

6th Homily - The Offertory / Presentation of the Gifts

“Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, your spiritual worship” (Rm 12:1). Today we are going to talk about the part of the Mass we call “the presentation of the gifts,” or “offertory.” Both of these titles, together with the words from St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, help us understand what is happening at this moment in the Mass while the collection is taken up and gifts of bread and wine are brought forward. The offering of our monetary gifts, along with the bread and wine, is our way of responding to the invitation of God to offer our lives to Him, to place them upon the altar. God is also the one who provides that which represents our self-gift: the monetary fruits of our labor, and especially the bread and wine.

The offertory is an important preparation for what follows: the consecration and communion. In order for these moments of the Mass to deeply affect our life and bear much fruit, the offertory is necessary. For how can God transform our life at the moment of the consecration if we do not freely open it and offer it to Him? How can the Lord fill us and unite us to Himself in Holy Communion if we do not surrender our will and give everything into his hands?

In the offertory we want to do the same thing with our life and our bodies that Jesus did with His. If we could put into words the desire of Jesus at this moment and what He is saying to us, it could be expressed perhaps in this way: “I, the eternal Son, took on your human nature to show you what I want you to do with yours. At every moment I offered my body, my entire life to the heavenly Father, I offered it and placed it entirely at the service of His Holy Will and the salvation of mankind. In doing this I showed you the way, what it truly means to be human, how to live a full and fulfilled life that leads to God. Will you now give me again your human nature so that I can continue to live the mystery of my self-giving, redeeming love in you? Will you give me your feet so that I may go to the places and people in your community and neighborhood where I am not yet known and loved? Will you give me your hands that I may continue to reach out to the lost, serve the poor and needy, heal and attend the sick, touch and embrace the lonely and forgotten? Will you give me your eyes to gaze with love upon the people you meet this day? Will you give me your mouth to speak words of kindness, hope and encouragement and to smile at those who carry heavy burdens and are sad. Will you give me your pain and your hurts that I may heal and strengthen you; your own longing to be loved that I may fill you. I know of all the sacrifices you are making and the burdens you are carrying--will you offer them to me and let me carry them with you? Will you give me your health, your education, your marriage, your family, your job, your future, your house and all your belongings--will you entrust them all to me and do as I did, offering them all into the Father’s hands and place everything at the service of God’s will and the salvation of your soul?”

The offertory reminds us again that the Mass is not for spectators. If we want to get something out of Mass we must put something into, the entire gift of ourselves. This is our part and participation at the offertory. But how do we place the gift of ourselves on the altar? It would look pretty ridiculous if we all came up and placed ourselves

physically upon the altar. This is why we offer gifts, gifts that represent us. We do this first of all at the moment of the collection: by giving monetary gifts for which we have labored and worked hard, we give something that represents ourselves. We invest time, sweat and energy into our work, and so in offering and sharing the fruits of our labor we are offering ourselves. These monetary gifts also manifest our mindfulness of the needs of the poor and our obligation to support the Church, since in God's plan, it is through the Church that we receive the truth and grace for salvation.

We also offer bread and wine. In the time of Christ these two substances represented the staple diet for many people, especially for the poor--and so to offer that which sustained them was to offer themselves. But bread and wine are fitting gifts for two other reasons, because of their connection to the consecration and time of communion. For grapes to become wine, they have to go through a kind of death--the crushing of the wine press; the same for the grains of wheat, to become bread they have to be ground up in the mill. At the offertory we offer our bodies and our lives like grains of wheat and clusters of grapes to be converted and transformed. At the consecration we unite ourselves with the death of Christ, receiving the grace to die to ourselves, to all that is sinful and contrary to the Gospel of love. Just as the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ at the moment of the consecration, we too become more transformed into the likeness of Christ through the power and grace of His death and resurrection.

Bread and wine also help us to understand what happens at the time of communion. As many grape make a single batch of wine, and many grains of wheat become as one loaf of bread, so we too, though we are many, become one single body, the Church, through our communion with Christ.

In a few moments we will be able to apply what we have learned, and the grace will be there to help us. Let us follow St. Paul, and "offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, pleasing and acceptable to God, our spiritual worship." If we make this offering generously and whole heartedly we will be able to repeat in truth what St. Paul said to the Galatians: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).