

Glossary of Liturgical Terms

Composed by Carol Campbell

I. Ritual of Mass

Mass: The common name for the Eucharistic liturgy of the Catholic Church.

Synonyms: Eucharist, Celebration of the Liturgy, Eucharistic celebration, Sacrifice of the Mass, Lord's Supper.

Liturgy: The public prayer of the Church.

Liturgy of the Word: The part of the mass beginning with the proclamation of Scriptures until the Universal Prayers.

Liturgy of the Eucharist: The part of the mass when the gifts are prepared until Communion.

Gathering procession: Priest, deacon, altar servers, lectors, enter the church or designated place for celebration of the liturgy.

Gathering song/music: The song/music which takes place during the gathering procession.

Veneration of the altar: The reverencing of the altar with a kiss and the optional use of incense.

Greeting: The presider greets all present at the liturgy, expressing the presence of our God.

Penitential Rite: An acknowledgment of our sinfulness and the need for God's mercy.

Gloria: Ancient hymn of praise in the Church.

Opening prayer: This prayer expresses a gathering of our prayers to God.

Responsorial Psalm: After the first reading there is a psalm as a response to the reading. The response is usually sung.

Gospel Acclamation: A sung Alleluia of praise preceding the Gospel, during Lent another verse is used instead of the Alleluia.

Homily: The homily is a reflection by a priest or deacon on the Scripture readings and their application to everyday life.

Profession of Faith: The Creed recalls and proclaims the fundamental teachings of our faith.

Universal Prayers: Prayers of intercession for all humankind; for the Church, civil authorities, those in various needs, for all peoples, and for the salvation of the world. The presider invites all to pray, the deacon or another minister announces the prayers and the community responds.

Preparation of the Gifts: The bread and wine (and at times, monetary donations) used in the celebration are carried to the presider by representatives of the faithful.

Presentation Song: Music used during the procession of gifts as the altar is prepared.

Incense: Incense is used as a symbol of the Church's offering and prayer going up to God.

Washing of hands: An expression of the desire for inward purification.

Eucharistic Prayer: The prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. It is the center and high point for the entire ritual.

Preface dialogue: The introductory dialogue between the presider and assembly.

Preface: The first element of the Eucharist Prayer prayed by the presider. The prayer praises God and thanks for the work of salvation accomplished, in Christ, in general and the special reason for giving thanks on this particular day.

Holy, Holy, Holy: The response of the community to the preface.

Epiclesis: The prayer in which the Church call on the Holy Spirit, and asks that the gifts offered be consecrated, that is, become the body and blood of Christ.

Institution Narrative: The words and actions of Christ at the Last Supper when he instituted the sacrifice of the Mass and holy Eucharist.

Anamnesis: The prayer that recalls the passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, “do this in remembrance of me” – meaning active remembering.

Second Epiclesis: The calling down of the Holy Spirit upon the Church that by sharing the Eucharist it became and remains one body, one Spirit in Christ.

Intercessions: A series of prayers for the Church, the world, the Pope, clergy and laity, and the dead.

Final Doxology: A final prayer of praise of God.

Amen: called the great Amen, it is the acclamation by the people expressing their agreement with all that has been prayed in the Eucharistic prayer.

Lord's Prayer: The prayer of petition for both daily food (which for Christians means also the Eucharistic bread) and the forgiveness of sins.

Embolism: The presider's prayer immediately after the Lord's prayer in which the same themes are developed: deliverance from evil, enjoyment of peace, and divine protection.

Doxology: The response of the people acclaiming the sovereignty of God at the conclusion of the Our Father.

Sign of Peace: Before sharing the body of Christ the members of the community are invited to express their love and peace with one another.

Breaking of the Bread: This action signifies that in communion we who are many are made one in the one Bread of Life which is Christ

Lamb of God: A song to accompany the breaking of the bread.

Prayer after Communion: The final prayer by the presider in which he petitions that the sacrament be beneficial for all.

Concluding Rite: The rite which consists of the presider's greeting to all present, final blessing and dismissal.

II. Ministers

Presider: The one who presides over the assembly at liturgies.

Concelebrants: Those priests and bishops who join the presider in celebrating the Mass.

Deacon: An ordained minister who assists the presider at rituals.

Master of Ceremonies: One who assists in the preparation of the rituals and is present during it to facilitate the movement of the entire rite.

