

REDISCOVERING THE MASS: A TASTE OF HEAVEN ON EARTH

PART 1: What Does the Mass Mean to You?

Beginning our Walk through the Mass: The Opening Rites

We are in the habit every weekend of attending Mass. Why? What is so important about doing this? Jesus Himself gave us this act of worship at the Last Supper on the eve of His sacrificial death on the Cross. Every Mass that is celebrated is a re-presentation of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ. During Mass, the Priest who is acting in the very Person of Jesus the High Priest, through the power of the Holy Spirit brings about the meeting of Eternity and Time. As we participate during Mass, the distinction between Heaven and earth blurs and we glimpse the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. We are present at the Last Supper when Jesus gave us the Eucharist to fulfill His promise to be with us always. We are present at the foot of the Cross with the Virgin Mary and St. John the Apostle, at Jesus' sacrifice as He hands His Spirit over to the Father in an act of total obedience to atone for our sins. We are even present at the Empty Tomb on the first Easter Sunday dawn, witnessing the Father's acceptance of the Son's sacrifice.

Experiencing this requires faith. It requires the same faith needed to recognize that the consecrated Host and Chalice are in their deepest reality the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ. Faith is an act of the will. It

doesn't depend upon feelings, emotions, or other subjective criteria. Faith enables us to enter into the sometimes mundane, ordinary actions on the altar and believe that something amazing, life-changing, and heavenly is occurring in our Church.

With the priest at Mass, we celebrate the Paschal Mystery: the passing of Jesus Christ from death to life and our own participation in His Passover. This mystery is not only at the heart of the Eucharist; it is at the heart of our entire Catholic Faith. Not surprisingly, the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life.

At the celebration of Mass, we symbolically see the realities of the heavenly worship of the High Priest and His Mystical Body. Pope John Paul called the Mass heaven on earth: "The liturgy we celebrate on earth is a mysterious participation in the heavenly liturgy." Vatican II, in its document *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 8, said: "In the earthly liturgy we share a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem ...where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, minister of the sanctuary and true tabernacle."

In the Book of Revelation, John describes the worship of the angels and saints in heaven before the throne of God. At Mass, we are before that throne of Heaven where Jesus is hailed forever as the Lamb.

In order to form His people in His Church, God calls us to leave behind our daily lives for about an hour each week and enter into His Presence at Church.

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Jesus Christ Himself meets us there. He is present as we walk into the Church and acknowledge Him residing in the Tabernacle.

Many Catholics do not realize that nearly every part of the Mass is Biblical! If every Bible reference were removed from the Mass, it would last about thirty seconds! The word Testament (as in old and new) and the word Covenant are synonyms. Christ established the New Covenant in the Paschal Mystery, and the Mass makes us present to the New Covenant. Basically, the Mass is the Bible in ritual form.

Remember: the priest is acting in the person of Christ -- in persona Christi. He is a stand-in for the High Priest, Jesus Christ. The Mass is not the priest's Mass. We receive Jesus' Body and Blood...not the priest's! It is not "our" Mass either. The Mass is Jesus Christ's perfect sacrifice offered to the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is eternal and all He has done on earth is eternally present to the Father. As we participate in the Mass on earth we are simultaneously present at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in the Heavenly Kingdom of God! We are privileged to enjoy a taste of Heaven on earth if we believe it!

WHAT DOES THE MASS MEAN TO YOU?

- What does the Mass mean to you?
- How do you prepare to come before God at Mass? How does God prepare you for Mass?
- Are you able to leave behind your concerns for a time to enter into the presence of God at Mass?
- What are some parts of the Mass that you recognize in the Bible?
- At Mass, how do you imagine Christ when you pray to Him?

BEGINNING OUR WALK THROUGH THE MASS:THE OPENING RITES

Sometimes, the things we do on a regular basis become so routine that we don't seem to see them anymore. We take them for granted. Then it's time to rediscover and be reminded of what we know! Hopefully, along the way we see more deeply into the mystery of the thing. That's what I hope to do with this walk through the Mass.

1. The Procession:

The Mass begins with the procession of the celebrant entering the Church. The priest is acting in the very person of Christ the head. So his entrance symbolizes the High Priest, Jesus, entering into our midst. We stand to honor that

Christ is made present in the celebrant. To prepare our minds, bodies, and souls to worship God, we lift up our voices and hearts in a hymn to God during the procession. Singing the hymn not only forms our individual voices into one harmonious sound, it also brings our separate lives together to enter into this one act of worship: The Mass.

2. The Sign of the Cross:

The priest begins the Mass by inviting us to sign ourselves in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is a basic confession of our Faith: God is one yet three Persons, the Trinity. We are now acting in the holy name of the Trinity and entering into a divine action. Because we are both body and spirit, our prayer involves our whole body. We trace the cross over our body. With this body Jesus calls us to take up our individual cross and follow Him.

