

# Sources for the Liturgy

Our favorite search engines have become our go-to source for almost everything.

Have you ever wondered about the source for the prayers, gestures, and postures of the Mass and how the priest and deacon know what to say and when? The answers are found in *The Roman Missal*. This book contains not only the prayers for Mass, but instructions for the postures and gestures used during the liturgy.

How did those prayers and instructions become part of the liturgy? Many sources have influenced our prayer. Some practices stem from ancient culture. The vestments that the priest and deacon wear, for example, were outer garments in ancient Rome.

Some of our sources originated with leaders of the early Church. Many of the prayers of the Mass, for example, are rooted in ancient texts written by early Christian theologians.

Another source was a Christian pilgrim named Egeria, whose observations of liturgical practices in fourth-century Jerusalem have influenced Holy Week liturgies to this day.

While all of these sources helped to shape the liturgy, Scripture is the primary source. The words of Jesus at the Last Supper, “Do this in memory of me” (Luke 22:21), became the cornerstone of liturgical prayer. Catholics come together to hear the words of Scripture and to do what Jesus commanded us to do: to take, bless, break, and share the sacred meal in remembrance of him.

Other Scripture passages are woven throughout the liturgy. The Sign of the Cross comes from Matthew 28:19: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit.”

In the first line of the Gloria, the assembly sings the words of the angels announcing the birth of Christ to the shepherds in Luke 2:14: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

The first part of the Sanctus comes from Isaiah 6:1–3, which tells of the Seraphim singing “Holy, holy,



*The Roman Missal* includes the prayers for the Mass as well as the postures and gestures of the liturgy.

holy is the Lord of hosts! All the earth is filled with his glory!” and Revelation 4:8: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come.” In the second part of the Sanctus are the words from Psalm 118:26: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” and Matthew 21:9: “Hosanna to the Son of David. / Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; / hosanna in the highest” (Matthew 21:9).

The Lord’s Prayer is from Matthew 6 and Luke 11, and the Sign of Peace is rooted in Matthew 5:23: “Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

The words we pray before Communion echo those of the centurion who asks Jesus to come to his house and heal his servant: “Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed” (Matthew 8:8). A similar passage is in Luke 7:6.

May we who hear and pray these texts be a living word of witness to the hope they express.