

Source and Summit

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You Are Worth More

“Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; *you are worth more*” (MT 10:30-31). Picture a mid-August month: fields are lush with crops, students are entering their next grade, and new projects have been undertaken throughout our communities. There is growth all around and in each of these areas, the growth reflects a preexisting potential (e.g. for there to be lush crops you need a seed, for a person to be a high school student they first need to be in grade school, etc.). For there to be this growth or this “more,” there first is a potential ... a potential for more beauty, efficiency, and fullness. Everything has the potential to be something more. *What about you?*

As Jesus was preparing to send his disciples, this was a key and essential point He wanted to instill in them: “do not be afraid, you are worth more.” It’s a message to not settle, to never think “this is it” or “this is as good as it gets.” Rather, you are worth more, there is more to yourself right now than you can imagine ... but our Lord can see it. No matter what others think of you, no matter where you are in life right now (remember Jesus called disciples with all sorts of different backgrounds), no matter what happened in the past, you are worth more. There is a potential in you, built and designed uniquely from day one, waiting to be actualized. Jesus instills this message not to simply spark speculation about what awaits; rather, He knows the danger of settling and living mediocrity, or worse. It would be like a seed planted but never growing and leaving behind a barren field, or the student never taking that next step and becoming that mature young individual. It’s not only sad for the individual but think of all the people that will not be influenced because he did not let his potential become actual.

So, how does the potential become actual? Quite simply, some outside trigger is needed. A seed needs the right water and nutrient inputs to grow, a student needs the outside instruction and commitment to the studies, and community projects need a vision and dedication of talented workers. The “actual” never just happens, you need an outside trigger/force. *What fundamental trigger did our Lord design to unleash our potential? It is the Mass!* This is fundamentally what the Mass is all about: getting us to be the person that we are always meant to be. If you want more out of life, if you believe and trust that our Lord has more in store for you, if you trust that *you are worth more*, I invite you to read the upcoming articles of this series as we explore how the Mass is designed to bring the best out in you!



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“He found it very good” (Gn 1:31)

How do I know what my potential is? How do I know what I am made for? How do I reach this end? Certainly there will be a nuance to each of our stories; however, there is also a common denominator. A denominator that is a necessary element for each of our stories to unfold as they are intended. This denominator is revealed in the very first page of the Bible. While we are familiar with the creation story, it is important to remember that the Bible’s primary intention is not to tell us how the world was made, but rather *why* it was made. What is clear from the first page is that everything is made from God and for God. Our Lord is that common denominator, and this means that He is the fundamental and necessary element in understanding our purpose and reaching that end...in other words, our full story can never be understood and discovered without Him!

While the creation story stress this point in different ways, I will highlight three of these ways. First is with the *number “seven.”* The Bible loves to use numbers because they help to express completeness or incompleteness. “Seven” conveys completeness. Hence, the number given to the devil is 666; thus conveying that he is absolutely incomplete, and its repeated three times because he dared to imitate the three faces of the Trinity. So, notice with the story of creation, it’s “seven” days and thus expressing completeness to our Lord’s plan. Notice further, what brings about the completeness to the overall plan, what happened on the seventh day: it is time with our Lord. God not only makes the picture, but also completes it. To isolate or remove God from the picture, then we are back to “6.”

Secondly, *the language used* to describe the formation of people suggests that we can only be understood when God is in the picture. Throughout the creation story, it says God “makes” different things. But, three times it says he “created” (“*bara*” in Hebrew), for the creation of matter (1:1), for life (1:21), and then humanity (1:27). *Bara*’ does not mean to create something like a cake; rather, it’s to make something new that was not there before. When we make things, we depend upon other things already in existence. To create something out of nothing, this is an action that only God can do. Thus, by using this term, the Bible is stressing that who we are as a person—our essence, our rights, our purpose—is not and can not be independent from God; rather, we are deeply rooted in Him. Driving this point home is the intimate detail of 2:7 where our Lord formed our bodies from the earth (the matter He *created*, 1:1) and breathed His life (which He *created*, 1:21) into us (i.e. the creation of our soul). Perhaps this whole intimate point is most beautifully expressed in our Lord’s words to Jeremiah: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you” (Jer 1:5).

Thirdly, when God is fully in the picture, look at how the rest of life goes. Adam and Eve are in a lush garden, a place that is life-giving. They are told not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and bad...in other words, God does not even want them to be exposed to badness. There is a perfect balance between the rest of creation and Adam/Eve. Finally, the relationship between Adam and Eve is itself whole/perfect. Did you ever wonder what was the significance of the verse, “They were naked, but felt no shame” (2:25)? It expresses that when God is in the picture, we don’t focus on the shallow and “skin-deep” level of the person; rather, we go to the heart and know that they too are a child of our Lord made in “His image and likeness” (1:27) ... that perspective is the foundation of true relationships.

“God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good.” That’s the fundamental plan, a *very good* plan, and plan that only unfolds for each of us when our Lord has His proper place in our lives. What does our life look like when God is not in the picture? Stayed tuned for next week.

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“Where are you?” (Gn 3:9)

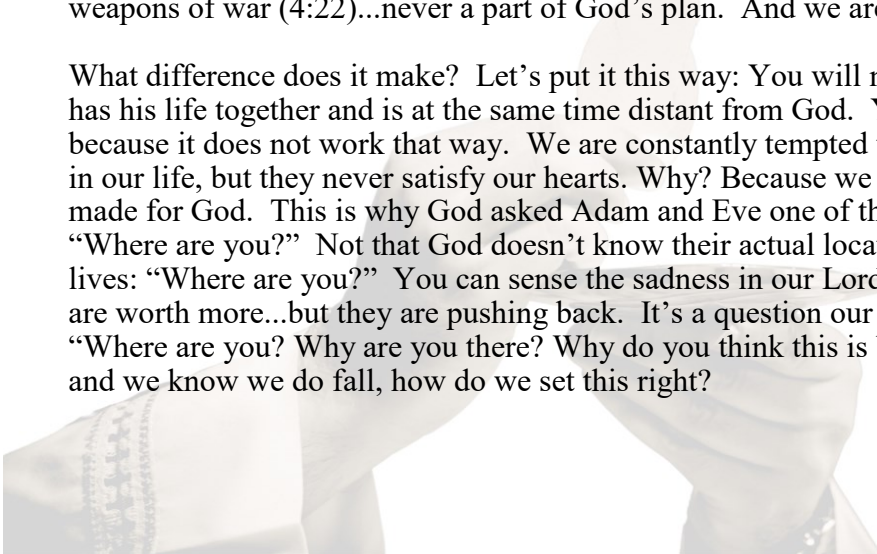
So what’s the big deal? If I cannot experience it, feel it, sense it, know it, why should I care? Being pragmatic people who like to cut to the chase, we like to know the difference something makes and consequently the seriousness we should afford it. So far, we explored that our Lord sees a potential within us that we cannot fully appreciate and it can only be unlocked by keeping Him fully in the picture. Okay, how seriously should we take this? How bad can it really get when God is not in the picture? The Bible’s answer: It can be a living hell!

Chapter 3 of Genesis contains many details of the “Fall,” and underneath these details there are some fundamental movements that are true to any of us who have fallen. First, the fundamental temptation for us all: to take God out of the picture and to do it our own way. This is always the first step, it’s my way and not our Lord’s way. Classically we call this pride. Notice the essential temptation of the serpent: If you do this then “you will be like gods” (3:5). It’s a removal of God from the equation, it’s going back to “6.” The irony is if they stayed with God, our Lord was making them “god-like” because He was sharing His life with them. Regardless, this is the first step for anyone who has fallen. The second step is that it begins to “twist” our hearts and change us. Thirdly, it begins to change the world around us.

The details of Chapter 3 and those shortly after capture this dynamic perfectly. It’s like the “snowball effect”: It seems small, but in a short time it gets bigger and bigger, and then out of control. Notice the first effect for Adam and Eve, they realized they were naked; they no longer saw each other in that pure and beautiful way. Not that their eyes were physically altered, but their twisted hearts prevented them from perceiving what truly matters. Secondly, “they hid themselves from the Lord” (3:8)...now they are completely going against the original plan. We see that this affects their experience of life (3:16-19); they struggle to find joy, happiness, and meaning...no wonder.

Notice too, up to this point, Eve was never named. To name something suggest dominion over it (2:19). After the “Fall,” Adam names “Eve” (3:20)...the Bible’s way of showing how inequality enters into this world (i.e. a sinful and prideful heart). In short time we see the first murder in the Bible with Cain and Able (Ch. 4). The original plan was for a man and woman to “become one body”...a beautiful plan, but with the sinful heart we see the first case of bigamy in the Bible with Lamech, a descendant of the sinful Cain (4:18). After him we have Tubulcain, the first creator of weapons of war (4:22)...never a part of God’s plan. And we are only at chapter four!

What difference does it make? Let’s put it this way: You will never find a person in the Bible who has his life together and is at the same time distant from God. You won’t find it there or in this life because it does not work that way. We are constantly tempted to make other values and things “gods” in our life, but they never satisfy our hearts. Why? Because we are not made for those things, we are made for God. This is why God asked Adam and Eve one of the saddest questions in the entire Bible: “Where are you?” Not that God doesn’t know their actual location, but spiritually speaking in their lives: “Where are you?” You can sense the sadness in our Lord’s voice because he knows that they are worth more...but they are pushing back. It’s a question our Lord asks us every time we fall: “Where are you? Why are you there? Why do you think this is better?” If we trust in our Lord’s plan and we know we do fall, how do we set this right?



