
The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

Father Noah Mori, Diocese of Arlington

I. Introduction: What is the Mass?

- The highest form of prayer we have as a Church.
- The supreme act of adoration before God.
- **A Dual Reality:**
 1. **A Sacrifice:** It represents the one perfect sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary. We participate in that one sacrifice and celebrate the Paschal Mystery (death and resurrection) anew.
 2. **A Meal:** A remembrance of the Last Supper ("Do this in memory of me"). It establishes communion with God and spiritual bonds with one another.

II. Historical Roots of the Mass

- The Mass is not a medieval invention; it traces back to Christ and the Apostles.
- **Three Early Historical Sources:**
 1. The Didache (~80 AD): "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles."
 2. First Apology of St. Justin Martyr (~155 AD).
 3. Apostolic Tradition by St. Hippolytus (~215 AD).
- **Early Christian Practice:** Apostles worshipped in the Temple for scripture, then gathered in homes for the "breaking of the bread."

III. Why Do We Celebrate Mass? (Four Reasons)

1. **Adoration:** Praising the infinite and omnipotent God.
2. **Thanksgiving:** The word "Eucharist" means thanksgiving.
3. **Atonement:** Expressing sorrow for sin and recognizing our need for God's mercy.
4. **Petitions:** Asking God for graces to grow in holiness.

IV. Key Concepts and Theology

- **Time and Presence:** Christ is not sacrificed again. God is outside of time. At Mass, we are transported outside of time to participate in the *one* perfect sacrifice of Calvary.
 - **Jesus' Role:** He is simultaneously the Priest, the Altar, and the Lamb of Sacrifice.
 - **The Invisible Reality:** Angels and saints are present, though unseen, offering the sacrifice with us.
 - **Source and Summit:** The Eucharist is the foundation and the highest point of our faith.
 - **Universality:** The "Catholic" (universal) Church includes the Roman (Latin) rite and 23 Eastern Catholic churches with unique traditions but the same faith.
 - **The Importance of Sunday:** The "Day of the Lord" and the day of new creation (Resurrection).
 - **Silence:** Essential moments to hear God's voice.
 - **The "Universal Priesthood":** All baptized are called to offer sacrifices. The ordained priest serves in the person of Christ (*in persona Christi*) to offer prayers on behalf of all.
 - **The Name "Mass":** From the Latin *missa*, meaning "sent." It ends with a missionary mandate.
-

V. The Structure of the Mass

The Mass is comprised of two main liturgies that form one single act of worship (like the Road to Emmaus: scripture explained, then breaking of bread).

The Four Parts:

1. Introductory Rites
 2. Liturgy of the Word
 3. Liturgy of the Eucharist
 4. Concluding Rites
-

Walkthrough: Part 1 – The Introductory Rites

- **Procession:** The Cross leads, symbolizing Jesus leading our pilgrimage.
 - **The Sanctuary:** Symbolizes the Holy of Holies in the ancient Temple.
 - **Candles:** Historical roots in catacomb masses; symbolizes Christ as the Light of the World.
 - **The Altar:** Reverenced with a kiss because it contains relics of saints and is shaped like a tomb (symbol of resurrection).
 - **The Chair:** Symbol of authority.
 - **Four Ways Christ is Present at Mass:**
 1. In the person of the Priest.
 2. In the Word proclaimed.
 3. In the Community gathered.
 4. In the Eucharist (Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity).
 - **Sign of the Cross:** Trinitarian invocation; ancient mark of salvation (Ezekiel 9).
 - **The Greeting:** "The Lord be with you" / "And with your spirit." An ancient biblical dialogue recognizing we need God's strength.
 - **Penitential Act:** Acknowledging our unworthiness to enter the "holy of holies."
 - *Kyrie Eleison* (Lord have mercy): Ancient Greek retained in the liturgy.
 - **The Gloria:** Hymn of praise rooted in the song of the angels at Bethlehem.
 - **The Collect (Opening Prayer):** The priest uses the *Orans* position (hands extended, cruciform shape) to collect our prayers and offer them to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.
-

Walkthrough: Part 2 – The Liturgy of the Word

- Over 50% of the Mass is sourced directly from Scripture.
- **The Lectionary:** A 3-year Sunday cycle ensures we hear almost the entire Bible.
- **First Reading:** Usually Old Testament; linked geographically or thematically to the Gospel.

- **Responsorial Psalm:** The prayer book of Jesus, reflecting all human emotions.
 - **Second Reading:** Usually from New Testament letters (Epistles).
 - **Alleluia:** "Praise the Lord." We stand to prepare for Christ's teaching.
 - **The Gospel:** The high point of this liturgy; proclaimed by priest or deacon.
 - **The Homily:** The bridge between the written Scripture and the Word made flesh at the altar.
 - **The Creed (Nicene Creed):** Profession of our Trinitarian faith dating back to 325 AD.
 - **Universal Prayer (Prayers of the Faithful):** Offering prayers for the Church and the world.
-

Walkthrough: Part 3 – The Liturgy of the Eucharist

- *Focus shifts from the Ambo to the Altar.*
- **Presentation of Gifts:** Symbolizes offering our daily labor and lives to God.
- **Commingling of Water and Wine:** A drop of water put into the wine symbolizes humanity being joined to Christ's divinity.
- **Washing of Hands:** Priest's prayer for interior purity.
- **The Eucharistic Prayer:** The center and high point of the Mass.
 - **Preface & Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy):** We join the song of angels in heaven.
 - **Epiclesis:** Calling down the Holy Spirit to make the gifts holy.
 - **Consecration (Institution Narrative):** The priest speaks the very words of Christ at the Last Supper.
 - **Transubstantiation:** The miracle where the substance of bread and wine becomes the substance of Christ's Body and Blood, though the appearance remains.
 - **Anamnesis (The Remembering):** Making the past event of the Passion present now.
- **The Communion Rite:**
 - **The Our Father:** The perfect preparation for Communion.

- **The Fraction Rite:** Breaking the host symbolizing Christ broken for us; mingling a piece in the chalice symbolizes the Resurrection (reunion of body and blood).
 - **Sign of Peace:** Reconciliation before approaching the altar.
 - **Lamb of God & Centurion's Prayer:** "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof.."
 - **Reception of Communion:** saying "Amen" means "I believe" (in the real presence and all church teaching).
 - **Quiet Reflection:** We become living tabernacles holding the presence of Jesus.
- **Ablutions:** Cleansing the vessels because every particle is truly Jesus.
-

Walkthrough: Part 4 – The Concluding Rites

- **Final Prayer and Blessing.**
- **Dismissal:** A missionary mandate to go forth and announce the Gospel.

Summary Reflection

In every Mass, Jesus Christ descends upon the altar in the fullness of His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. We become what we receive. The Eucharist is a foretaste and pledge of eternal life.