

Understanding the Mass

The Lavabo

*Each week, we are explaining a different part of the Mass - the items that are used, the parts of the church, and the roles of the people who help us celebrate Mass. This week, our topic is the **Lavabo** .*

Once the priest has given thanks and blessed the bread and wine, he washes his hands in an act known as the **Lavabo**, a word in Latin meaning “I will wash”.



This gesture echoes the actions of Jewish priests of the Old Testament, who had to undergo ritual washings before they could perform their duties.

The physical washing symbolised the internal cleansing of heart that was required before a priest could draw near God’s presence in the sanctuary.

Following this Biblical tradition, the priest’s handwashing at Mass reflects that he is about to stand in a most holy place, even more holy than the sanctuary of ancient times: it is through the priest that God will change the bread and wine into His Body and Blood.

The priest washes his hands in a special bowl used for water and washing, which is called a lavabo, named after the act of washing that the priest performs.

While the priest is washing his hands, he prays quietly under his breath:

Lord, wash away my iniquity. Cleanse me from my sin.

He will then wipe his hands with a lavabo towel, or finger towel.

The priest’s need to wash his hands, and the words that he prays, remind us that he is a human, sinful and imperfect like us. This prayer is also a reminder for all of us that through God’s graces and water (in the Sacrament of Baptism), we are made new and holy.

Who washed themselves in Jewish tradition? _____

What is the name of the bowl and towel that the priest uses in Mass? _____