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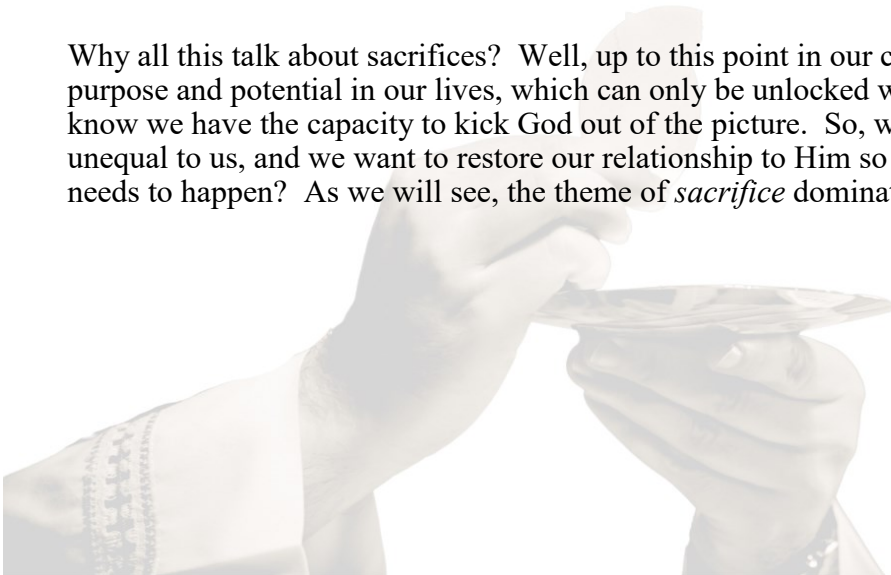
“Sorry Just Won’t Cut It”

One thing we can’t deny is that we are relational people. We are born of a person, we grow in a family, we have friends, we live in a society, etc. Relationships are great, they can build us up, they are there when we need them the most, they help us achieve heights and experiences that we can’t do on our own. However, we also know we can screw relationships up, and when that happens how do we fix it? One word: *sacrifice*. A sacrifice is an act where we give up something of ourselves in order to make things right again. It’s an act that makes up for the bad act, and depending on how bad the act was determines the necessary sacrifice. For example, if you upset your spouse and you want to amend this bad act, you need a good act; so, you apologize. The apology is a kind of sacrifice where the person gives up his pride to express his care for her. This sacrifice heals the relationship because (1) it acknowledges the wrong that was done, and (2) serves as a vessel of love to apply to the wound of the relationship. Now, if you really upset your spouse, you might sense that a simple apology is insufficient and something more is needed. A simple apology may not adequately acknowledge the wrong committed nor apply the needed healing love. So, the spouse may not only have to apologize but also offer a gift, like flowers. This is a greater kind of sacrifice because not only is the person giving up his pride in apologizing, but also his time to get the flowers and his money to buy them. This sacrifice more adequately acknowledges the wrong that was committed and thus not taking the other person for granted, and is a greater expression of love.

So far we just considered sacrifices between two people who are relatively equal (e.g. two spouses, two friends, etc.). But what if the relationship was unequal, what kind of sacrifice would be needed then? For example, your relationship with the state of Ohio, if you get caught speeding, will a simple apology cut it? Probably not; rather, you will be required to pay a ticket. Nonetheless, this too is a type of sacrifice: giving up of something important (i.e. your money) to (1) acknowledge the wrong committed to the state, and (2) serve as a vessel to heal the wound (the assumption being that by paying the ticket we are learning from our mistake). Notice, when the relationship is unequal and the lower party offends the higher party, a greater sacrifice is needed to restore the relationship. Let’s take another example, if you crash your neighbors party uninvited, only a simple sacrifice will be needed to set things right again with your neighbor because you two are relatively equal. However, if you crash the party of the President of the United States at the White House, you will be looking at jail time. Why? Because, in a sense, we are not equal to the President and so a greater sacrifice will be needed.

Why all this talk about sacrifices? Well, up to this point in our conversation, we saw that we have a purpose and potential in our lives, which can only be unlocked when God is in the picture, and yet we know we have the capacity to kick God out of the picture. So, when we offend God who is infinitely unequal to us, and we want to restore our relationship to Him so that we can reach our potential, what needs to happen? As we will see, the theme of *sacrifice* dominates the rest of the Bible.

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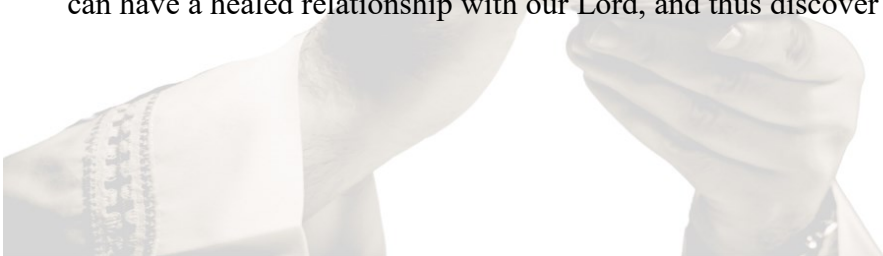
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*“For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins”
(Heb 10:3)*

We have seen that our Lord has a plan for us and to reach this potential He needs to be in the picture; but yet, we have the capacity to screw it up by kicking Him out. We know from our own experiences that in order to heal a broken relationship, some kind of *sacrifice* is needed to make up for the bad act and to be a vessel of love that provides the healing. It should be no surprise then that one of the first acts we hear of after the Fall is that of people making sacrifices to God (cf. Cain and Able, 4:3-4). In fact, *sacrifice* will remain a constant theme throughout the rest of the Old Testament...the desire to make things right again, to get closer to God, to thank Him, to allow His power more fully present in their lives, and all of this through *sacrifices* so that they can reach their potential. The first thing Noah does when he gets off the Ark is build an altar to *sacrifice* (GN 8:20); when Abraham (the father of Judaism) hears God's calling he builds an altar for *sacrifice* (GN 12:7); Moses's (1200s BC) very first request of Pharaoh was not to “let my people go,” but was to let them go “in the desert that we may offer *sacrifice* to the Lord” (EX 5:3); while in the desert Moses outlines in the entire book of Leviticus how *sacrifices* were to be conducted by priests; once Joshua finally led the Israelites into the promised land they offered *sacrifice* (JOS 8:30); when Saul was accepted as the first King of Israel (1020 BC) a *sacrifice* was made (1 SM 11:15); the second King David (1000 BC) too made *sacrifices* especially when the Ark of the Covenant was finally presented in Jerusalem (2 SM 6:17); the third King Solomon (950 BC) not only offered *sacrifices* (1 KGS 3:15) but also built the Temple in Jerusalem (1 KGS 5:19) that will remain the place and point of reference for all *sacrifices* amongst Israel up to the time of Jesus. When the Old Testaments Prophets began to enter the scene, they too were concerned about correct *sacrifice* amongst the people. For example, Hosea (750-730 BC) noticed that people were too routine with their sacrifices to God and said God “desires love not *sacrifice*” (HOS 6:6), a line repeated by Jesus (MT 9:13); while in the belly of the whale, Jonah (700 BC) vowed to *sacrifice* to our Lord (JON 2:10); after a time of exile, Ezekiel (592-571 BC) tries to get people back on track with clear laws for *sacrifice* within the renewed Temple (EZ 43-47); and even the last Old Testament story of the Maccabean revolt against the Greeks focused on restoring the Temple for right *sacrifice* (1 MC 5:36-40).

These are only a few examples, but it is essential to get this point if we want to appreciate what Jesus is responding to. Every Old Testament book has at least one implicit reference to right *sacrifice*...again why, because it's the means to set things right so that God can help them discover their potential. However, **there is a problem**: if a sacrifice is meant to make up for an offense, but the gravity of an offense against God is of infinite value since God is infinitely greater than us, how can any of these single sacrifices (typically of animals and crops) ever make up for that infinite offense? They cannot and so we are stuck. Perhaps God could pretend like we never transgressed against Him? But this too creates problems: (1) He would be denying our free will by removing our option to kick Him out of the picture...it would be like a “shot-gun wedding” with God; also, (2) it would be uncharitable for us not to learn from our mistakes because we are bound to repeat them since we never addressed the underlining issue going on in our hearts; finally, (3) there is a question of justice if we expect to get away with every transgression we make. So, can this problem ever be solved so that we can have a healed relationship with our Lord, and thus discover our full potential again?

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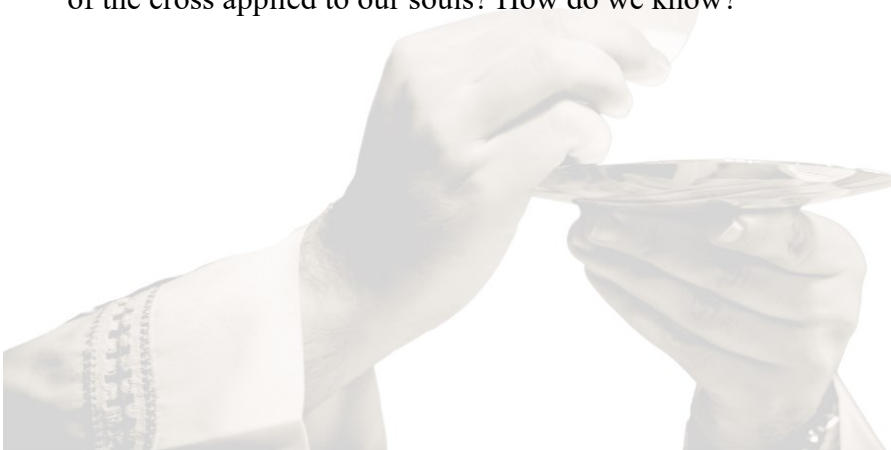
“Behold the Lamb of God”

In the famous Exodus story of Moses and the Israelites, there is the dramatic scene of Passover where, to escape the grip of slavery, they had to apply the blood of a lamb without blemish to their homes (EX 12). Sounds gory, but the idea is that this is a clear way for the people to say “I’m in” or “I’m out.” Furthermore, the intention was clear: to leave this life that is holding me back and get to the Promised Land. Moses even told them: “You shall eat like those who are in flight” (EX 12:11). Since the first years of Christianity, the Church Fathers have seen the Exodus event serving also as a metaphor for our lives: We are born into a Fallen World that tries to hold us back (slavery), we are meant for more (promised land), and now we find ourselves in this in-between time (desert).

Sticking with this metaphor and our conversation from the past weeks, the question remains: What lamb could be sacrificed that can free us from this deepest sense of slavery and allow us to experience our fullness with our Lord? The answer: the Lamb of God = Jesus (whose nature is both divine and human). The problem before is that no sacrifice was ever of infinite value...they were just animals and crops. Jesus though is God; thus, *He is of infinite value*. The other problem is that since humanity offended God, they needed to offer the sacrifice on their behalf; but, how will this work? Solution: Jesus also took on our human nature and joined our humanity, He “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (JN 1:14). From the very beginning, He was sent by the Father to be both the sacrifice of infinite value and the priest who conducted the sacrifice. Thus, when John the Baptist identifies Jesus to the people, he points to the essence of what Jesus is all about: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (JN 1:29). When St. Paul tries to explain the importance of Jesus to fellow Jews, he stresses Jesus’ role in this profound sacrifice: “But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be...he entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with His own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption” (HEB 9:11-12). In other words, (1) by becoming man Jesus acted on behalf of humanity, and (2) by being God His sacrifice was of infinite value and could make up for the infinite damage caused by our offense. **Finally, with Jesus, we have the sacrifice that can heal our broken relationship with God and allow us to experience our full potential.**

Going back to the Exodus event of Moses and the Israelites, remember that they had a choice to apply the blood of the lamb to their homes. They were not forced, nor does God force us. Our Lord desires a loving relationship that is freely chosen. What this means for the sacrifice of the Cross is that (1) the sacrifice was made on our behalf; but, (2) we need to allow the effects of the sacrifice to be applied to our soul. With the Israelites in the Exodus, there was a prescribed way (i.e. the applying of the blood to their homes) so that they know if they are in or not. How are the effects of the sacrifice of the cross applied to our souls? How do we know?

