

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

“Nothing is greater or holier than the
sacrifice of the Mass.”

-Pope Pius IX, *Amantissimi Redemptoris* (1858)

Prayer before Study

O ineffable Creator, true source of light and wisdom, origin of all things, be pleased to cast a beam of your radiance upon the darkness of my mind.

Take from me the double darkness of sin and ignorance in which I was born. Give me quickness of understanding, a retentive memory, the ability to grasp things correctly and fundamentally, and abundant grace of expression.

Order the beginning, direct the progress and perfect the achievement of my work. You who are true God and true Man and who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Source and Summit of our Christian Life

- ▶ The Mass is the liturgical setting for the offering of the sacrament of the Eucharist, the “source and summit” of the Christian life (CCC 1324)
- ▶ The Eucharist is the source of our Christian life because in it Jesus Christ himself – sacramentally present Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.
 - ▶ Not just a symbol or wishful thinking
 - ▶ The Church has never understood the Eucharist as a mere symbol: “We do not receive these as common bread or common drink, since this food is the flesh and blood of the Incarnate Jesus.” --St Justin Martyr 150 AD

Source and Summit of our Christian Life

- ▶ The Eucharist is the summit of our Christian life because there is nothing higher to which we can strive on this earth
 - ▶ There is no higher form of worship than offering the Eucharist in the Mass
 - ▶ A million good deeds are not the equal of one Mass.
- ▶ The Eucharist represents “God with us” and is the fulfillment of our Lord’s promise to “remain with us always.” (Mt 28:20)
- ▶ “The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself.”
 - ▶ Pope St. John Paul II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 5

Source and Summit of our Christian Life

- “The Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause (i.e. it brings about that which it signifies) of that communion in the divine life and that unity of the People of God by which the Church is kept in being. It is the culmination both of God’s action sanctifying the world and of the worship we offer to God.” (*Eucharisticum mysterium* 6)
- It is both the greatest thing God does for man and the greatest thing man offers to God
- It is difficult to overstate the importance of the Eucharist to the Catholic faith

The Most Perfect Worship

- ▶ The Mass is the most perfect act of worship that man individually or the Church collectively can offer to God the Father.
- ▶ This is because in the Mass the very Person of Christ himself is offered to the Father in the “unbloody” sacrifice of the altar.
 - ▶ Our Lord’s sacrifice on the cross was bloody
 - ▶ In the Mass, **THAT SAME SACRIFICE** is offered in an unbloody manner

The Most Perfect Worship

- ▶ The Mass is a sacrifice...the one and the same sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross
 - ▶ When the Father looks at the altar, he does not see bread and wine as we do. He sees his Son, crucified on Calvary.
- ▶ We do not believe that Jesus is crucified again and again when we celebrate the Mass. It is the same sacrifice.
- ▶ This differs substantially from most Protestant understandings of the “Lord’s Supper”
 - ▶ We have an altar and a priesthood because there is a sacrifice involved in our worship

The Most Perfect Worship

- ▶ The sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross is made present upon the altar at every Mass through the words and actions of the priest. That one sacrifice is re-presented to the Father in worship/adoration, thanksgiving, expiation and petition.
- ▶ Nothing else we puny human beings can do can ever equal the perfect sacrifice of the Son of God. This is what makes the Mass the most perfect act of worship
- ▶ In addition to being the offering upon the altar, Jesus himself is the “offer-er.”
- ▶ He himself is the one High Priest – the God-Man – the only one who can worthily offer sacrifice to the Father (because Jesus is without sin himself)
- ▶ In the Mass, it is Jesus Christ himself offering his own sacrifice to his Father

The Most Perfect Worship

- ▶ The priest celebrant is ordained and conformed in such a way to Jesus Christ that Christ acts in and through him
- ▶ We can accurately say that Christ is truly the One praying the Mass and offering his own sacrifice to his Father.
 - ▶ As with all the Sacraments, the priest acts with the power Christ gave him, but it is truly Christ who is the “actor”

Two Forms of Mass

- ▶ The Mass in the Roman Rite is currently offered in two forms:
 - ▶ The *Ordinary Form*, which is the form celebrated in most Catholic parishes that is based on the revision of the liturgy done in 1969 (Vatican Council II)
 - ▶ and the *Extraordinary Form*, which is the Mass celebrated according to the rubrics in place in the centuries prior, sometimes called the “Tridentine Mass” or the “Traditional Latin Mass”

What is the Mass?

