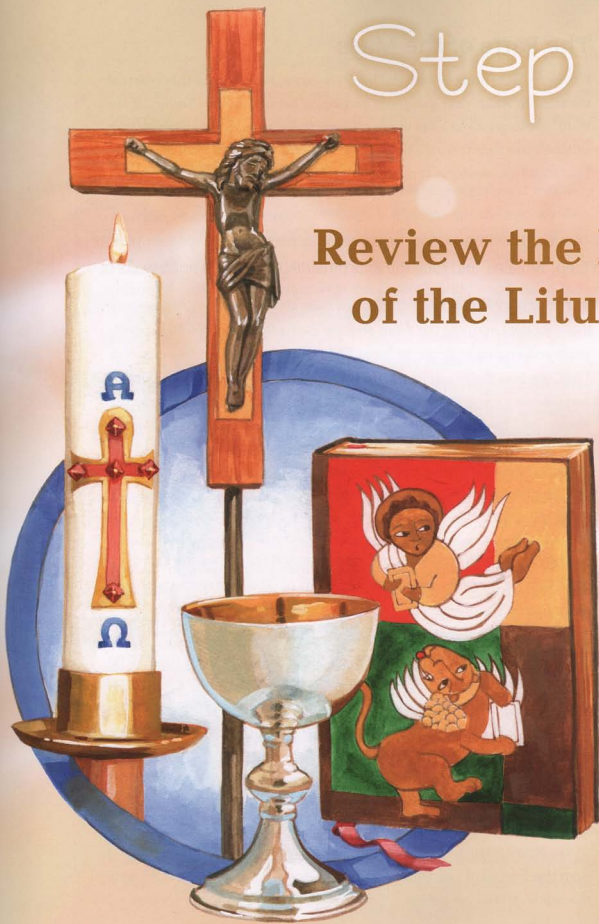


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Step 2

Review the Flow of the Liturgy



The Parts of the Mass

When preparing liturgies with children, it is easy to focus only on those parts of the Mass in which your group will participate heavily, like the Liturgy of the Word, and forget about some of the other parts. Before preparing a liturgy with children, take time to review the parts of the Mass and their overall movement. You can see a summary of the parts of the Mass on this page.

The Parts of the Mass

Introductory Rites: The Introductory Rites unify the people and prepare them for the Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharist. We begin by processing in and singing an Entrance Song. The priest greets us, and we respond. Then, we pray the words of the Penitential Rite. We acknowledge our sins and receive a general absolution (this is not the same thing as a sacrament absolution). The priest asks that God will forgive us. After this, on Sundays or solemnities except during Advent and Lent, we sing the Gloria, an ancient hymn that glorifies God. Then, the priest says the Collect, which gathers (or “collects”) the prayers of the people and expresses the character of the celebration.

Liturgy of the Word: After the Introductory Rites comes the Liturgy of the Word. At this time, we listen to the Word of God. The readings should be prepared prayerfully and carefully proclaimed from the ambo. There should be silence between them, so that the people hearing them can reflect on them meditatively. The readings that you hear will vary depending on the Mass that you are doing. If you are doing the weekday Mass, you will hear the First Reading (usually from the Old Testament, New Testament letters, or Acts of the Apostles), sing the psalm, prepare for the Gospel with a sung Gospel Acclamation (“Alleluia,” except during Lent), and hear a reading from one of the four accounts of the Gospel. If you are doing the Sunday Mass or a Mass for a solemnity or feast day, you will hear the First Reading, sing the psalm, hear a Second Reading (usually from the letters of the New Testament), sing the Gospel Acclamation, and hear a reading from the Gospel. If you are using the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*, the readings may be different. Sometimes, if a reading is not considered

suitable for children, it may be omitted from the Mass in the *Lectinary for Masses with Children*. For example, sometimes you may not have a Second Reading on a Sunday. The Gospel, the high point of the Liturgy of the Word, is always proclaimed.

After the readings, you will hear a homily or reflection. It is usually given by an ordained person, although in Masses with children, a reflection may be given by a lay person who has expertise in speaking to children. In Masses where children are predominately present, the homily might take the form of a conversation with the children, and may be more interactive than the typical homily. On Sundays, the homily or reflection is followed by a recitation of the Creed. In regular Masses we usually say the Nicene Creed, but many people prefer to use the Apostles' Creed in Masses with children. The Creed is followed by the Prayer of the Faithful or Universal Prayer, in which we bring forth our petitions for the needs of the Church, for the salvation of the world, and for specific needs in our community.

