

The Prayer Over the Offerings – The Priest’s Role (Entering the Holy of Holies)

The final prayer of the *Preparation of the Altar (the Offertory)* is called The Prayer Over the Offerings. The words of this prayer are always linked in a similar theme to the Collect Prayer at the beginning of Mass (to end the Introductory Rites) as well as the Prayer After Communion (to end the Communion Rite at the very end of Mass). The Catholic Priest says the words of this prayer to God the Father, and we are supposed to remember that the priest is standing in the person of Christ in this pivotal moment. How can the priest **OFFER** to God any special? (after all, the priest is simply a broken human person) It is only because the priest’s soul has been changed through his Ordination and configured to Jesus Christ in such a way as to allow Jesus to work through him and become present, especially during the celebration of the Sacraments. Jesus becoming present through the priest **is the one taking the prayers and the weekly sacrifices and spiritual offerings** from every person at the Mass, and Jesus is then offering these things (in union with His one perfect sacrifice on the Cross) to God the Father in heaven.

Jesus is the perfect priest, but it might be good to think about the Old Testament priests and how the symbolism of the Mass is helping us lift our minds to this reality. For example, we already reflected on a couple weeks ago, how just before the Prayer Over the Offerings, the priest symbolically washes his hands and tries to humble himself before God and recognize his own sinfulness and unworthiness to be this most holy instrument that God will use during The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. This symbolic gesture of washes hands actually also goes back to the Old Testament priests, and specifically the Levites, who had to wash their hands before ministering to God in the Jerusalem Temple (Exodus 30:17-21). This location of the Tabernacle in the Jerusalem Temple was called the Holy of Holies, and it was very important to be ritually clean for the Levitical priests to even enter this location at all (Exodus 29:4; Numbers 8:7). This is where God’s presence truly dwelt with His people, so it was very important to take this seriously and be prepared for this intimate encounter with God’s holiness and His divinity. Therefore, when we see the priest setting the altar, washing his hands, or praying the Prayer Over the Offerings, we should be thinking about the fact that we are all entering into the New Holy of Holies! It is no longer a Tabernacle that is separated from all people. It is God himself, Jesus Christ, God become man, who makes Himself present through the Catholic Priest as well as ultimately becoming present in the form of bread and wine. We are all invited into the communion of God within the Holy of Holies, and we can offer ourselves completely to Jesus Christ who becomes present in the priest during the Preparation of the Altar and the Offertory of the Mass.