- ▶ The Eucharist performs at once two functions: that of a *sacrament* and that of a *sacrifice*.
- ▶ The sacrament is intended privately for the sanctification of the soul, whereas the sacrifice serves primarily to glorify God by adoration, thanksgiving, prayer, and expiation.
 - ▶ The recipient of the sacrifice is the Father, who receives the sacrifice of his only-begotten Son;
 - ▶ We are the recipients of the sacrament, who receive it for our own good.
- ▶ Notice that nowhere in this definition is the word “entertainment”

Parts of the Mass

- ▶ The Mass is divided up into main two parts:
 - ▶ Liturgy of the Word
 - ▶ Liturgy of the Eucharist.
- ▶ The Liturgy of the Eucharist is further subdivided into three parts:
 - ▶ Offertory
 - ▶ Consecration
 - ▶ Communion
- ▶ All these parts together form a single act of worship.

Procession

- ▶ Mass begins with the Introductory Rites, specifically the procession of the priest and ministers into the sanctuary, accompanied by an entrance ‘antiphon’ or other song.
 - ▶ The procession is reminiscent of the entrance of Christ into Jerusalem, where he offered his sacrifice upon the cross. In the Mass, he will do the same thing
- ▶ The priest (and deacon) will genuflect to the tabernacle and then will kiss the altar, in reverence to the place where the sacrifice will be made present.
- ▶ “In the name of the Father...” The priest begins the Mass in the name of the Most Holy Trinity, invoking the presence of God
 - ▶ “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am present among them.” (Mt 18:20)

Penitential Rite

- ▶ “The Lord be with you.” This is the official greeting by the priest.
- ▶ A few (brief) remarks may be made about the theme of the readings, the Saint of the day, the season or to acknowledge any special intention for the Mass, etc.
- ▶ The penitential rite (one of several forms) comes next, in which we acknowledge our sinfulness and unworthiness as we come into his presence, and we ask for his mercy.
 - ▶ This priest prays, “May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to life everlasting.”
 - ▶ This absolution is NOT the same as sacramental confession.
- ▶ The prayer, *Kyrie eleison*, (Lord, have mercy) is one of the most ancient elements of the Mass

Gloria

- ▶ The *Gloria* (or ‘Glory to God’) is then sung. It takes its Latin name from the first line of the hymn: *Gloria in excelsis Deo*.
- ▶ It begins with the words of the angels at Christ’s birth (Lk 2:14) and goes on to give praise and honor to the Blessed Trinity.
- ▶ Traditionally, its institution in the Mass is attributed to Pope Telesphorus (+139) who ordered the Gloria to be sung at Christmas Mass
- ▶ By around the year 1100, its usage was extended to most Sundays of the year.
 - ▶ The tone of the hymn is joyful, and as such is not deemed fitting in times of penance, such as Lent and Advent.
- ▶ Otherwise, it is sung on all Sundays, Solemnities and Feasts

Collect

- ▶ The prayers immediately after the Gloria are called the *Collect* or the opening prayer.
- ▶ The meaning of the word *Collect* is unclear:
 - ▶ Pope Innocent III (+1216) says that in this prayer the priest “collects” together the prayers of all the people.
- ▶ These prayers prepare the believer to hear the Word of God and be disposed to receive the graces God wants to bestow upon us through the Mass.
- ▶ The Collect is typically prayed to the Father, through the Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit

The Liturgy of the Word (Sunday)