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“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”

So, what do we know so far: (1) to reach our potential we need God in the picture; (2) we have the capacity to kick God out of the picture with our sin; (3) to heal any broken relationship some kind of sacrifice is needed by the offenders; (4) no human sacrifice could be adequate considering the gravity of what it means to offend God; (5) pretending like the offense never happened would deny our free will, ultimately being uncharitable to us, and be unjust; (6) so to solve this problem for our sake the Father sent the Son; (7) Jesus’ sacrifice of Himself is of infinite value and in a real infinite amount of Grace was made available by that action since His nature is divine; (8) Jesus also is able to make the sacrifice on behalf of humanity since He also had a human nature; (9) with Jesus’ sacrifice we now have access to the love/grace that can restore our relationship with God. Alright, one question remains: *How do we access the treasury of graces earned by Jesus’ sacrifice?* **It’s the Mass!**

At Last Supper, Jesus instituted the sacramental elements of the Mass and connected them to His physical sacrifice the next day on Good Friday. The actions and signs of Jesus at the Last Supper are not simply symbols; rather, they are sacramental, which means they contain and provide grace...the grace won from the sacrifice of the Cross. **The Mass is not a new sacrifice; rather, it is a representation the Sacrifice of the Cross!** In other words, Jesus Himself made the essential actions and motions of the Mass to be effective signs that represent the Sacrifice of the Cross. Remember, because Jesus Himself was sacrificed and He is Divine, His sacrifice is of infinite value...the Mass is that mechanism that puts us in touch with this infinite treasury of grace. How do we know this?

Let’s consider Jesus’ own words at the Last Supper: “Take and eat, this is my body”...“Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins” (MT 26:26-28; cf. MK 14:22-24, LK 22:19-20). Notice first, it’s no longer ordinary bread and wine, it’s now sacramental as its essence becomes the body and blood of Jesus. Secondly, Jesus connects His sacrifice with the motions of the Last Supper when He says this wine is His blood being shed. Keep in mind that the Last Supper was celebrated in the context of a Passover meal (MT 26:17; MK 14:12; LK 22:7; JN 13:1), indicating that Jesus is the true and definitive Lamb that will get us out of slavery and to the Promised Land. Thirdly, we can be connected most fully to Jesus’ sacrificial act by consuming the sacrament of His body and blood...hence why He says to eat it and drink it, in other words, make it apart of you. This is akin to the Israelites applying the blood of the lamb to their home before the Exodus, now we have the Lamb of God! To be clear, this is not simply going through the motions...rather, it’s physically consuming the sacrament and making communion with our Lord in our hearts at the same time! It’s a time to fully engage our body and soul, just like Jesus did during His own sacrifice, so that we can more fully experience the power of this sacrifice. One can sense the apostles even struggled with this at the Last Supper considering their weakness during the Agony of the Garden, and they all bailed Jesus (except John) at the foot of the cross.

To recap: (A) the sacrifice of Jesus is only one event — it began at the Last Supper and was completed on Calvary; (B) it is represented to us at Mass through Jesus’ establishment of sacramental signs; (C) we need access to the power of this sacrifice if we want to reach our full potential; and (D) we can access this power through our sincere and reverent participation at Mass. Why sincere and reverent? Because we are simply following Jesus’ model on the cross when He tells the Father, “Into your hands I commend my spirit” (LK 23:46).

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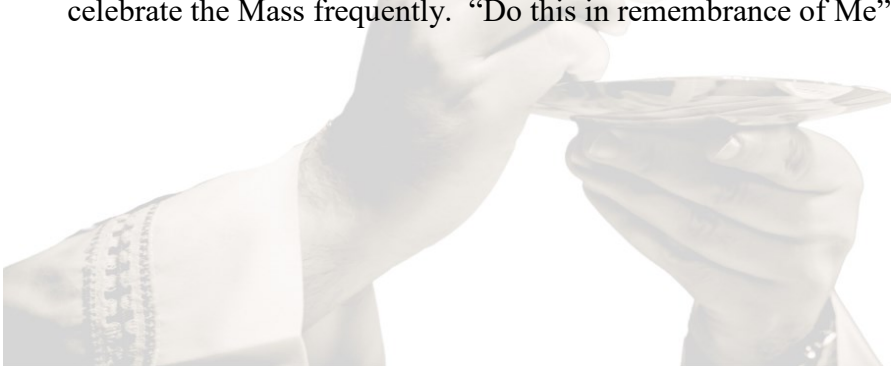
“Do This in Remembrance of Me”

Last week in article 7, we saw how the Sacrifice of the Cross is not simply remembered during a Mass; rather, every Mass represents THE Sacrifice of the Cross and thus makes available the treasury of grace won by Christ. So, it may be wondered if that is the case, why do we have multiple Masses? Wouldn't my attendance at just one Mass be sufficient? Well, one Mass would be sufficient *if* we never sinned again. However, the more and more we reflect on our lives we realize we need all the help we can get! For this reason, Jesus Himself tells us to “Do this in memory of me” (LK 22:19). St. Paul quotes Jesus as expecting this to be repeated “for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup” (1 COR 11:26). Again, this is not to make us feel bad about ourselves; but rather, to give the clearest chance to be in communion with our Lord.

When speaking of the Eucharist and the Mass, St. Thomas Aquinas called it “food for the journey.” It's the idea that is provides the spiritual sustenance for our soul...and there is so much that weighs our soul down in this fallen world. Frankly, the idea actually goes back to Jesus who connects the sacrament of the Mass with the Manna in the desert as the Israelites traveled to the Promised Land. In the Exodus story, the Israelites complained about taking this journey to the Promised Land, to the point that they wanted to return back to slavery in Egypt (*This may sound strange, but to be honest, how many of us fall back into the same bad habits even though we know they are not in our best interest!*). The Lord intervenes by sending the sustenance they need: “Bread from Heaven” called Manna (EX 16:4). “Manna” literally in Hebrew means “what is it,” which is appropriate because it's not something we can come up with...it's from God Himself. On a side note, Moses even instructed the Israelites to “Eat it today, for today is the Sabbath of the Lord” (EX 16:25). Anyways, Jesus says that He is the definitive Manna, the real bread that will provide them the sustenance they need to get to the real Promised Land (i.e. the purpose of what they were made for, both in this life and the life to come). Jesus says “**I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst**” (JN 6:35). Even in the prayer Jesus taught us, the “Our Father”, there is the clause “give us this day our daily bread.” Frankly, this is a poor English translation because the word in Greek is “*epiousion*,” which means “super-substantial”...so something beyond the ordinary (MK 6:11). The point is we need this spiritual “pick-me-up” because the journey of life weighs down everyone. And just like with ordinary food, we are in constant need of nourishment.

One final point: This need to repeat our exposure to the Sacrifice of the Cross, through the Mass, is also consistent with the Scripture accounts of the early Christians. For example, the Acts of the Apostles tells how the Apostles and the first converts to Christianity devoted themselves to the “breaking of the bread” (ACTS 2:42). In addition, as mentioned above, St. Paul addresses the issue of Mass with Christian community at Corinth, around year 55 A.D. (Jesus died in 33 A.D.). The problem was that the Corinthians were celebrating Mass, but were not welcoming to everyone...there were rival house churches. Nonetheless, notice that they believed and understood the need to celebrate the Mass frequently. “Do this in remembrance of Me”...why, because we need it!

Fr. Nathan Bockrath



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“The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world”

So, what is it? As we saw last week in article 8, this question is literally what “Manna” means in Hebrew. Frankly, it’s an appropriate name for the bread “that came down from Heaven” because there is nothing that we can compare it to from our ordinary experiences. In a very similar way, this is the case with the sacrament of Jesus’ body and blood: What is it? We see that Jesus calls it His Body and Blood, and even in the “Our Father” He tells us to pray for “super-substantial” bread. But, what actually is it? Is Jesus just using this as a metaphor to strive for spiritual communion? It is just a symbol that reflects Jesus’ desire for Heavenly Communion with us? The correct response to these and like statements is: **NO!!!** That is absolutely not the case; rather, we believe that this sacrament is really and truly Jesus’ body/blood, soul, and divinity!

Why do we say this? The best response is because that is how Jesus Himself explained it, as recorded in John’s Gospel. John is unique from the other Gospels for many reasons. One reason is that he doesn’t record Jesus’ words of consecration at the Last Supper (i.e. “this is my body ...”). However, he does recount when Jesus explained how His body will be bread for humanity in chapter 6. It was right after the miracle of the multiplication of fishes and loaves, and Jesus tells them “do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life” (v. 27). He is contrasting between ordinary and extraordinary food, and then says “I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst” (v. 35). Notice that He is identifying Himself as this extraordinary food. Understandably, the audience was confused how Jesus could be food and questioned Him; but, Jesus persisted:

I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world (vv. 48-51).

The audience persisted and asked, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (v. 52). At this point, seeing that the audience is struggling to grasp that He is speaking about His physical flesh, Jesus changes His language. When He said “eat” in v. 51, He used the word “*fagan*,” which is how we ordinary eat. But in response to this new question He uses a new word in v. 54 “*trogan*,” which means to “gnaw” or chew aggressively and persistently. In effect, He intensified His language to express that He is literally speaking of His actual flesh:

Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever *eats* my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him (vv. 53-57).

Certainly, this concept is difficult to grasp, and I will offer an explanation in article 11 for how we can rationally make sense of Jesus’ true presence in the Blessed Sacrament. But, for now its important to note that many of Jesus followers “returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him” because the teaching was too difficult to grasp (v. 66). Facing the Apostles, Jesus asked, “Do you also want to leave?” (v. 67). Peter replied with all faith: “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (v. 68). So too we are asked today, is our faith strong enough to trust Jesus and keep going on this journey?