Acolyte: One who assists in the celebration (i.e., carrying candles, holding the Pope's staff miter, etc.).

Cross bearer: The one who carries the cross in the procession (entrance and recessional).

Reader: One who is called upon to proclaim the scriptures during the Liturgy of the Word.

Cantor: One who sings during the liturgy (i.e., the responsorial psalm).

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion: Those who assist in the distribution of Holy Communion.

Assembly: Those present to celebrate the liturgy. Other terms to use: "The Community," "The Church (as people not building)," "The Worshipers," "The Faithful," or "the congregation."

III. Vestments

Vestment: The vesture the minister's wear.

Alb: The white garment covering one's street dress for participation in the liturgy.

Chasuble: The vestment worn over the alb by priests, bishops and Pope when presiding at Mass.

Cassock: A non-liturgical, full-length robe for use by ministers, usually black for priests and seminarians, purple for bishops and other prelates, red for cardinals, white for the Pope.

Surplice: A loose, flowing vestment of white fabric with wide sleeves worn over the cassock.

Dalmatic: The vestment the deacon wears over the alb on solemn occasions.

Stole: The vestment worn around the neck by all ordained ministers. For priests, bishops and Pope, it hangs down in front; the deacons wear it over their left shoulder crossed and fastened at the right side.

Mitre: A headdress worn at some liturgical functions by bishops, abbots and, in certain cases, other ecclesiastics.

Crosier (pastoral staff): The staff which a bishop carries when he presides at the liturgy.

Zucchetto: A skull cap worn by the Pope (white) and bishops (purple) and Cardinals (red).

Pallium: Special stole made of lamb's wool worn over the chasuble by the Pope and archbishops; it signifies communion of archbishops with the Holy See.

IV. Liturgical Objects

Altar: A table on which the sacrifice of the Mass is offered.

Ambo: The place where the Scriptures are proclaimed, also called a lectern.

Aspergillum: A vessel used for sprinkling holy water.

Cathedra: The Archbishop's chair.

Presider's Chair: The chair for the presider. It expresses his office of presiding over the assembly and of leading the prayer of those present.

Chalice Pall: is a stiffened square card covered with white linen, usually embroidered with a cross, or some other appropriate symbol. The purpose of the pall is to keep objects from falling into the chalice.

Corporal: The corporal is a square white cloth upon which the chalice and paten are placed when the Eucharist is celebrated.

Credence Table: This is a small side table used in the ritual to place items to be used on the altar.

Lavabo: The towel used by priest after washing hands

Processional Cross: The cross carried in the processions.

Purificator: is a white linen cloth which is used to wipe the chalice after each communicant partakes. It is also used to wipe the chalice and paten after Communion

Pyx: is a small round container used to carry the consecrated host (Eucharist), to the sick or those otherwise unable to come to a church in order to receive Holy Communion.

Bread and Wine: The elements used in Eucharist (unleavened bread). NOTE: After the Eucharistic Prayer the bread and wine are referred to as consecrated bread and wine or the body and blood of Christ.

Cruets: The containers/vessels holding the water and wine.

Tabernacle: Place in the church where the Eucharist or sacred species is reserved.

Chalice: The cup used to hold the wine.

Paten: The plate used to hold the bread that will be consecrated during the Eucharistic prayer.

Ciborium: A vessel used to hold the consecrated bread for the distribution of communion.

Cathedral: The major church in an archdiocese or diocese. It is the seat of the local Ordinary.

Lectionary: The book that contains all the readings from the Scriptures for use in the liturgy.

Roman Missal: The book used by the presider, containing all the prayers for the liturgy of the Mass.

Book of Gospels: The book which contains the Gospel texts, from which the priests or deacon proclaims the Gospel of the day.

V. General Terms

Archbishop: Title given automatically to bishops who govern an Archdiocese.

Archdiocese: Term used to describe a large geographic region of the Church.

Auxiliary Bishop: A bishop assigned to an Archdiocese, to assist the Archbishop.

Basilica: A church to which special privileges are attached. It is a title of honor given to various kinds of Churches.

Bishop: The highest ordained position in the Church. They are the chief priest of a Diocese. Bishops are responsible for the pastoral care of their Diocese. In addition, they are responsibility to act in council with other bishops to guide the Church.

Blessed Sacrament: The Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ, whether at the Mass or reserved in a tabernacle.

Brother: A man who is a member of a religious order, but is not ordained or studying for the priesthood.