For the early Christians the Sign of the Cross was the most universal expression of their Faith. It summarizes the Christian Faith in a single gesture. We proclaim the Faith into which we were baptized: Trinitarian. The Sign of the Cross reminds us we are children of God.

3. Greeting -- The Lord be with You:

The priest offers a greeting. This isn't just any old words of hello. It is taken from one of St. Paul's letters. One greeting is: read 1 Cor. 1:2

If the Bishop is celebrating, he says “Peace be with you,” the words of Christ to the Apostles after His resurrection. This is actually a Blessing: May the Lord be with His people gathered here around the altar.

Interestingly, each time something new or significant is about to happen in the Mass, this blessing is repeated. It is offered 5 times throughout the Mass!

4. Response -- And with your Spirit:

Remember, the priest or bishop is acting in the person of Christ. The Mass isn’t about him as an individual but about Jesus working in and through the man. Our response -- “and with your Spirit” -- encourages the celebrant to embrace this identity and the people are saying to him: “be priest for us. Be Jesus Christ, the High Priest”

5. Penitential Rite -- I confess to Almighty God and to you my brothers and sisters:

We have recognized that we are in God’s presence and now the priest calls us to acknowledge our own sinfulness and unworthiness. Our offenses are against God Whose greatness is unmeasurable! Jesus Christ came to save humanity from sin and death, so we acknowledge that we are sinners in need of God’s mercy. In the silence, we admit our sins to God and ask for His forgiveness before receiving Communion. Only God can forgive sins so we need and depend on His mercy.

We are not to just feel guilty...we are to be honest and recognize our need for a savior. The priest then offers a minor absolution, which brings with it forgiveness of venial sins. (Did you know this?) Our repentance is ALWAYS met by God's mercy. The only sin God cannot forgive is the one of which we do not repent.

6. Kyrie Eleison:

In every Mass, some form of "Lord, have mercy" is said in some way. This prayer is very, very ancient; from when the Mass was said in Greek and the New Testament was written in Greek. It is so ancient that even when the Mass was celebrated in Latin, it was kept in the original Greek, which preceded it. We still implore God's mercy with the same prayer at each Mass.

7. Gloria:

Having recognized our need for God's mercy, we now offer a hymn of grateful praise to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with joy, hope, and confidence. Only during Advent and Lent is the Gloria omitted. The Gloria has been in the Mass since the second century! It was originally acclaimed at Midnight Mass on Christmas to commemorate Jesus' Birth! We glorify God by recognizing the glory He already has. The Gloria echoes the words of the angels who announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds. We summarize what our Mass does: We praise You God, we bless You, we adore You, we glorify You, we give

You thanks. We also remind ourselves to whom our action is directed: To God the almighty Father, to Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit.

Listen to Revelation 7:11-12 (read) In Heaven a great multitude along with angels are singing a hymn of praise to the glory of God!

* NOTE: THE GLORIA IS ALL ABOUT GOD...not us. This sets the tone for our worship of the Trinity.

8. The Collect -- Let us pray:

This is the final action of the Opening Rites. The priest issues a command: Let us pray. He is inviting each individual to offer up prayers in the silence of our hearts. The priest then offers a prayer that gathers together or “collects” all of the diverse petitions we just offered to God in our hearts. This prayer then becomes one prayer that is offered on behalf of all present.

Questions for consideration:

- What is your favorite hymn; why?
- Have you ever thought about the significance of your baptism and its connection to the Sign of the Cross?
- What is your favorite prayer?
- How do you see Jesus in your parish priest?
- Why do you think we confess to “Almighty God and to you my brothers and sisters”?

- What does it mean to repent of “what I have done and what I have failed to do”?
- What is a prayer that you remember from your childhood that has always stayed with you?
- For what do you praise God at Mass?
- What is the petition you most frequently bring to God?

Beginning our Walk through the Mass: The Opening Rites

1. The Procession:

“I will go the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight” (Psalm 43:4)

2. The Sign of the Cross:

“I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of His body, which is the Church.” (Colossians 1:24)

3. Greeting -- The Lord be with You:

“Behold I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

4. Response -- And with your Spirit:

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20)

5. Penitential Rite -- I confess to Almighty God and to you my brothers and sisters:

“When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the man, ‘Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.’” (Matthew 9:2)

6. Kyrie Eleison (Lord have mercy):

“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” (1 Timothy 1:15)

7. Gloria:

“And suddenly there appeared with the angel a great multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests!’” (Luke 2:13-14)

8. The Collect -- Let us pray:

“Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts before Him. God is our refuge.” (Psalm 62:8)