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“Behold, I am with you always” (MT 28:20)

Jesus’ True Presence in the Blessed Sacrament is so essential, key, and fundamental to our faith. Our Catholic faith cannot stand if this is not true! In article 9 I explained *why* we believe this since it is a teaching directly from our Lord and in article 11 I will explain how we can make sense of this. Right now, I think it is helpful to simply recall that this teaching has been consistently held throughout the entire Church’s history: from the Last Supper till now. To recall this history would take a library of books, so let’s just consider some examples of the early Fathers of the Church and how the Eucharist was not understood as just a symbol, but instead His Real Presence that empowered His Church, through her priests, to continue his physical presence in the world.

In 110 A.D. St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote: “Take note of those who hold heterodox opinions on the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us, see how contrary their opinions are to the mind of God. They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and which that Father, in his goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes” (Letter to the Smyrnaeans 6:2-7:1).

In 151 A.D. St. Justin wrote: “We call this food Eucharist, and no one else is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true and who has been washed in the washing which is for the remission of sins for regeneration [i.e. has received baptism] and is thereby living as Christ enjoined. For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by Him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nurtured, is both the flesh and the blood of that incarnated Jesus” (First Apology 66).

In 180 A.D. St. Irenaeus wrote: “But if this flesh is not saved, then neither did the Lord redeem us by his Blood, nor is the cup of the Eucharist the Communion of his Blood, or the bread that we break the Communion of his Body. For blood can only come from veins and flesh, and whatever else makes the human substance. Having truly become this human substance, the Word of God redeemed us by his own Blood...[and] he has declared that the cup that is taken from creation is his own Blood, from which he makes our blood increase, and he has decreed that the bread, taken from creation, is his own Body, by means of which our bodies grow” (Against Heresy, V, 2).

Briefly, it should be also noted that from time to time, our Lord allows miracles to take place...mainly for the purpose of getting our attention. Our Lord has permitted 153 approved Eucharistic miracles attesting to his Real Presence in the Eucharist, across the ages and in many countries. Some of the most famous are the miracles that occurred in Italy in Orvieto (1263), Lanciano (8th century), and Siena (1730). In each miracle where bread and wine have taken on the appearance of flesh and blood, the flesh has been confirmed to be cardiac tissue and the blood is always Type AB. A website called www.therealpresence.org gives details the 153 approved miracles of the Eucharist and other miracles that are well-documented but not formally approved. All of these miracles, as well as the consistent teaching of the Church, simply reaffirms Jesus’ final message (which is the last verse of Matthew’s Gospel): “I am with you always until the end of the age.”

Fr. Nathan Bockrath

Source and Summit

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“This is my Body...this saying is hard, who can accept it?” (JN 6:60)

How can we really say that something which appears like, taste like, looks like, and feels like bread is actually the Body of Christ (and the same for the Precious Blood)? Are we to deny our sensibilities and just have blind faith? While faith is important, we can offer a rationality for how this is possible. If you want to make sense of what we mean by the full Presence of Jesus within the Blessed Sacrament, you only need to learn two words: Accidents and Substance. When ancient philosophers tried to explain how a thing can experience change and yet remain the same thing (e.g. like when we get a haircut and yet we are still the same person afterwards), these are two words they used. The *Accidents* of a thing are those aspects that are not essential to it. These aspects can change and yet the thing is still essentially the same thing. This would be the haircut example, or someone getting a tan, a car being scratched, a child growing an inch. For the child who grew an inch, you would not approach that child and ask “Who are you?” No, it’s the same person who simply underwent an accidental change. In general, the accidents of a thing are its taste, texture, shape, color, weight, and other like aspects...you need some version of each of these, but they can be in flux and the essence of the thing remains. The *Substance* of a thing on the other hand, you need for the thing to exist. Now, it is difficult to precisely define what the substance is for a particular thing, but we all know it’s there because that is how we identify objects. For example, if a house burned down into a pile of ash, you wouldn’t say “Oh look at that house.” No, whatever made that a house a “house” is gone ... its substance as well as the accidents of the house has changed and now it is something different completely. Let’s recap:

Accidents change - Substance remains

This would be person with a haircut or tattoo, an apple becoming sour, a tree growing in size, etc...

Accidents change - Substance changes

This would be something that is completely changed, like a house being burnt down, an apple decaying into a pile of mush, an animal dying, etc...

Accidents remain - Substance changes

Can you think of an example for this category? I will give you a hint, there is only one example of this kind of change in the history of our world...and that is the Blessed Sacrament. With the Blessed Sacrament, the accidents of the bread and wine remain the same: its taste, texture, shape, color, weight...thus, it looks, feels, and tastes like bread and wine. However, its substance, whatever makes bread “bread” and wine “wine”, that substance is replaced with the substance of Christ Himself. However you would describe the core of who and what Christ is, that core or substance is present in the Blessed Sacrament. It is why classic theologians called the change in the Blessed Sacrament Transubstantiation. You can detect two words here: “trans” which means movement (think of transport, transcontinental railroad) and “substance.” The term implies the movement of substance: the substance of bread and wine being “moved out” and the substance of Jesus being “moved in,” while the accidents of bread and wine remain the same.

“This saying is hard, who can accept it?” It is difficult because we have no other example in our lives to compare this to. However, considering the absolute uniqueness and essentialness of our Lord, why would we expect His ways to blend into the norm? Everything about our Lord is to break us out of the norm to reach our full potential. Let us pray that just as our Lord changed ordinary bread and wine into Himself, that He too may divinize our ordinariness!

Source and Summit

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“Call no one on earth your father, you have but one Father in heaven” (MT 23:9)

We have seen so far that the Sacrifice of Jesus is the key to the restitution of our relationship with the Father, and it's this relationship that ultimately unlocks our full potential (art. 6 and 1). In doing so, Jesus fulfills the entire fundamental goal of the Old Testament: perfect union with our Lord (art. 5). The power of this loving action is made available to us at Mass since it represents to us the Sacrifice of the Cross (art. 7). Furthermore, we have the opportunity to make this Sacrifice our own by consuming the Sacrifice itself, which is the sacrament of Jesus' Body and Blood (art. 8). But, how does all this happen? Answer: The gift of the priesthood.

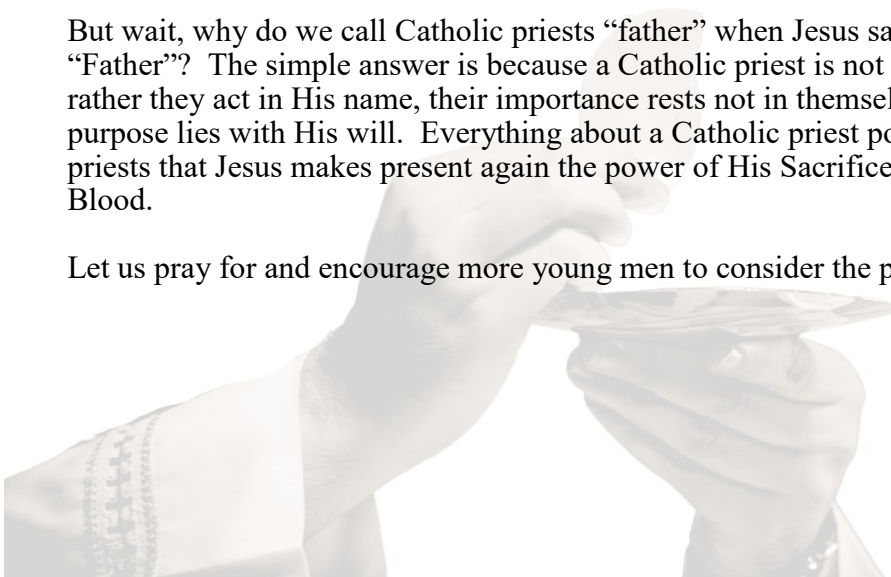
Throughout the Old Testament, the one who offered a sacrifice was called a priest. We saw numerous priests offered countless sacrifices to God, but all were lacking (art. 5). With Jesus, He is the definitive priest because He offers the definitive sacrifice: Himself as the Lamb of God. In other words, on the Cross He is both the priest and sacrifice. To make the power of His Sacrifice available for future generations, He instituted the priesthood at the Last Supper when He said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” A very important point here: The apostles were not made new priests; but rather, priests of Jesus Christ. They act as vessels through which Jesus operates. In other words, our Lord uses a priest as a tool, just like how a person uses a hammer to knock a nail into a wall. Because our Lord works through His priests, this is how we know the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into Jesus Body and Blood continues in the Church today. Because our Lord works through His priests, this is why the priests says the same words of Jesus at the Last Supper: “This is my Body, this is my Blood.”

This idea of God working through a person is not foreign to the New Testament, rather it's at the heart of understanding Christian spirituality. Jesus Himself expresses this intimate context in the analogy of Him being the vine and we the branches (JN 15:1-6). St. Paul perhaps offers some of the richest lines expressing this theology. For example, Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ and so I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). He also said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13). With this reality in place and knowing that Jesus works through some in a particular way to represent His sacrifice, the Church has always understood ordination as a gift to be passed down. For example, in Acts 6:6, 13:3, and 1 Timothy 4:14 we see ordinations being conducted so that the Mass can be shared with all.

But wait, why do we call Catholic priests “father” when Jesus says in the Gospel to call no else “Father”? The simple answer is because a Catholic priest is not a new or competing priest to Jesus, rather they act in His name, their importance rests not in themselves but in His sacrifice, and their purpose lies with His will. Everything about a Catholic priest points to Jesus and it's through His priests that Jesus makes present again the power of His Sacrifice and the Sacrament of His Body and Blood.

Let us pray for and encourage more young men to consider the priesthood of Jesus Christ!

