

Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest



Sunday Worship: The Mass vs Celebrations Without a Priest

absent. The complete memorial of the Lord's sacrificial offering, as he commanded, is absent. Missing from this celebration are:

- the priest, who acts in the person of Christ
- the presentation of the offertory gifts of bread and wine
- the eucharistic prayer
- the eucharistic actions of taking, giving thanks, and the breaking of the bread
- the greetings and blessings proper to a priest

The secondary way in which this rite differs from Mass is that there is no homily, unless a deacon is the leader. If a lay person has been properly trained and has received permission from the bishop, he or she may give a reflection following the reading of the Gospel.

Next week:

The roles of those who participate in *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*.

Sources:

Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest, 1988.
Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 1963.

The question is often asked, "What is the difference between Sunday Mass and *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*?" This insert will help explain some of the underlying principles.

Due to the phenomenon of the priest shortage, there may be extraordinary occasions when a priest is not available to celebrate a Mass on Sunday. When this happens, parishes need to be aware of the importance of Sunday celebration and the options available. A parish plan must be developed before such an occasion should present itself.

What is the meaning and importance of the Eucharist?

At the Last Supper Jesus instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of his body and blood. He did this to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the centuries until he comes again. Doing so, he entrusted to the Church

- a memorial of his death and resurrection
- a sacrament of love
- a sign of unity
- a bond of charity
- a Paschal banquet

In the Mass, “the work of our redemption is carried out whenever we celebrate the memory of the sacrifice” (*Sacramentarium Veronense*, 93). Our faith instructs us that the sacrifice of the cross and its sacramental renewal in the Mass are one and the same. The Mass is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, of reconciliation and redemption.

The celebration of the Mass proclaims the mystery of the Lord’s real presence under the forms of bread and wine. Christ is present at Mass not only by means of the words of consecration, but also by the spirit and expression of reverence in the worshipping community.

What is the role of the priest and the assembly?

The priest’s role in the Mass is to offer the sacrifice in the person of Christ and to preside over the assembly. Ministerial priesthood sheds light on yet another reality, the royal priesthood of believers. They are a people called to offer God the prayers of the entire human family, giving thanks in Christ for the mystery of salvation by offering his sacrifice, and growing in unity by sharing Christ’s body and blood.

The celebration of Mass, the action of Christ and the people of God with their specific roles or ministry, is the center of the whole Christian life. In the Mass we celebrate the work

done by Christ which is offered to the Father. All other liturgical rites and all the works of the Christian life, flow from, and lead to the eucharistic celebration. No other celebration can take the place of the Mass as to its meaning and effects.

Why is Sunday the Lord’s Day?

By a tradition handed down from the apostles, Sunday has its origin from the very day of Christ’s resurrection. On this day Christ’s faithful gather so that, by hearing the Word of God and taking part in the Eucharist, they may call to mind the Paschal Mystery and give thanks to God who has restored a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest — What does it really Mean?

If a priest is unavailable to preside at Mass due to extraordinary or emergency situations such as: sudden illness, inclement weather, or other reasons the archbishop may consider appropriate, then the rite of *Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest* may be invoked. This rite includes the hearing and reflecting on the Word of God, giving thanks and praise, offering intercessions, and *may* include reception of Holy Communion. This is not a Mass and one is not obligated to attend. Nevertheless, it remains important for the faithful to gather on Sunday as a community of faith. Assemblies of this kind should not take away but should rather increase the desire of the faithful to take part in the celebration of the Eucharist.

How does this rite differ from Mass?

The primary way in which this rite differs from Mass is that even though communion *may* be distributed at this rite, the eucharistic prayer (which includes the consecration) is