



***Why are people invited to bring up the gifts at the Offertory during Mass?***

***What is the purpose and why is it a privilege to participate in it?***

Inviting people to participate in the Offertory presentation is an ancient custom dating back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century in a commentary by St. Justin Martyr and again by St. Augustine in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Both acknowledged that it as a beautiful symbolic gesture and an admirable exchange that takes place where the faithful return their gifts to God.

The priest acting in “persona Christi” (in the person of Christ) receives from the faithful their contributions and sacrifices, offers them to God, who perfects them and transforms them into the Body and Blood of Christ. A wonderful exchange between man and God! Our imperfect gifts in a Holy exchange for the perfect gift from God, “the Eucharist”!

Since the Eucharist is the celebration of Christ’s love for His Church, it is meant to have the full, conscious and active participation of the faithful. The faithful accomplish this by giving of themselves at Mass, and allowing themselves to be transformed by the sacred mysteries.

This desire to be transformed is symbolized in the presentation of gifts, which is much more than a sentimental gesture. The people taking up the gifts at Mass represent the people of the parish and, in a sense, the entire Church. They bring up the bread and wine, as well as the collection, all as signs of the gifts God has given us.

Pope Benedict drew attention to the presentation of the Gifts when he said:

*“This humble and simple gesture is actually very significant: in the bread and wine that we bring to the altar, all creation is taken up by Christ the Redeemer to be transformed and presented to the Father. In this way, we also bring to the altar all the pain and suffering of the world, in the certainty that everything has value in God’s eyes. The authentic meaning of this gesture enables us to appreciate how God invites man to participate in bringing to fulfillment his handiwork, and in so doing, gives human labor its authentic meaning since, through the celebration of the Eucharist, it is united to the redemptive sacrifice of Christ”.*

The symbolism of bread and wine acknowledges the transformative work of mankind. For we do not present simply wheat and grapes, but the work of human hands that ground the grains of wheat and processed the flour and baked the bread, as well as the work of human hands that processed the grapes and applied the fermentation procedures to create the wine.

After receiving the gifts, the priest prays over them:

*Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through Your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.*

*Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through Your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink.*

That is why we refer to the Eucharistic celebration as a *Liturgy* (from the Greek meaning “public work”).

**In the next several weeks, we will begin inviting families and individuals to participate in the Offertory again. I hope this information will encourage and inspire you to partake in it.**

*Fr. Paul Olszewski*