

Parts of the Mass: It All Started in Homes

It is well documented that the structure of the Catholic Mass received its inspiration from family gatherings. The earliest Christians worshiped God in their homes long before any Catholic church building existed. The structure was loose and allowed for much creativity, as one would expect in a family gathering with friends. Review the chart below to make connections between the four main parts of the Mass and a typical family gathering.

Parts of the Mass

Introductory Rites:

- We gather and greet
- The presider welcomes
- A theme sets the tone (through the liturgical season or feast day)
- We express sorrow in the Penitential Rite

Liturgy of the Word:

- Readings from the Bible
- Homily for interpretation and application

Liturgy of the Eucharist:

- Eucharist Prayer of Thanksgiving
- Sharing the Eucharistic Meal

Concluding Rite:

- Blessing
- Sending Forth

Parts of a Family Gathering

Introductory Rites at Home:

- Guests arrive
- Host welcomes
- Theme such as birthday, anniversary, or holiday sets the tone
- We often express sorrow if we haven't kept in touch or if some recent tragedy calls for words of consolation

Liturgy of the Word at Home:

- Guests share stories with each other
- Guests interpret and make meaningful applications of stories to their own lives

Liturgy of the Eucharist at Home:

- Grace with Thanksgiving before the meal
- Sharing the meal

Concluding Rite at Home:

- "It was so good to see you!" Blessings are acknowledgments of God's goodness
- Farewells

Prepare a special meal with your family and friends. Have fun by exaggerating the parts of the meal that bring out the roots of the Mass structure. Here are some suggestions:

1. Greet each other with embraces and loud voices. Announce the theme of the party.
2. All members of the household may share a favorite family story. Those who listen may suggest ideas about the deeper meaning of the story (this may be done while eating).
3. Pray before you eat. Enjoy the feast.
4. Conclude the meal with each person completing the following sentence, "What I love about this family is _____."