Liturgy of the Eucharist: In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, we remember the sacrifice that Christ made for us and receive Christ's Body and Blood. The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the Preparation of the Gifts. Members of the assembly bring the gifts of bread and wine and alms for the poor forward, often while the assembly sings a song. Then, the priest prays over the offerings and says the Eucharistic Prayer, which is considered the "center and summit" of the entire Eucharistic celebration. After the Eucharistic Prayer, we sing the Holy, Holy, Holy. Then the priest prays that the Holy Spirit will consecrate the gifts and reminds us of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. We affirm our belief by singing the Memorial Acclamation.

After the Memorial Acclamation, the Church offers the sacrificed Christ and we all offer ourselves. We pray intercessions, remembering that the Eucharist is celebrated in communion with the entire Church, heavenly and earthly. Then, we sing the "Amen."

The priest then leads the prayers of the Communion Rite. We all pray the Lord's Prayer and are invited to offer one another a sign of peace. After this, the priest breaks the host, signifying that we all receive from the one Christ, the Bread of Life. Then, the faithful process forward to receive communion while singing a hymn. After communion, we pray again.

Concluding Rites: In the Concluding Rites, we are sent forth from Mass with Christ's mission to serve others. If there are any announcements that need to be made, they are made at this time. Then, the priest says a blessing over the people and sends them forth to do good works. We process from the church, sometimes singing a Closing Song.

The Liturgy is One Breath

Look over the parts of the Mass and recall liturgies with children that you have planned or attended in the past. What element would you identify as the high point, or what area is given the most attention in the liturgy? It can be easy to give primary focus to the parts of the Mass that you are most responsible for planning, like the Liturgy of the Word. While you are preparing these parts of the Mass, though, you cannot lose sight of their purpose and placement in the liturgy as a whole.

You must look at the entire liturgy as one breath, not as several different pieces or “acts.” There is an ebb and flow to the liturgy. In the Opening Rites, we prepare ourselves for what is to come: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. According to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM), the Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist should be “so closely interconnected that they form but one single act of worship” (28). These two parts build toward the Eucharistic Prayer, the “center and high point” of the Mass (GIRM, 78). From there, nourished by the Word of God and the Body and Blood of Christ, the Concluding Rites send us forth to serve as disciples.

As you are preparing the liturgy with children, remember why you are doing it. It isn't merely the fulfillment of a requirement. And it's not a school play where there is an audience. In fact, it is the assembly who does much of the work of liturgy. Make sure that this is in the front of your mind as you are preparing liturgies. What you are doing is teaching children the ritual language of the Church, preparing them for ongoing participation in the liturgy, and instilling the mission of discipleship within them. As you are planning the opening procession, remember that it is part of your preparation for the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. In light of this, an over-the-top opening procession does not really make sense, as it might distract from the true meaning of the Mass. If you spend a lot of time as a class preparing the readings for the Liturgy of the Word, make sure that you take time to talk to the children about how hearing these readings prepares them to receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

If you are preparing a weekday liturgy, keep in mind that participation in the weekday liturgy should be preparing the children for the Sunday liturgy, not standing in place of it. Given this, you might find it appropriate to use some of the same musical settings and hymns in your weekday liturgy as the parish uses at Mass on Sunday. If your parish will be using certain hymns throughout a certain season like Advent or Lent, for example, you can teach the children those hymns in preparation for your weekday Mass. Knowing the hymns will make the children more eager participants in Mass on Sunday. If the hymns that your parish is using are too hard for the children to learn, especially those children who cannot read, then you might consider just learning the refrains of the hymns.

As you and the children prepare for your liturgy, also keep in mind the mission to which we are called as a result of our participation in Mass. After the Mass is over, take time to talk to the children about what they experienced and reflect on what they might do to take what they heard in the Mass into their daily lives. You can also use the Mass as an opportunity to talk about the importance of community. If a child complains that the Mass is boring and doesn't want to participate, talk about how that child's presence is important to every other child in your group. We attend Mass Sunday after Sunday not just for ourselves, but for those around us. They rely on our prayers and company just as we rely on their prayers and company. This is the ministry of the assembly!

Don't Underestimate Ritual

When planning liturgies, people often want to add new elements because they think it makes the liturgy more fun or interesting. They say, "But if you don't add anything, it's boring!" Don't let yourself fall into this trap. Ritual is not boring. In fact, it's comforting for children (and adults, too). The Mass is a touchstone in our lives. We return week after week to the same place and perform the same actions. The Mass does not change, but that does not mean that it is boring. It is only boring when we fail to acknowledge how *we* have changed since we last participated in that ritual. Think of how you celebrate birthdays in your family. The celebration probably does not change too much from year to year, but it isn't boring because you are called to reflect on all of the ways in which *you* have changed since your last birthday.