Fr. Nathan Bockrath



Source and Summit

40 Weeks with The Mass | Article 13 of 40

“He took bread and after He had given thanks ...” (1 Cor 11:24)

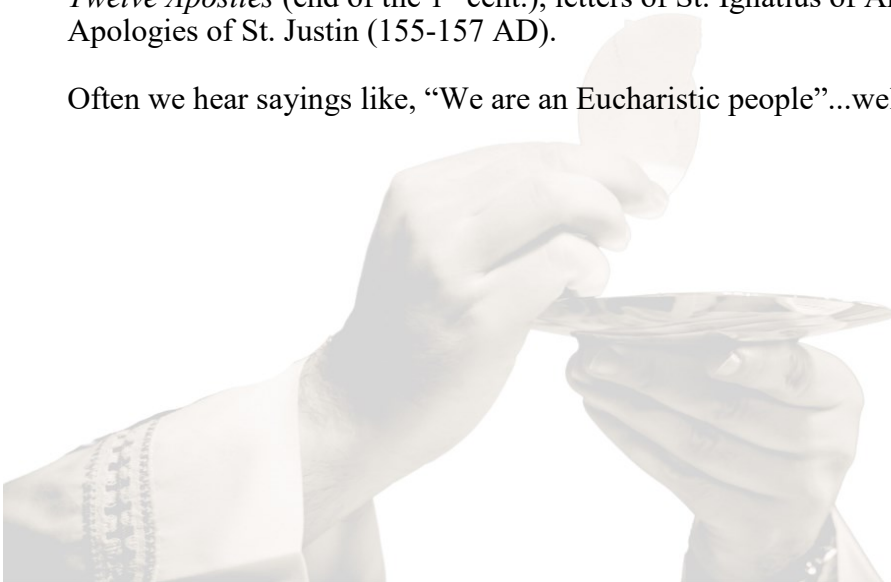
From an early age we are told to say “thank you.” For sure, this is a kind gesture and a polite thing to do; however, it is not just a random and arbitrary manner. Underneath this expected etiquette there is an importance being protected. By sincerely expressing “thanks,” we are forced to recognize the value of the other person. We recognize that we did not achieve this on our own, that we are different and better because of someone. In doing so, we are less inclined to take that person for granted; rather, the “thank you” reaffirms the role and importance of that person in our lives. By doing so, it helps maintain a healthy relationship with that person. By not saying “thank you,” it frustrates that relationship. We lose sight of the importance of that person, and there is a good chance that we offended that person as well...how do you feel when someone fails to say “thanks” after you perform a kind deed?

Back in article 3, we explored how Adam and Eve lost sight of God and took Him for granted. Even though everything around them was because of God, and even their very lives were because of Him (He blew the breath of life into Adam [2:7], He took Adam’s rib to form Eve [2:21]) we never see them once give thanks...hmm, wonder why things broke down for them? Fast-forward to Jesus, each time His words of consecration of the bread and wine are recorded at the Last Supper, what does He do: He gives thanks (MT 26:27, MK 14:23, LK 22:17, 1 Cor 11:24). Part of the reason why Jesus was the perfect priest and sacrifice, was because of His attitude of thankfulness to the Father (even on Good Friday). He recognizes the value of the Father, His emptiness without Him, His need for Him, and so He gives thanks.

Historically, this mystery of the Last Supper and Cross that is continued through the Mass was given the Greek title “***Eucharist***,” which simply means “thanksgiving.” It’s given this title because not only it is the attitude in which Jesus instituted the mystery; but also, it’s the attitude we need to have if we want to experience the fullness of its power. We can approach Mass with all sorts of moods; however, the best is one of thanksgiving where we appropriately see the Father’s role in our lives and our role vice-versa. Furthermore, the title “Eucharist” captures the fact that Jesus’ sacrifice of Himself to Father is the ultimate sign of “thanks”...I recognize my nothingness without you and so I offer my total self to you...which is another important focus for us to adopt. These ideas were captured by the early Church, which can be seen in the ancient writings of the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (end of the 1st cent.), letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch (early 2nd cent.), and in the *Apologies of St. Justin* (155-157 AD).

Often we hear sayings like, “We are an Eucharistic people”...well, lets hope so for our own sake!

Fr. Nathan Bockrath



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“I rejoiced when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord’” (Ps 122:1)

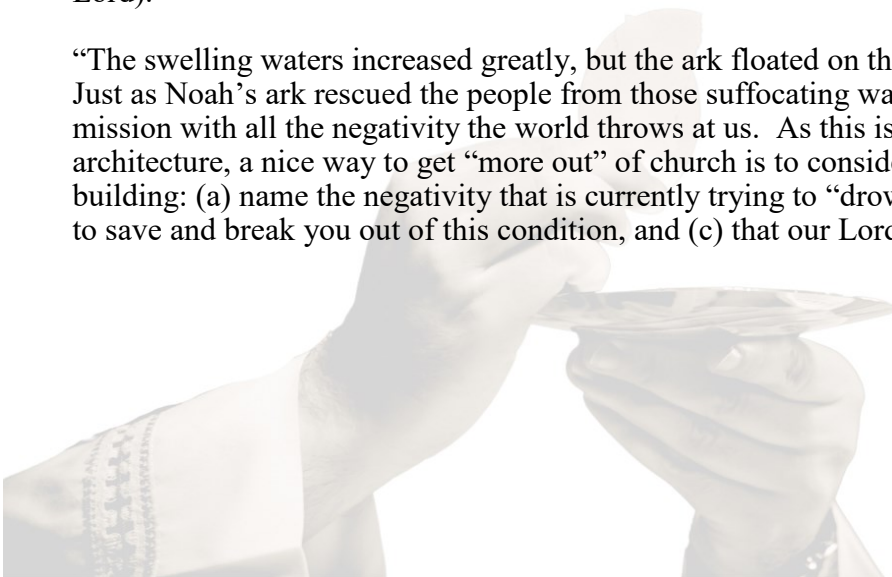
During these past thirteen articles we explored the background theology of the Mass; but now, in these next thirty-six articles we will explore how the concrete details of “what we do” reflects this theology. Beginning with our Church architecture: Why do our Churches look the way they do? What guides the design of a Catholic Church? What’s the point? Ultimately, a Church building wants to accomplish two goals: (1) to remind us of our ultimate goal and (2) the fundamental mechanism to achieve this. Here we will focus on the former and article fifteen will focus on the latter.

Back in articles one and two, we recalled how we are made for more and we only discover this “more” when our Lord is in the picture. Thus, the first goal of a church architecture is to “break out of the ordinary.” From the moment you approach a town, the church should stand out and be something extraordinary (e.g. height, size, arches, color, etc.). Furthermore, the interior has a regal beauty to it that, too, should stand out from our ordinary lives. On the one hand, this reminds us of the beauty that can come to our ordinary lives when we allow our Lord in. On the other hand, it points symbolically to the beauty of Heaven. For example, the book of Revelation offers a symbolic vision of Heaven in its penultimate chapter, where its walls are depicted as composed of jewels and precious stones: “The foundations of the city wall were decorated with every precious stone” (Rev. 21:19). It’s this sense that is captured by our stained glass windows.

In addition to its beauty, the layout also tries to remind us that we are made for more. In the body of a church, there are fundamentally two main parts: the nave and sanctuary. The term “nave” comes from the Latin word *navis*, which means ship. A ship has been an early Christian symbol for the entire Church: a group of people on the move, navigating the precarious “waters” of this world, seeking a desired destination. The image is rooted in the story of Noah and the Ark: a group of people desiring to leave a fallen world to a new life with our Lord. The sanctuary, on the other hand, by definition is a place of safety. It’s the sacred place that the people in the *navis* strive to reach. For this reason, the sanctuary of our churches always stands out. It is often elevated, beautifully decorated, and most importantly it is often the home of the Blessed Sacrament...our Lord’s true presence in our midst. By sitting in the nave and facing the sanctuary, it physically reminds us of (a) our current condition, (b) that we are “on the move for something more,” and (c) our desired destination (i.e. union with our Lord).

“The swelling waters increased greatly, but the ark floated on the surface of the waters” (Gn 7:18). Just as Noah’s ark rescued the people from those suffocating waters, so too, this is the Church’s mission with all the negativity the world throws at us. As this is the intention of a church’s architecture, a nice way to get “more out” of church is to consider these points upon entering the building: (a) name the negativity that is currently trying to “drown” you, (b) recall that our Lord wants to save and break you out of this condition, and (c) that our Lord has a beautiful plan that awaits you.

Fr. Nathan Bockrath



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“We proclaim Christ Crucified” (1 Cor. 1:23)

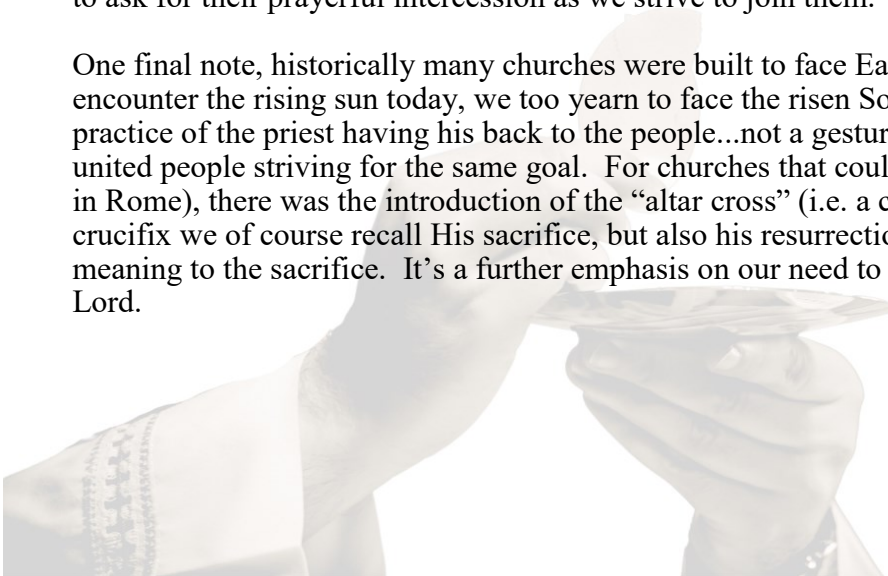
Last week in article 14 we saw that a goal of any church building is to draw our attention to how God can break us out of the ordinariness and make us extraordinary. This week, we will consider the second goal of any church building, and that is to highlight the mechanism of this transformation...the Cross! In article 6 we reflected on how Jesus' sacrifice provided the necessary power to reconcile humanity with our Lord; and in article 7 we saw that the Mass provides us the opportunity to tap into this power since it sacramentally represents to us the sacrifice of the cross. Since it's the fundamental and essential purpose of every Mass and a church building's primary purpose is to provide a space for celebrating it, every church aims then to draw people's attention to the centrality of Cross.

First, on the top of most churches there is a cross...physically expressing what is of highest value. Secondly, most churches are built in the shape of the cross (the lone aisle down the middle with the crossing aisle towards the sanctuary, reflecting the vertical and horizontal beams of the cross). Thus, causing the attendants to physically walk the cross and make it a part of themselves. In fact, in some ancient churches the roof is physically in the shape of a cross (e.g. Notre Dame in Paris, Cathedral of St. Peter in Cologne). Thirdly, front and center in most churches is a crucifix...immediately drawing people attention to what this space is about. Fourthly, also front and center in churches is an altar...not a table, but an altar...which is a place of sacrifice (in our case, a sacramental sacrifice). Fifthly, the walls of most church depict the stations of the cross...almost consuming the nave of the church as if to remind us sitting there that this is the means of our salvation.

