

# Mass (religion)

## I INTRODUCTION

**Mass (religion)**, the ritual of chants, readings, prayers, and other ceremonies used in the celebration of the Eucharist in the Roman Catholic church. The same name is used in high Anglican churches. Other Protestant churches call this ritual Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper; Eastern Orthodox churches call it the Divine Liturgy. The word *mass* comes from the Latin *missa* ("sent"). It was taken from the formula for dismissing the congregation: *Ite, missa est* ("Go, the Eucharist has been sent forth"), referring to the ancient custom of sending consecrated bread from the bishop's Mass to other churches in Rome to symbolize that church's unity with the bishop in the celebration of the Mass.

## II FORMS OF THE MASS

The earliest form of the celebration of the Mass was the domestic Eucharist. Archaeological evidence shows that from the 3rd to the 4th century, Christian communities celebrated Mass in large homes. The local bishop presided over this Eucharist. After Emperor Constantine the Great's Edict of Toleration (AD313), public buildings—called basilicas—were adapted to the celebration of the bishop's Eucharist. As the church grew and the number of individual churches increased, presbyters attached to these churches came to lead the celebration. Eventually, these presbyters became known as sacerdotes ("priests").

Before the 8th century, the only form of the Mass was the public Mass, celebrated by a bishop or priest with a congregation. In its solemn form (High Mass), most parts are sung. In its most elaborate form, the papal Mass, the pope is assisted by the papal nobility, Latin and Eastern Rite deacons, the papal court, and numerous other functionaries. The pontifical Mass (solemn Mass of a bishop) is less elaborate, although besides deacons, subdeacons, thurifers (incense bearers), and acolytes, the bishop is also assisted by his *familia* (family), assistants who are responsible for taking care of his regalia (solemn vestments) and insignia (miter, crosier, and pontifical cross). The solemn parish, or monastic, Mass is celebrated with deacon and subdeacon. The simplest form of sung Mass is celebrated by one priest, with the assistance of acolytes and thurifer. In daily celebrations, a simpler form is used in which all parts of the Mass are read by one priest. This is the *Missa Lecta* ("read Mass"), or Low Mass.

Beginning in the 8th century, the private Mass evolved in the monasteries of northern Europe. Monks were originally laity, and they relied on local priests for their sacramental needs or ordained some of their own members for those needs. Beginning in the 8th century, British and Irish monks were ordained for the missionary work of converting the tribes of northern Europe that had been subdued by Charlemagne and his successors. By the 11th century (after the great missionary age), the growing monasteries of northern Europe continued to ordain their monks; so the number of priests eventually far exceeded the sacramental needs of the monks. Thus, the practice of private daily celebration of Mass grew until, by the 12th century, it was common.

### III PARTS OF THE MASS

By the 6th century the parts of the Mass were relatively fixed. Six principal sections can be distinguished.

The Foremass consists of the Entrance (introit), procession, and chant, which are then followed by the confession, which includes a litany (Kyrie Eleison) and which ends with the Gloria. The Foremass ends with the opening prayer, or first oration.

The Readings constitute the second part of the Mass. They consist of selections from the Old Testament, or from letters of the New Testament (Epistle), which are followed by a chant for the Gospel procession. This chant is known as the Gradual, so called because it was chanted from the steps (*gradus*) of the pulpit where the Gospel was read or sung. The final reading is drawn from one of the four Gospels and is followed by the sermon (homily).

During the third part of the Mass—the Offertory—offerings of bread, wine, and other gifts are brought to the altar with processional chants and are dedicated to the service of God with Offertory prayers.

The fourth section of the Mass is the Eucharistic Prayer. This section begins with the Preface, an introductory prayer that concludes with the Sanctus. Then follows the central Eucharistic prayer, or Canon, which contains the narrative of Jesus' institution of the Eucharist.

The Communion is the fifth, and climactic, section of the Mass. It opens with the Lord's Prayer (Paternoster, "Our Father"), continues with the prayer for peace and the greeting of peace, and concludes with the communion of the clergy and the faithful, which may be accompanied by the communion hymn.

The final section of the Mass, the Concluding Rite, consists of a final prayer (postcommunion), the blessing (benediction), and the dismissal (*Ite, missa est*). A recessional hymn may be sung as clergy and laity leave the church.

### IV LITURGICAL BOOKS

Before the 13th century a variety of liturgical books were used in the celebration of the Mass. The choir used the *Graduale* (for the Gradual chant) and *Antiphonale* (for the responsive processional chants at the Entrance, Offertory, Communion, and Recessional). The subdeacon used the *Apostolus* (letters of the New Testament), the deacons the *Evangelarium* (Gospel), and the presiding celebrant the *Sacramentarium*, which contained all the prayers of the Mass. As the practice of private Mass grew, the various liturgical texts were gathered into one book for the priest who performed all the parts of the Mass alone. This book, called the missal, contained all the prayers, readings, and chants of the Mass. The various missals used since the 13th century were standardized in an official text, the Roman missal (1570), which was issued by order of the Council of Trent. Earlier, in 1298, papal and episcopal ceremonies had been standardized in the Roman pontifical. The Roman missal and the Roman pontifical have been revised several times over the centuries.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) introduced a number of changes into the celebration of Mass. The council returned to the ancient practice of calling this sacrament and its

celebration by the same name: the Eucharist. The principal liturgical changes include the introduction of vernacular languages into the Eucharist, the return to the custom of allowing the laity to receive both bread and wine, and the reintroduction of the practice of concelebration (see the discussion of concelebration below).

## V VERNACULAR LITURGY

The traditional language for the celebration of Mass in the Roman rite has been Latin, although the Eastern Rite churches have used a number of vernacular languages (for instance, Old Slavic, Greek, and Aramaic). Reform movements in the Western church from the 14th to the 16th century called repeatedly for vernacular liturgies. One effect of the separation of churches during the Reformation was the adoption of vernacular languages for the Mass (or Lord's Supper) in the Protestant churches. The Council of Trent (1545-63) saw no dogmatic difficulty in using vernacular languages in the Mass, but considered sanctioning their use inopportune at that time. Vatican II sanctioned the use of the vernacular in the Roman rite, and the Mass is now celebrated in almost every language in the world.

## VI COMMUNION UNDER BOTH KINDS

The same reform movements called for a return to the ancient custom of allowing the laity to receive communion under the forms of bread and wine, a custom that had disappeared from the Western church by the 8th century (although it has continued to the present in Eastern Catholic and Orthodox churches). The Council of Trent rejected these appeals, but Vatican II established certain times and conditions under which the laity may receive both bread and wine. The conditions have been broadened, so that the practice has become increasingly common in the Western church.

## VII CONCELEBRATION

Although surrounded by priests and deacons, the bishop alone presided over the celebration of Mass in its original form. As the church grew, and priests were needed for the masses in parish churches, concelebration—the celebration of Mass by more than one priest—became common, although the practice was restricted to the major feasts of the year. It survived in various forms and with varying frequency into the 13th century. Priests originally concelebrated silently with the bishop, but the custom of reciting the words of the Canon aloud developed in the 7th century. After the 13th century concelebration survived only in the Mass for the ordination of priests. In this case, the newly ordained priests recite all the prayers of the Canon aloud with the bishop. Vatican II, however, restored the rite of concelebration for occasions when a number of priests gather together and placed limitations on the times and places in which the Mass can be celebrated privately.