difficulty, or growth — rather than presenting only polished enthusiasm.
- Avoid framing Mass attendance purely as a rule to follow; instead model it as a practice you genuinely return to and grow through, even when it's difficult.