St. Thomas Aquinas said there are three primary reasons for why Jesus died on a Cross: (1) to pay the price for our sins and thus to reconcile us to the Father, (2) to be a sign of how much our Lord loves us, and (3) to serve as a model for discipleship. These last two points draws our attention to another aspect of Catholic churches: the statues. It's hard to imagine a church without a statue, and some churches have a lot of them...the reason again is that it ties back to the cross. The statues depict a person who has been (a) inspired by the love of God expressed through His sacrifice on the cross and (b) who has shown similar sacrificial love back to our Lord. Because of their embrace of the cross, they have been officially declared citizens of heaven (i.e. a saint). By having these statues within our church, it's meant to remind us of who we should aspire to be, to inspire us with the knowledge that people have broken out of the ordinariness, to embrace the cross in all dimensions of its meaning, and to ask for their prayerful intercession as we strive to join them.

One final note, historically many churches were built to face East. The idea being that just as we encounter the rising sun today, we too yearn to face the risen Son. This was the reason for the ancient practice of the priest having his back to the people...not a gesture of separation, but a symbol of one united people striving for the same goal. For churches that couldn't face East (like St. Peter's basilica in Rome), there was the introduction of the “altar cross” (i.e. a crucifix on the altar). By facing the crucifix we of course recall His sacrifice, but also his resurrection as that is what gives real the meaning to the sacrifice. It's a further emphasis on our need to orientate ourselves to our crucified Lord.

Fr. Nathan Bockrath



Source and Summit

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“I will live with them and move among them, and I will be their God” 2 Cor 6:16

Before we enter into the Mass proper, several more comments are needed on the objects of a Catholic church. A Catholic church of course stands out for its architecture, but also for its objects. First and foremost because of what is in the sanctuary. As was commented on before, every Catholic church has an altar. Historically speaking, an altar is understood as a place where a sacrifice was offered to a deity. This was the case in pagan cultures, and was the case in the Old Testament (cf. art. 5). For us now, following Jesus’ command (cf. art. 8), the sacrifice of Jesus is represented to us in a sacramental — unbloody — way on the altar of our church (cf. art. 7). Unique to the altar is that a relic of a saint is placed within it. This captures the idea on the one hand how the early church celebrated Mass at the graves of other Christians (Christianity was outlawed until the edict of Milan in 313 A.D.). On the other hand, it expresses our desire for this saint to pray for us, that we may follow his or her example and allow the graces of the Cross to be applied to our lives. With this object established, it leads to the next necessary object: the chair of the priest. As we have seen (cf. art. 12) it is through an ordained priest of Christ, that Jesus works to confect this sacrament of the altar...in other words, the priest stands in the person of Christ. Therefore, the object of the presider’s chair is not accidental to the sanctuary, but is a reminder that Christ is fully present during any Mass.

In conjunction with these objects is the next necessary one: the tabernacle. Practically, the tabernacle serves as a place to store consecrated host (i.e. the body of our Lord). Therefore, it should be located in a dignified place and be focal point of any church (i.e. front and center); unless, if that church has many visitors, it could be reserved in a side chapel in order to preserve a sense of reverence (e.g. St. Peter’s, Vatican City). Because of its purpose it should be of dignified material. In addition, upon seeing it, all the faithful are invited to make a genuflection with their right knee as a gesture of worship and humility before our Lord. The term “tabernacle” is derived from the Latin word meaning “tent.” This recalls how the Ark of Covenant was originally placed in a tent in the desert (cf. Exodus 25-31, 35-40), and how the use of a tent (or veil) was continued in the construction of the Temple... the part that was veiled was called the “holy of holies” and its where the sacrifice was made to God. Further capturing this symbolism, some churches have a *Baldacchino* (like Rosary Cathedral) over their tabernacle and altar.

In conjunction with these objects is the place where we hear directly our Lord’s revealed word: the ambo. The word “ambo” comes from the Greek word meaning “step” or “elevation.” This has Jewish roots since rabbis used a platform to read the scripture before the people; but, it also follows Jesus’ example of when he “went up on the mountain, and...opened his mouth and taught them” (MT 5:1-2). A church that has an elevated ambo with steps (e.g. Rosary Cathedral), that is called a pulpit.

A final note should be given on the Baptistry. Every parish church is to have one, and should be in a separate place...thus, capturing the idea that baptism is the doorway to the entire spiritual life, and so it’s through this sacrament that you can have access to the other sacraments rooted in the sacrifice of the Cross. Being a sacrament of salvation that makes us an adopted child of our Lord, the font traditionally has eight sides: capturing on the one hand how Jesus rose on the eighth day (the day after the Jewish sabbath, and thus His resurrection points to a new beginning), and on the other hand how the Ark saved eight people; “When God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water” (1 Pt. 3:20).

Fr. Nathan Bockrath

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“Let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord who made us” (Ps 95:6)

Why do we make all those movements at Mass? This question will be addressed in more detail throughout the following articles. For now, it's important to note two fundamental points: (1) the Mass is meant to represent to us the Sacrifice of the Cross so that the grace of Jesus' sacrifice may be applied to our soul (cf. art. 7) and thus we can reach our full potential (cf. art. 1), and (2) every part of our body is an expressive instrument of our soul. Our soul does not inhabit the body as a person inhabits a house; rather, it lives and works throughout the entire body. Thus, our body has role in our soul's cooperation and acquisition of our Lord's grace.

Genuflection: Historically, the act of genuflecting on one knee comes from royal etiquette where one does this in the presence of a king/noble, as a sign of respect and a pledge of service. It's ultimately a great sign of humility. The early Church clearly thought that if this is proper for earthly kings, why not our heavenly King? However, since the royal etiquette required the genuflection of the left knee, the Church encouraged Christians to genuflect with the right knee as to distinguish our intention. In practice, we genuflect as we enter our true King's "court" within our churches (cf. art. 14). In particular, we do so only towards the tabernacle when it contains a consecrated host, since we believe that Jesus is truly present (Body, Blood, soul and divinity) in that host. Typically, a red sanctuary lamp will be lit to indicate its presence. On a side note, during times of adoration when the consecrated host is exposed in the Monstrance, tradition called for a "double genuflection" (i.e. kneel on both knees at the same time with a head bow) to indicated ultimate devotion to our Lord.

Bow: A bow is another sign of reverence and honor. In ordinary practice, you can still see diplomats do this upon greeting each other. As indicated by the above quoted psalm, bowing has a very ancient part if our worship practice. In current liturgical practice, we are encouraged to make a bow of the head at certain times where reverence is most fitting: before receiving Holy Communion, a blessing at the end of Mass, and if we hear the sacred names of Jesus, Mary, or the saint we are remembering that day. Sometimes, a profound bow is prescribed (i.e. bow of the body), as is the case during the Creed.

Kneeling: As you can imagine, if a bow and genuflection are signs of reverence and honor, how much more so is the act of kneeling. Its uncomfortable, I know, but its kind of the point because in this act we are saying "Lord you are my king and are worth more than my discomfort." This is always a good reminder to have since it was the preference for comfort that pushed God out of the picture in the Fall (cf. art. 3). Overall, kneeling is a sign of humility, as well as a sign of worship in times of quietness and reflection.

Standing: The opposite of kneeling, but also can be done as a sign of worship ... all depends on one's intention. Just as a servant or soldier stands in attendance, it reflects worship in times of vigilance and action. Its like saying "Lord, I am ready to carry out your will, kindly direct me." Thus, we stand at the beginning of Mass, indicating our desire to carry out our Lord's will.

Sitting: This gesture, as is the case in all learning environments, is a sign of receptivity. We are prepared to be taught, challenged, and directed by our King.

Hands: There are several classical liturgical positions for our hands. First is the flat hand to flat hand position. This is a historical sign of devotion to a king and his governance. In ancient times, to show your loyalty to a king, you would kneel before him with your hands flatly pressed together, and if the king accepted you, he would wrap his hands around your folded hands. Coming into a church with the same position, we are showing our devotion to the true King and our prayer desire that He wrap His hands around ours and accept us into His heavenly kingdom. Second is the interlocked finger clasped. It gestures compress and control, signifying our desire for our Lord's spirit not to escape us. It's also a reflection of beautiful intimate relationship between us and God expressed in the Song of Songs: "my beloved is mine and I am His" (Song 2:16). Another position that the presider is required to do is the open hand, shoulder to the part position (think of the priest during the opening prayer or at the altar). This is called the "orans" position, which literally means "one who is praying or pleading." As the priest stands in for the person of Christ (cf. art. 12), it is really Christ's prayerful position before the Father, with His hands extended on the Cross, praying and pleading for our redemption.

Fr. Nathan Bockrath

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“Awake, my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn! I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations” (Ps 57:8)

What is the deal with music at Mass? Interestingly, the verb “to sing” (with related words such as “song” and so forth) is one of the most commonly used words in the Bible. It occurs 309 times in the Old Testament and 36 in the New. It corresponds to those times when man comes into contact with God and recognizes that mere speech is not enough. For instance, after the Israelites had escaped slavery and crossed the Red Sea, they sang (Ex 15). In fact, this is the first mention of singing in the Bible. They sang because they wanted to glorify God in a way that ordinary speech does not, and they sang to reinforce the reality of salvation that God achieved for them. All holy singing from this point forward will reflect this original intention.

Ultimately in the New Testament, we will see that the true exodus that God wants us to have is found in the Resurrection (i.e. escape from this world to eternity in Heaven...Happy Easter!). This deeper sense of exodus was captured by St. John in the last book of the Bible: Revelation. Here he speaks of the evil one, whose aim is to corrupt the world and in effect enslave us from reaching our full potential (cf. arts 1 and 3), to be ultimately defeated. Those who are standing in victory “were holding God’s harps, and they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb” (Rev. 15:2-3). Notice for John, it’s Jesus’ sacrifice as the Lamb (cf. art. 6) that fulfills the exodus of Moses, and it’s this sacrifice that is represented to us at Mass. Thus, we sing at Mass to glorify our Lord for this sacrifice that leads to freedom, and to reinforce the reality of exodus in our souls. In other words, music is meant to draw us into the spiritual dynamic of God’s salvation for us.

With this Biblical vision, the ultimate two questions for any music at Mass is this: (A) does it glorify God and (B) does it lift our souls to be transformed? The music at Mass is meant to be humble, for its aim is not applause but edification. For this reason, classically the music was conducted opposite the sanctuary (e.g. choir loft) as a way to stress the music’s ultimate purpose of moving us towards our Lord. This of course would be in contrast to symphony or concert, which has a fundamentally different purpose.