At first glance, it may seem as if something that's been done before is not as exciting as something that is new, but consider the power of ritual in your own life. Your favorite meal isn't the one that you've never had; it's the one that you've had again and again. Your favorite jeans aren't the ones that are on the rack at the mall; they're the ones that are so full of holes that they can't leave the

house any longer. The Mass can be like this for the children. It can become the favorite meal that never fails to satisfy.

Trust the ritual. Don't underestimate the power of singing the same songs that you already know and performing the same ritual that you have done before. Remember, too, that boredom can come when we don't understand the purpose and meaning of an event. Part of our work is to give the children time to contemplate the meaning behind our ritual.

Five Things to Avoid At All Costs

1. The Over-the-Top Entrance: We've all seen it happen—every single kid in the school parades in waving a banner and playing a musical instrument, to the point where a casual observer might not know whether you are preparing for Mass or practicing for the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade. It is wonderful to get children involved in the opening procession of the Mass, but it is important that you keep it simple and dignified. For example, you might invite some children to process in carrying simple ribbon banners in the liturgical colors, or you might have some children process in carrying votive candles that can be placed somewhere at the front of the church. You can involve more children without making the procession overly long if you use all of the aisles in your space.

2. The Barely-Perceptible Liturgy of the Word: Be honest now—how many times have you heaved a sigh of relief after the Old Testament reading is completed out of pure gratitude that the child proclaiming it made it all the way to the end? Reading scripture aloud is difficult for adults, so it should come as no surprise that a child who has just mastered *The Cat in the Hat* might have some trouble tackling the strange names of people and places and unusual turns of phrase that are in many scripture readings. While it may seem vital to give every child a "part," remember that being a member of the assembly is an important "part," too. The assembly deserves to hear the readings proclaimed in a prayerful, meditative way. If you are working with younger children to prepare the liturgy, consider looking outside of your group for appropriate readers. Perhaps you might invite a parent or older sibling to serve as a reader. Maybe you could ask the school librarian, or another adult who often reads stories to the children. Then, you might select a few children who can help the readers.

A child can come forward with the reader when the time comes and proclaim, "A reading from the book of . . ." The child can stand next to the adult or older child while he or she reads, and then come forth again to proclaim, "The word of the Lord."

3. The Presentation of Everything but the Kitchen Sink: The Presentation of the Gifts can, at school Masses, sometimes get a bit out of control. When all is said and done, everything that isn't nailed down winds up heaped on top of the altar. While it is wonderful to have classroom objects blessed, this is not the time for that. The things that we bring to the altar during the Preparation of the Gifts are not things that we expect to get back. When we send money to the altar during the Sunday Mass, we don't expect to come up and take back blessed dollar bills when the Mass is over. We are giving that money for the good of someone else, just as Jesus gave his life for the good of all of us. The things that we bring forward represent sacrifice of the self on behalf of others: the Eucharistic species of bread and wine represent Christ's sacrifice for us, and the money that we give represents our sacrifice for the Church, the Body of Christ. Make this clear to the children by keeping it simple and only bringing forth those things that you are giving of yourselves for someone else. If you are doing a food drive, for example, then it is appropriate to bring the cans of food forward and place them at the altar.

4. Symbol Overload: Sometimes, in an attempt to make Masses with children more engaging, we can fall into the trap of symbol overload. Everywhere you look, there's a different symbol: light, water, sand, lilies, lions, tigers, bears, oh my! When planning your liturgy, remember the value of austerity. When you are first teaching someone to play the piano, you start with a simple scale, not the showiest concerto. In the same way, when you are introducing children to the liturgy, it is important to start simple. As you and the children work through the readings, notice if there is one pervasive symbol and focus on that. You can also just focus on the colors and symbols of the time of the liturgical year. Remember that you are using symbols to enhance, not distract from, the liturgy. Avoid obvious symbols and allow the children to wonder at what they see in the church. Remember, you are creating liturgy that children will grow into, not out of.

5: The Theme That Just Won't Quit: Sometimes, in an effort to make the Mass more appealing to children, a theme like "friendship" or "peace" is applied to it . . . and suddenly, the theme takes over—you are reading friendship readings, singing friendship songs, saying friendship prayers, and leave the Mass unable to think of anything but the friendship theme! When preparing your liturgy, remember that the Mass already has a "theme"—the Paschal Mystery, the heart of our faith: Christ died for us, rose from the dead, and will come again. You don't need to add anything to the Mass to give it meaning. It has a meaning greater than anything we could ever apply to it. Allow the rhythm of the liturgy and liturgical year to take over, and allow yourself to relax and wonder at the children's response.