Cardinal: Cardinals are appointed by the Pope and constitute a kind of senate of the Church, and aid the Pope as his chief counselors.

Cathedral: The major church in an Archdiocese or Diocese. It is the seat of the local Ordinary.

Clergy: Collective term referring to male persons who administer the rites of the Church through Holy Orders.

Cloister: Part of or convent or monastery reserved for use by the members of the institute.

College of Cardinals: The College of Cardinals is comprised of all the Cardinals of the Church, who advise the Pope, assist in the central administration of the Church, head the various curial offices and congregations, administer the Holy See during a vacancy, and elect a new Pope.

Contemplative Nun: A religious woman who devotes her entire life in the cloister to prayer and reflection.

Convent: The term refers to a house of women religious.

Curia: The government of the church.

Dean/Vicar: The title of a priest appointed by the (Arch)Bishop to aid him in administering the parishes in a certain vicinity, called a “*Deanery*”. The function of a dean involves promotion, coordination, and supervision of the common pastoral activity with a deanery.

(Arch)Diocesan Curia: The personnel and offices assisting the (Arch)bishop in directing the pastoral activity, administration and exercise of judicial power of the (Arch)Diocese.

Diocese: The geographic region of parishes under the direction of a (Arch)Bishop.

Holy See: Diocese of the Pope, Rome.

Incense: Incense is the material used to produce a fragrant odor when burned, is used as a symbol of the Church’s offering and prayer going up to God.

Lay Ministers: These are ministers within the Church that are carried out by laypersons. Included are altar servers, Eucharistic ministers and lectors.

Liturgical Colors: Colors used for vestments and altar covering to denote special time in the Church. Green is used in ordinary times; red denotes feasts of martyrs or the Holy Spirit; purple denotes Advent and Lent, and white is used for joyful occasions including Christmas, Easter and some saints’ days.

Liturgy: The public prayer of the Church.

Liturgy of Hours: The official prayer of the Church sanctifying the parts of each day.

Magisterium: The official Teaching office of the Church.

Metropolitan: The Archbishop of an archdiocese in a province. He has limited supervisory powers and influence over the other dioceses and bishops in that province.

Minister: From the Latin word “servant”.

Monastery: An autonomous community house of a religious order, which may or may not be a monastic order. The term is used more specifically to refer to a community house of men or women religious in which they lead a contemplative life separate from the world.

Monk: Friar, a man who belongs to one of the monastic orders in the Church, such as Benedictines.

Monsignor: An honorary ecclesiastical title granted by the Pope to some diocesan priests. In Europe it is a title also given to Bishops.

Nun: A member of a religious order of women with vows.

Order, Congregation, Society: Religious orders, it is a title loosely applied to all religious groups of men and women.

Ordinary: Diocesan Bishops, religious superiors and certain other diocesan authorities with jurisdiction over the clergy in a specific geographical area, or the members of a religious order.

Pastor: A priest in charge of a parish or congregation. He is responsible for administering the sacraments, instructing the congregation in the doctrine of the Church, and other services to the people of the parish.

Pastoral Associate: A member of the laity who is part of a parish ministry team.

Relics: The physical remains and effects of saints, which are considered worthy of veneration in as much as they are representative of persons in glory with God.

Religious Priest/Diocesan Priest: Religious priests are professed members of a religious order or institute. Religious live according to the rule of their respective orders. In pastoral ministry, they are under the jurisdiction of their local bishop, as well as their superiors. Diocesan priests, are under the direction of their local Bishop.

Roman Curia: The official collective name for the administrative agencies and courts, and their officials, who assist the Pope in governing the Church. Members are appointed and granted authority by the Pope.

Rome: The city of Rome is the diocese of the pope, as the Bishop of Rome.

Sanctuary: The part of the Church where the altar is located.

See: Another name for a diocese or archdiocese.

Seminary: An educational institution for men preparing for Holy Orders.

Sister: Woman religious belong to a congregation where members do apostolic ministry among people.

Vows: Solemn vows are a perpetual, irrevocable public vow taken by a religious. Simple vows are a public vow taken by a religious. A vow, is a promise made to God with sufficient knowledge and freedom.

Superior: The head of religious order or congregation. He or she may be the head of a province or an individual house.

Tabernacle: Place in the church where the Eucharist is reserved.

Zucchetto: Skull cap, white is worn by the Pope, red is worn by Cardinals and purple is worn by Bishops.