So, am I expected to sing at Mass? Here a distinction is necessary: singing of heart and singing of the mouth. As shown above, the purpose of all church music is to arouse the heart so as to glorify God and to connect ourselves to Jesus’ sacrifice. This deeper purpose is the “singing of the heart,” and we all are called to lift up our hearts. However, the means by which our hearts are aroused (i.e. singing of the mouth), this is not an absolute expectation for all of us. For those of us who are not musically inclined, being forced to sing may actually distract and prevent the goal of the singing of the heart... at which point, it loses any value. In fact, our hearts may be able to sing better by being inspired from the voices around us. Pope Benedict expressed this more precisely:

In more concrete terms, there are a good number of people who can sing better ‘with the heart’ than ‘with the mouth;’ but their hearts are really stimulated to sing through the singing of those who have the gift of singing ‘with their mouths.’ It is as if they themselves actually sing in the others; their thankful listening is united with the voices of the singers in the one worship of God. Are we to compel people to sing when they cannot, and, by doing so, silence not only their hearts but the hearts of others too? This is not to impugn the singing of the whole faithful people, which has its inalienable place in the Church, but it is opposed to a one-sidedness which is founded neither on tradition nor on the nature of the case (pg. 124 *Feast of Faith*).

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“Vested in his magnificent robes, and wearing his garments of splendor, as he ascended the glorious altar and lent majesty to the court of the sanctuary” (Sir 50:11)

These inspired words from the author of Sirach, depicts the appearance of the high-priest at the Temple during the Old Testament period. Vestments have a long history in our liturgies, and their original usage can be traced back to first priests during the Exodus (Ex 28). Even St. John envisions them being symbolically used in the Heavenly worship: “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they stand before God’s throne and worship him day and night in his temple” (Rev. 7:14-15). So, what’s the point behind their usage? In general, they are meant to draw our attention away from the ordinary to the extraordinary. They are reserved to priests within a liturgical setting in order to emphasize the uniqueness of what is happening. In the context of Mass, that is representation of Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross. Each has its own unique symbolism, and while I will articulate how the priest is to think of it, all of us are encouraged to take its symbolism to heart as well.

Roman Cassock: A tradition of the Church dating to the 5th century is the usage of the Cassock during a liturgical rite. This is the first garb that is used, that goes from the shoulders to the ankles. For a priest it is black, monsignors and bishops it is purple, cardinals it is red, and the pope wears white. All clerics begin with “black” as it is meant to encourage him to spiritually think of dying to self and living for our Lord, for as Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23). The traditional design has 33 buttons from top to bottom, in honor of the 33 years of Jesus’s life. Five buttons are on the cuffs for the five wounds of Christ. Thus, the priest is invited to think how he is in communion with our Lord.

Amice: This is the first official vestment and its practical purpose is to cover roman collar of the cassock. The desire is for none of the priest’s daily clerical garb to be seen, as to emphasize the extraordinariness of what is to take place within the liturgy. This vestment is a square piece of white linen that goes around the priest’s neck. Its name is derived from the Latin verb *amicire*, which means “to cover.” Its spiritual symbolism is meant to draw our attention to St. Paul’s “helmet of salvation” (Eph 6:17). St. Paul encourages us to fight against the attacks of evilness, and so put on a “helmet” of grace in this effort. Consequently, as the priest vests, he is to be mindful of his efforts in warding off evilness.



Alb: This is the long white vestment that covers the rest of the cassock. Its name derives from the medieval Latin *alba*, which means “white.” This color is meant to symbolize purity, and so it is to be worn by all those at the altar. In turn, it challenges the priest to be completely pure and clean of heart.

Cincture: This is the cord that is fastened around the waist of the priest. In the Bible, when someone is encouraged to “gird themselves” (e.g. Lk 12:15, Eph 6:14), it is done in connection to acts of labor, warfare, and pilgrimage. The idea being to fasten their loose clothing so that they can move with ease. In turn, the priest is challenged to be effective and efficient in his work for our Lord.

Maniple: This is the vestment that hangs off the left arm of the priest. It has largely fallen out of use, but it never was abolished...it is still required for the Extraordinary Form (i.e. the Mass celebrated according to the rubrics of the 1962 Missal). Its original purpose was to serve as a handkerchief that would be used to wipe the sweat of the priest’s brow during Mass. Thus, its purpose was connected to the labors of the priests. Its name, too, points to labor, as it is a Latin word for a “sheaf” of wheat (e.g. Ps 126:6), which is the bundling of wheat after harvest. Thus, the priest is challenged to carry out his duties with zeal and pray for the fruit of his labor.

Stole: This is the vestment that hangs around the neck of the priests. Its name is a Greek word derived from the early Greek word for towel (*stolas*), and so it points to service. Early Christian writers, in fact, attached to it the symbolism of Christ washing the feet of the Twelve. As part of this service, it also points the sacramental and teaching authority bestowed on the cleric for the people. Thus, the priest is encouraged to be mindful of his service towards those entrusted to his care.

Chasuble: This is the vestment that is most easily seen as it is the most outer garment that hangs over the body of the priest. Its name is rooted in the Latin *casula* meaning “little cottage” or “hooded cloak”...the idea being that it overcasts the entire life of the priest. Its symbolism is that of our Lord’s love, which led Him to the Cross...thus the priest, too, is led to the altar by charity. Because of this symbolism, it is always to be worn over the stole since it represents the charity of Christ which “covers all things” (Col 3:14). Historically, there has been a wide variety of chasuble styles that have evolved over the centuries, and there is no such thing as a “correct” style. The main thing is that it reminds the priest that he is to allow our Lord’s love to work through him.

Finally, a note on the **Colors:**

-*white* – symbolizes joy, exuberance, celebration, victory, purity, innocence. Thus, its for solemnities and feasts of our Lord and Our Lady, saints, and festive seasons.

-*red* – symbolizes the “fire” of the holy spirit (cf. Acts 2:3) and the blood of martyrdom. Thus, its for Pentecost, Palm Sunday, apostles, evangelist, and martyrs.

-*violet* – as a “heavier” color, it symbolizes sorrow, mourning, repentance, and penance. Thus, its for lent and advent.

-*green* – a classic symbol of hope, everlasting life, and fidelity. Thus it is used for the “ordinary” times of our liturgical calendar.

-*rose* – as it’s a mix between white and violet, it symbolizes subdued joy. Thus it is used for the third Sunday of Advent and fourth Sunday of Lent, since the celebration of Christmas and Easter is right around the corner.

-*black* – symbolizes mourning and death. Thus, it is reserved for All Souls day and funerals.

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“Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy.” (Ps 42:4)

It only took 20 weeks, but we are now ready to look at the movements of the Mass. The first question we face is: Why do we begin Mass the way we do? Why do the servers carry heavy items and burning candles? Would it just be easier if everyone just went to their seats once they are vested? The simple reason is that the opening Procession sets the tone for what the Mass is all about: We as a pilgrim people moving towards heaven! Central to our faith and understanding is that we are meant for more (arts. 1-2); but yet, we are held back (art. 3). It is as if we are exiled from the life that we should be experiencing. In an effort to remind themselves of this, early Christians called themselves, in Greek, “*paroiko*,” from which we get the word “parishioner,” which means a “sojourner”...a temporary resident in a foreign land. In other words, a person who knows that he is not home yet! When these sojourners gathered in a community, they were called a “*paroikia*,” from which we get “parish.”

The beginning of Mass then wants us to call this reality to mind. So, what happens first: From the hustle and bustle of everyday life, we first enter into a peaceful space, God’s space. The contrast from the noisy outside to the quiet inside of the church reminds us immediately of God’s radical plan of how He desires to pull us out of the ordinary and make us extraordinary (art. 1). This is why it’s customary and very appropriate for us to begin with a private prayer, drawing to mind what we are thankful for, are in need of, and to be open to our Lord’s calling. When it comes time to begin Mass, it commences with a procession. While it in general symbolizes our deepest desire to move towards our Lord, it more precisely symbolizes Jesus (working through the priest [art. 12]) going to the Cross. It’s the grace that Jesus merited through His sacrifice on the Cross, that brings us closer to our Lord (art. 6). And it’s the Mass that represents to us this sacrifice and makes those graces available (art. 7). Because of this focus on the Cross, the procession begins with a server carrying a cross, thus signifying what we are all about. At our most solemn celebrations, incense is used, and this server (i.e. the thurifer) would precede the Cross bearer. One of symbolisms of the incense is to emphasize the presence of our Lord’s spirit and how He is making His grace available to us; therefore, he proceeds the Cross. After the Cross bearer are the two candle bearers, whose presence puts emphasis on the centrality of the Cross. The priest concludes the procession, as he stands for Jesus working in our midst.

At this point in our reflection on the Mass, it will be helpful to acknowledge the two common forms of the Roman Rite Mass: the *Novus Ordo* (the Mass promulgated in the 1960s and which is celebrated in most all of our parishes) and the *Extraordinary Form* (the Mass according to the 1962 Missal, and is celebrated at St. Joseph parish [Toledo] and St. Michael parish [Findlay]). There is only one Mass (i.e. Jesus’s death on the Cross that is sacramentally represented to us); however, there are different forms in which this Mass is celebrated. In fact, there are 37 forms of the Mass that I am aware of...all Catholic and all the true Mass. Each of these have a cultural and historic reason for its existence: for example, the Syro-Malabar Church of India was founded by the apostle St. Thomas. While it’s beyond the scope of these reflections to get into the “weeds” of the ritual differences of each form, I will limit my focus to the two that are the most popular in the world and which affects our parishes here in Toledo.

Upon approaching the sanctuary, reverence is given to the altar and tabernacle. For those carrying anything they make a bow of the head, while the rest make a genuflection. Before the liturgical changes of Vatican II, there were actually prayers said (i.e. Psalm 42) at the foot of the altar to emphasize the importance what was to take place in the sanctuary. This is still done in the *Extraordinary Form* and are the last prayers said before Mass begins. In fact, the sanctuary is typically elevated by a number of steps, reminding us of Jesus’ ascent to Mount Calvary. When the priest enters sanctuary, he kisses the altar. This may seem like an odd gesture, but it’s a symbol of deep reverence for what has and will take place there: the representation of Jesus sacrifice. It calls to mind the Biblical scene of the sinful woman who bathed Jesus feet with tears and kissed them (Lk 7:38). So too, as we beginning Mass, we are mindful of our shortcomings, how essential our Lord is in making a difference in our lives, and how we too should be moved with that same charity.