- ▶ Readings from Scripture are next proclaimed
- ▶ As we discussed earlier, there is a three-year cycle for Sunday readings
 - ▶ Old Testament (or Acts of the Apostles)
 - ▶ Psalm
 - ▶ New Testament Epistle
 - ▶ The Gospel reading

The Gospel

- ▶ The Gospels are the heart of all the Scriptures because they are our principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Savior Jesus Christ (CCC 125)
- ▶ The Gospel reading is the most important liturgical reading of the Mass, and as such is distinguished by several factors:
 - ▶ Only a deacon or priest can proclaim the Gospel.
 - ▶ The reading of the Gospel is also accompanied by different responses.

The Gospel

- ▶ The reading of the Gospel is surrounded by various other rites.
 - ▶ Blessing of the deacon
 - ▶ Acclamation (Alleluia)
 - ▶ Procession
 - ▶ Evangelarium
 - ▶ Incense
 - ▶ Sign of the cross upon our forehead, lips and heart
 - ▶ Standing

Homily

- ▶ The word *homily* comes from an old Greek word meaning communication with a person, or dialogue.
- ▶ The homily has always been a part of the Mass, and insofar as it consists of an explanation of the readings, it predates Catholicism as part of Israelite synagogue service.
- ▶ However, unlike in Judaism or Protestant Christianity, the sermon/homily is emphatically *not* the center of the worship.
 - ▶ As the Sacrifice of the Mass is the climax of the liturgy, the homily has always been secondary to the Eucharist

Credo

- ▶ After the Homily, if it is a Sunday or Solemnity, the Creed is recited.
- ▶ The profession of the Creed was originally connected with baptism, as a preparation for that sacrament and as a means of scrutinizing the catechumens to ensure they held to all things believed by the Church.
- ▶ The Nicene Creed was written in 325 AD in response to several heresies, and its recitation during Mass became standard by the Middle Ages.

General Intercessions (Prayers of the Faithful)

- ▶ The General Intercessions are a series of prayers at the conclusion of the Liturgy of the Word, called “general” to distinguish them from the specific intercessions made for the Pope and the Bishop during the Eucharistic Prayer
- ▶ The practice is very ancient, probably going back to Jewish synagogue worship, and is mentioned by St. Paul in 2 Tim. 2:1-2
- ▶ Traditionally, the General Intercessions are meant to be prayers for the Church, political authorities, those in distress, the sick and those who have died.

Offertory

- ▶ The Offertory marks the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
- ▶ The Offertory refers to the offering of the bread and wine to God prior to their consecration and is often carried forward in a small procession. Food and support for the poor may also be brought to the altar area.
- ▶ This is also the time when a collection for the ongoing support of the Church is taken up.
 - ▶ Please be generous. Everything that makes our parish run comes from the collection basket!!
- ▶ The prayers of the priest during the offertory invoke God's blessing on him and ask that he receive the bread and wine to be consecrated. "Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Almighty Father..."

The Eucharistic Prayer

- ▶ The Eucharistic Prayer is at the heart of the Mass.
- ▶ It begins with the phrase, “The Lord be with you...” The phrase, “Lift up your hearts” denotes that we are now being elevated beyond our mundane realm and are ascending into the heavenly worship around God’s throne.
- ▶ We enter the central part of the Mass at this point, which is the making present and presenting of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to the Father.
- ▶ Innumerable hosts of saints and angels are present and participate in glorifying God through the offering of his divine Son.
- ▶ If only we could see what actually happens...

