Special words used during the Mass



The language used during the Sacrament of the Eucharist is very rich in meaning and has its roots in ancient languages. Here are some of the main terms, their roots and meaning and where they might apply during this liturgy.

A liturgy (which comes from the Greek word ‘leiturgia’, meaning public work or service) means that the people of God participate in the ‘work of God’. Liturgy is the official divine worship of the Church. The Sacrament of the Eucharist is a liturgy of the highest order as it is the ‘source and summit’ of our Christian life (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1324).

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| **Word** | **Origin/ Meaning** | **Explanation** | **Use in Mass** |
| **Eucharist** | *Eucharistia* (Greek) = thanksgiving | At first the word Eucharist was the name for the prayer of thanksgiving that took place before the transformation of the bread and wine into Christ’s Body and Blood. The term has since come to be applied to the whole celebration of Mass. | In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, bread and wine are offered, consecrated and distributed to the faithful. |
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| **Lord have mercy** | *Kyrie eleison* (Greek) = Lord have mercy | This homage to Christ (which has been around from 500 AD) has been carried over from an ancient cry to the gods and rulers in the Greek liturgy. | *Kyrie eleison* –  Lord have mercy *Christe eleison* –  Christ have mercy *Kyrie eleison* –  Lord have mercy  This takes place at the beginning of Mass during the Penitential Rite |
| **Gloria** | *Gloria* (Latin) = honour | This comes from the Scripture (Luke 2:14) which tells of the angels’ joyful song on Christmas nights. This is used at Mass for praising God. | *‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you… Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father’.*  This takes place after the Penitential Rite. |
| **Alleluia** | *Halal* (Hebrew) = praise ye! Glorify!  + *YHWH* (divine name for God)  = ‘Let us praise the Lord’ | This exclamation (often sung) is used to greet the Gospel at Mass. It occurs 24 times in the Psalms.  + YHWH - this is known as the sacred tetragrammaton. In Jewish tradition it is never uttered aloud or printed. In response to Jewish requests a few years ago the Church has tried not to use this. | *Alleluia, Alleluia…*  This is said/sung by the congregation before the Gospel at Mass (although not during Lent as it is a sombre time). |
| **Homily** | *Homilein (Greek)* = to speak to someone as a peer, to converse with him | A homily can also be known as a sermon. After the readings and Gospel, the preacher (usually a priest or deacon) will help the faithful to understand the Good News (*evangelion*) which has just been proclaimed, encouraging them to put it into practice. | This takes place after the Gospel. |
| **Holy Holy** | *Sanctus* (Latin) = holy | This is one of the most ancient parts of the Mass and can never be omitted. It is a combination of the angels’ cry in Isaiah 6:3 and a greeting in Psalm 118:26 that is applied to the presence of Christ | *Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.* |
| **Consecration** | *Consecratio* (Latin) = hallowing, sanctification | A consecration is a solemn act of making something sacred or holy. During Mass at the consecration, the bread and wine are ‘consecrated’ and thereby transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. This begins at the *Epiclesis* (the Calling of the Holy Spirit) when the priest extends his hands over the bread and wine. It ends when the priest elevates the chalice, before the Mystery of Faith. | *‘You are indeed Holy, O Lord, the fount of all holiness. Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they become for us the Body and Blood of Christ… Do this in memory of me’.* |
| **Transubstantiation** | *Trans* (Latin) = change + *Substantia* (Latin) = essence, substance | This is the theological term used to explain how Jesus can be present under the appearances of the gifts of bread and wine. While their outward form or ‘species’ remains the same, they are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. This means that Jesus is truly but invisibly present in the form of bread and wine. | *This takes place when the priest in Persona Christi (in the person of Christ) uses the Words of Institution of Christ that were used at the Last Supper: ‘At the time he was betrayed and entered willingly into his Passion… Do this in memory of me’.* |
| **Doxology** | *Doxa* (Greek) = glory | This is a solemn, formulaic conclusion to a prayer. Doxologies are often addressed to the Trinity. The Final Doxology of the Mass is ‘Through him…ever’ and this takes place at the end of the Eucharistic prayer. The Great Amen follows which is said/sung by the whole congregation. | *Through him, with him and in him, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, for ever and ever.*  After the Final Doxology and Great Amen, the people are invited to stand and join in with the Lord’s Prayer (Our Father). |
| **Lamb of God** | *Agnus Dei* (Latin) = Lamb of God | This is deeply rooted in Scripture. In the Old Testament (Exodus 12) the lamb of God is the sacrifice by which the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt. In the New Testament, John the Baptist applied this image to Jesus saying ‘Behold the lamb of God…’ It is through Jesus, who is led like a lamb to the slaughter, that we are freed from our sins so we can find peace with God. | *Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us (x2).*  *Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace.*  This takes place after the Our Father and Sign of Peace, shortly before the distribution of Holy Communion. |
| **Communion** | *Communio* (Latin) = fellowship, community | By ‘communion ‘we mean receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in the consecrated gifts of bread and wine. Jesus gives himself so that we may give ourselves to him in love. In this way we are joined with the one Body of Christ – the Church. | Holy Communion is distributed with the words ‘*The Body of Christ’* and possibly also ‘*The Blood of Christ’*. The believer responds, ‘*Amen’*, which means ‘*Yes, I agree, I believe’*. |
| **Tabernacle** | *Tabernaculum* (Latin) = hut, tent | This is the very prominent, ornamented place for preserving the Most Blessed Sacrament in the church (Christ in the form of bread = host). It is reminiscent of the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant. | The Blessed Sacrament (unconsumed hosts from the Mass) are reposed in the tabernacle after the Communion Rite. |

For more information about the language of the Mass see   
Q & A GUIDELINES FOR CELEBRATING SCHOOL MASSES <https://education.rcdow.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Mass-Guidelines.pdf>