

Pax vobis—Peace be with you

Pax Vobis



The Rite of Peace follows the Lord's prayer after the Eucharistic prayer. The celebrant prays that the peace of Christ will fill our hearts, our families, our Church, our communities, and our world. As a sign of hope, the people extend to those around them a sign of peace.

This part of the liturgy is not only steeped in contemporary meaning but profoundly reflective of the whole purpose of Jesus' ministry and message.

The sign of peace has its liturgical and spiritual roots in Jesus' teaching on forgiveness prior to offering gifts on the altar (Mt 5:23-24): if someone had a grievance against his brother, he should first "be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

As Christian worship evolved, the gesture of a "kiss of peace" was a way to unite the community gathered in love and reconciliation. Without being at peace, the community and its members could not fully reflect or live the peace and love of Christ in Eucharist.

The "kiss of peace" took on various forms as liturgy developed. Sometimes it involved clergy and congregation, and sometimes only clergy. Today, we know this part of the Mass, placed just after the Lord's Prayer and a brief invitation by the priest, as the sign of peace, which follows the priest's invitation, "Let us offer each other the sign of peace."

Cultural and congregational considerations can play a role in what gestures best express the fullness of this gift-giving of peace.



According to the 2014 circular letter on "The Ritual Expression of the Gift of Peace at Mass," released by the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, actions at the sign of peace should maintain the "sacred sense of the eucharistic celebration," and so avoid a "song for peace," "movement of the faithful from their places to exchange the sign of peace among themselves," "the departure of the priest from the altar in order to give the sign of peace to some of the faithful," and should not be used as a time to express "congratulations, best wishes or condolences among those present." This ritual among the congregants may be omitted, for example in times of health concerns.

There is some latitude in the case of a funeral, where the priest may offer peace to a "small number of the faithful near the sanctuary" (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, No. 154).

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has not established an "official" expression of peace, though the gesture should be in keeping with being at Mass and this reverent time of worship. So, fingers in the shape of a 'peace sign', overly enthusiastic waving, and such, are not encouraged. Shaking of hands and a nod of one's head with a smile are more suitable for the environment of Mass.