Important Elements in the Eucharistic Prayers

- ▶ There are four primary Eucharistic Prayers. Eucharistic Prayer I (called the Roman Canon) is the oldest, the others being more recent additions.
- ▶ Sanctus: The Sanctus consists of the refrain, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts,” and has the twofold effect
 - ▶ of reminding us of God’s holiness and the majesty of the sacrifice of the Mass
 - ▶ as well as recalling to us the angels of the heavenly court, who chant this refrain endlessly around God’s throne (Is 6:3; Rev 4:8).
 - ▶ The congregation kneels after the Sanctus in preparation for the sacramental presence of Christ’s sacrifice upon the altar

Important Elements in the Eucharistic Prayers

- ▶ Epiclesis: The epiclesis is the calling down of the Holy Spirit upon the gifts.
 - ▶ For example, in Eucharistic Prayer II, it is found in the words, “Lord, let your Spirit come upon these gifts like the dewfall, that they may become for us the Body and +Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.”
 - ▶ The priest will stretch out his hands over the gifts of bread and wine at this point

Important Elements in the Eucharistic Prayers

- ▶ Words of Consecration: or “Institution Narrative”
 - ▶ It consists of the priest repeating the words of Christ at the Last Supper: “Take this all of you and eat of it, for this is My Body, which will be given up for you”...”Take this all of you and drink from it, for this is the Chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.”
 - ▶ The priest typically bows his head while saying these words of consecration and is instructed to take special care to speak them clearly and distinctly.
 - ▶ Transubstantiation has taken place, Christ emerges in the sacrament, and the Sacrifice of the Mass is present on the altar.
 - ▶ In recognition of this fact, the priest first elevates the sacred Host or Chalice to show them to the people and then genuflects before them.
- ▶ This is THE moment!!!

Important Elements in the Eucharistic Prayers

- ▶ Mysterium Fidei: Immediately following the consecration comes the proclaiming of the “Mystery of Faith,” in which Christ’s true presence is affirmed.
 - ▶ It is a direct address to Christ himself present in the sacrament.
 - ▶ “We proclaim your death, O Lord, and profess your resurrection, until you come again”
 - ▶ Almost all the prayers of the Mass are directed to the Father. Here, we address the Son, now present upon the altar, proclaiming his saving death and resurrection, and praying for salvation.

Important Elements in the Eucharistic Prayers

- ▶ The remainder of the prayer consists of praise of God's gracious gift of salvation through Christ's saving Passion and petitions for the Church, the living and the dead, and beseeching God to admit us to share eternal life with the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints.
- ▶ Minor Elevation: This elevation is where the priest raises the host and chalice and says, "Through Him, with Him, and in Him..."
 - ▶ It can be likened to a final presentation of the Holy Sacrifice of Christ to the Father with our gratitude for his mercy.
- ▶ Amen: The people answer 'amen' signifying their assent and participation with all the prayers made to God by the priest.

Pater Noster

- ▶ The people now stand and pray the Lord's Prayer.
- ▶ This prayer, as part of the liturgy, is very ancient. It relates to the Eucharist by the phrase "give us this day our daily bread," always seen as a reference to the supernatural bread of the Eucharist.
- ▶ It is mentioned as early as the *Didache* (c. 70 AD); its present place in the liturgy, prior to Communion, was fixed by Pope St. Gregory the Great (+604).

Pax (Sign of Peace)

- ▶ It is a very ancient practice that is mentioned as early as 150 AD by St. Justin Martyr, who writes: "When we have completed the prayers, we salute one another with a kiss"
- ▶ The sign of peace was instituted to fulfill Christ's command in Matthew 5:23-24: *"Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift."*
- ▶ By this sign, we demonstrate our desire and intent to live in peace with our brothers and sisters

Agnus Dei (Lamb of God)

- ▶ The hymn Agnus Dei is chanted during the breaking of the host by the priest.
- ▶ It recalls Christ's role as the sacrificial Lamb of God (Rev 5:6). The chant is directed to Christ specifically.
- ▶ Meanwhile, the host is split, representing the breaking of Christ's body on the cross.
- ▶ Once again, we beseech God for mercy, especially as we now dare to approach the altar to receive the sacred Body and Blood of the Lord

“Ecce, Agnus Dei”

- ▶ The broken host is held aloft for the veneration of the faithful. It is again identified as Christ, the slain Lamb of God, by the words, “Behold, the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world.”
- ▶ With the response, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof,” the congregation echoes the faithful words of the humble centurion whose servant Jesus healed. (Mt 8:8)
 - ▶ We beg Jesus to ‘say the word’ and heal us from our sinfulness.
- ▶ The priest then receives Communion, followed by the deacons, servers and the faithful

