

Catholic 101

Throughout the Mass, there are some things that are said by the priest or deacon that are, according to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), supposed to be said "in an inaudible voice." Have you ever wondered what he is saying as you see his lips moving? All of us, the baptized, represent Christ each and every day. Through our words and actions we are Christ's disciples, bringing others to him, by being like him. Doing this requires our attention, deliberately opening ourselves to God's grace to do all we do and say in his name. Likewise at mass, the priest representing Christ the Lord must preside with attention as he does what the Lord himself did "and handed over to his disciples to be done in his memory." (GIRM #72) So throughout the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the rite itself facilitates the constant and deliberate attention of the presider by various prayers that he speaks to himself, so that he might remain mindful of his servant role to do as Christ did. For example, as the wine is being prepared for the chalice, the priest (or deacon) says: *By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.* After gifts of bread and wine have been received and presented, the priest says inaudibly: *Lord God, we ask you to receive and be pleased with the sacrifice we offer you with humble and contrite hearts.* Then the servers bring water, a bowl, and a towel to "wash" the priest's hands. As the water is poured, he says to himself: *Lord wash away my iniquity; and cleanse me from my sin.* This silent prayer is an earnest attempt for the presider to express to God his desire for "interior purification" before he holds the Precious Body and Blood. During the Lamb of God, as the bread is broken, the priest places a small piece of host into the chalice (to signify the Unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the work of salvation—GIRM #83) and says inaudibly: *May the mingling of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.* Finally, just like everyone at the mass silently prepares themselves to receive the Eucharist, the priest says inaudibly: *Lord Jesus Christ, with faith in your love and mercy I eat your body and drink your blood. Let it not bring me condemnation, but health in mind and body.* (Which is why it can be disruptive to continue to offer the sign of peace to anyone once the Lamb of God has begun and should not be done.) Part of the beauty of the prayers of the Mass is that they so intentionally and reverently desire only to lead us into God, both the prayers we say aloud, and the prayers we say in our hearts.