Communion

- ▶ The Communion rite begins the third section of the Eucharistic liturgy, where the faithful receive the Body and Blood of the Lord.
 - ▶ It is a moment of profound significance, wonder and awe
- ▶ The priest's Communion, together with that of the faithful, is the culmination of the Mass
- ▶ Reception of Communion is not obligatory. Do not receive if you are in a state of grave mortal sin. Repent and go to confession first.
- ▶ There is a proper and an improper way to receive the Holy Eucharist
- ▶ DO NOT leave after receiving Communion!!!

Post-Communion Prayer & Dismissal

- ▶ The Mass concludes with the post-communion prayer and the dismissal, “Go forth, the Mass is ended,” or another approved dismissal
- ▶ Private devotions after this point are appropriate and encouraged.
 - ▶ Traditional devotions after Mass include the St. Michael Prayer, the Rosary, Our Lady of Perpetual Help devotions or various prayers of thanksgiving.

In Summary...

- ▶ The Mass is our highest act of worship
- ▶ As the People of God, we have a grave obligation to worship God on the day he commands and in the manner he commands. (i.e., we must come to Mass on Sundays)
- ▶ Let your Sunday revolve around Mass, not the other way around.
- ▶ Mass is not a burden – it is a joy and a gift, in which we worship God, hear his word, lift up our prayers, are fed with his Body and Blood and receive his blessing together with all the faithful. We give witness of our faith in God to those around us, to our children and families and to the world!

Quotes about the Holy Mass

- ▶ “Man should tremble, the world should quake, all Heaven should be deeply moved when the Son of God appears on the altar in the hands of the priest.”^[L]_[SEP] St. Francis of Assisi (+1225)
- ▶ “No human tongue can enumerate the favors that trace back to the Sacrifice of the Mass. The sinner is reconciled with God; the just man becomes more upright; sins are wiped away; vices are uprooted; virtue and merit increases; and the devil’s schemes are frustrated.”^[L]_[SEP] St. Lawrence Justinian (+1456)

Quotes about the Holy Mass

- ▶ “O you deluded people, what are you doing? Why do you not hasten to the churches to hear as many Masses as you can? Why do you not imitate the angels, who, when a Holy Mass is celebrated, come down in myriads from Paradise and take their stations about our altars in adoration to intercede for us?” -St. Leonard of Port Maurice (+1751)
- ▶ “Know, O Christian, that the Mass is the holiest act of religion. You cannot do anything to glorify God more, nor profit your soul more, than by devoutly assisting at it, and assisting as often as possible.”^[SEP]-St. Peter Julian Eymard (+1868)

Quotes about the Holy Mass

- ▶ “From this moment on, live the Eucharist fully; be people for whom the Holy Mass, Communion, and Eucharistic adoration are the center and summit of their whole life.” – Pope St. John Paul II (+2005)
- ▶ “Put all the good works in the world against the Holy Mass; they will be as a grain of sand beside a mountain.” – St. John Vianney (+1859)
- ▶ “It would be easier for the world to survive without the sun than to do without Holy Mass.” - St. Pio of Petrelcina (+1968)
- ▶ “If we really understood the Mass, we would die of joy.” - St. John Vianney (+1859)

Next Week...

- ▶ The Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints
- ▶ This Thursday, Jan 14 at 7pm – *Presence*, part 2

- ▶ Catechumens (non-baptized)
 - ▶ Save the Date...
 - ▶ Sunday, February 21, the first Sunday of Lent
 - ▶ Rite of Sending – 9:30 Mass at Nativity
 - ▶ Rite of Election – afternoon time TBA at the Cathedral of St. Mary

- ▶ Sources: NABRE, Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), *Catholic Christianity* by Peter J. Kreeft, unamsanctamcatholicam.org