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“After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” (Mk 14:26)

The point when Mass officially begins is with the signing of the Cross. Why do we make the sign of the Cross on ourselves, and why do we do this with all our prayers? Within the signing, there is a twofold symbolism that is essential to our Christian theology. First, it expresses who we desire to be in union with: God...who revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As we have seen (Art. 2) we are made for God and we only realize our full potential when we are in union with Him. By signing ourselves, it reminds us of this goal/reality. Secondly, the signing reminds us of the means or way to be in union with our Lord: the Cross. As we have seen (Art. 6), the Cross is our Lord's fundamental and principle means/way to be in union with us. When our Lord died on the Cross, it created an infinite treasury of grace (which is our Lord's divine life), and that grace is made available to us at the Mass, which represents the sacrifice of the Cross in a sacramental way (Art. 7). By allowing this grace, which was merited by Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross, to be applied to our soul, it in turn strengthens our union with our triune Lord.

Next, we have our Penitential Rite where we call to mind our sins. Logically this makes sense: if the whole point of the Mass is to bring us into union with our Lord, we need to consider what it is in our life that blocks us from Him. In fact, the whole point of the Cross, as Jesus Himself tells us, is to address sin: My blood “will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28). Because of this close connection between the Cross, which the Mass represents to us, and sin, St. Paul advises his community to examine themselves first: “A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup” (1 Cor 11:28). Even the ancient Christian manuscript the *Diadache*, from the 1st century, advised this examination first: “On the Lord's day, we meet together; break the bread and give thanks, after having first confessed our sins so that our sacrifice may be pure.” In the *Novus Ordo* form, the *Confiteor* (i.e. “I confess you almighty God that...”) is one of the optional forms (this is actually a part of every *Extraordinary Form*, but included within the prayers at the foot of the altar, before the priests enters the sanctuary). Within the *Confiteor*, you probably noticed that we strike our chest when we say “through my fault...” The striking of one's chest is an ancient symbol of self-accusation. Even when people left the Cross on Good Friday, they conducted this act: “When the people who had gathered for this spectacle saw what had happened, they returned home beating their breasts” (Lk 23:48).

Another part of the Penitential Rite is the prayer “Lord have mercy,” commonly known as the “*Kyrie eleison*.” The official language of the Mass is Latin, but this is the only prayer of the Mass that is in another language, Greek. This was because it was a longer chant that began in the East, and when it was discovered around 390 A.D, it was introduced into the Mass as is. Even though it was introduced later, the prayer itself is Biblical. The blind man of Jericho cried out, “Son of David, have mercy on me” (Mk 10:47), and the lepers cried, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us” (Lk 17:13). As we recognize our own faults, we too cry out.

Then we have the *Gloria*. This prayer aims to excite our hearts for what we are about to encounter: our Lord. While all the phrases are Biblical, the opening line is what the angels sang to the shepherds as they prepared themselves to meet our Lord: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to his people on earth” (Lk 2:14). This prayer was used by the first Christians whenever they gathered, and soon it was a part of the Mass, but only at Christmas. In the 6th century, Pope St. Symmachus extended it to all main solemnities (e.g. Sunday Mass). First, it begins with a prayer to the Father (we praise you, we bless you...). Then it addresses Jesus, as the Lamb of God. Interesting in these two addresses, it invokes the four ends/purposes of Mass: (1) Praise of God (“we worship you...we praise you”), (2) Thanksgiving (“we give you thanks”), (3) Sorrow for sin (“you take away the sin of the world”), and (4) Petition (“receive our prayer”). Finally, it ends with an act of faith in the Trinity. Kindly note that the *Gloria* is omitted during the Penitential seasons (e.g. Advent, Lent), in order to greater emphasize the somberness of the season.

So, yeah, a lot is happening at the beginning of Mass!

Fr. Nathan Bockrath

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*“Anything you ask for from the Father He will grant in my name. Ask and you will receive.”
(Jn 16:23-24)*

“Let us pray” / *Oremus*. One part of the Mass that changes weekly are three prayers known as the “Collects” (KOL-ekts). The first collect comes at the beginning of Mass after the Gloria (if said), and the final collect comes at the end of Mass after the priest says “Let us pray” or “*Oremus*” (the phrase in Latin). The second collect comes at the altar after the faithful complete the response, “May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise...” (this is not introduced by “Let us pray”). In the *Extraordinary Form*, this collect is known as the “Secret” because the priest prays the prayer in a quite voice. This was the custom from the early Church, and practically it allowed for a more dramatic introduction to the next prayer (the Preface, said in the loud voice) that brings us deeper into the mystery being celebrated at the altar. These Collects are concise formulas that summarize our general petitions/intentions for the particular Mass. Because they effect this summarization, they are called a “collect” since it gathers in our thoughts. This name was found in the early Church in Rome and referred to a gathering of Christians in a church...they were *collected* within the church. The structure of a collect is typically the same: invocation to God, the grounds on which we base our confidence, our petition, and a conclusion. Look at the opening collect for this weekend’s *Novus Ordo* Mass (5th Sunday of Easter) and then the *Extraordinary Form* (4th Sunday after Easter, my translation):

“(invocation) Almighty ever-living God, (petition) constantly accomplish the Paschal Mystery within us, (grounds) that those you were pleased to make new in Holy Baptism (the petition continues) may, under your protective care, bear much fruit and come to the joys of life eternal. (conclusion) Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.”

“(invocation) O God, (grounds) of Whom it cometh that the minds of thy faithful people be all of one will, (petition) grant unto the same people that they may love the thing which You command, and desire that which You do promise, that amid the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely be fixed where true joys are to be found. (conclusion) Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.”

You will also notice at the end of all collects is some formulation of the phrase “through Christ our Lord.” Why “through,” and what does that even mean? Here, the Church is drawing our attention to the reality that the answer to our prayer comes from graces merited by Jesus’ sacrifice, which is represented to us in a sacramental way at Mass. Thus, our prayers are literally answered “through” Jesus Himself.

These prayers are proper to the priest, as he stands as a mediator between the faithful and our Lord. You will notice that the priest is in the “*orans*” position (hands extended upwards, by shoulders, with palms faced in). We have already looked at this briefly (cf. art. 17), and said the name means “one who is praying or pleading.” This gesture is an entirely natural one in prayer, and was used by both Jews and Pagans...it expresses an attitude of one who expects to receive a gift. So, they would raise their hands above their heads with palms turned upwards. The early Church had no objection to this gesture and so assumed it in its own practices; however, they also “christianized” it so that it was clearly Christian. They wanted the position to also remind us of the Cross, and how Jesus who died on the Cross is acting through the priest. Thus, they changed the position of the hands, making the palms face each other so as to resemble those of the Lord on the cross, and at the same time lowering the arms, so as “not to raise up our hands ostentatiously” as the church father Tertullian said.

Finally, we say “Amen.” This is a word we use in all our prayers, and in fact is the last word of the Bible (*nb*. Depending on your translation of the Bible, they may move the “amen” somewhere else in the final verse, but that translation is wrong in its placement). The word “amen” is found in the classic Hebrew language, and was used to affirm a common understanding/plan/deal. It literally means “So be it!” or “Be it done so!” When it is directed towards our Lords, it carries a slightly different connotation: “as You wish.” It expresses a desire for perfect adherence to the will of God. Thus, when we conclude our prayer of petition, we say “Amen” as if it to say in this plan/deal, I trust that Your will is what matters most.

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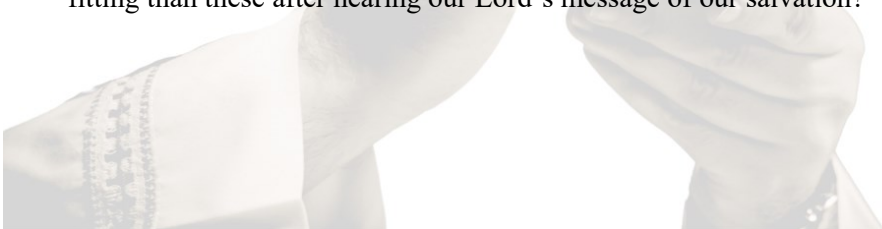
“The word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart.” (Heb 4:12)

So why do we have readings at Mass? Well, since the Mass is meant to represent the sacrifice of the Cross, and Jesus spent three years teaching before Good Friday, so too do we expose ourselves to our Lord’s teaching before the prayers at the Altar. Already in the Old Testament, the prophets spoke of Lord’s truth re-saturating the world as was the original plan (cf. Art. 2): “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as water covers the sea” (Is. 11:9). In other words, because this is not the case, it is why we experience the chaos in life (cf. Art. 3). Thus, as Jesus began His ministry, He said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me, to preach the gospel to the [spiritually] poor” (Lk 4:18). In addition, Jesus told Pilate that He came to testify to the truth (Jn 18:37). St. Paul says that within Jesus “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). When we let this truth and reality set-in, it’s no wonder why at the end of the reading we say “thanks be to God...[or] *Deo gratias*”...because where would we be without this instruction? In addition to these theological considerations, another reason is that this was the custom of services within a Jewish synagogue. We hear of Jesus himself in a synagogue on the sabbath, standing up to read (Lk 4:16). Also, we hear of St. Paul sitting through the readings in a synagogue on the sabbath (Acts 13:14). Since Christians believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament (cf. Mt 5:17, as well as Art. 5 and 6), they have assumed many Jewish elements into the Mass.

The structure of our readings are different between the *Novus Ordo* and the *Extraordinary Form* of the Mass. For the *NO*, it’s the following: (1) typically an Old Testament reading that usually has a thematic connection with the Gospel (reflecting how Christ fulfills the Old Testament), but sometimes it could be a New Testament reading, like during the Easter season with readings from the Acts of the Apostles; (2) a reading from the book of Psalms (this was a custom of Jewish liturgy that the course of readings be broken by the recitation of Psalms, thus keeping away monotony); (3) a New Testament reading, often from a letter of St. Paul; and (4) then a reading from one of the four Gospels. For the Sunday Masses, the readings are on a three-year cycle (meaning you will hear the same readings every third year). The “A” cycle focuses on the gospel of Matthew, “B” cycle on Mark (and some of John), and “C” on Luke. For the weekday Masses, the readings are on a two-year cycle, and just have one reading, Psalm, and Gospel. Feast Days (i.e. Christmas, Easter, etc.) have their own particular readings. For the *EF*, there is (1) only one reading, referred to as the “Lesson or *Lectio*,” which is typically a New Testament reading but can also be from the Old Testament; (2) several verses from the book of Psalms; and (3) a reading from the Gospels. The *EF* has only one cycle of readings, meaning the readings repeat each year. Like the *NO*, Feast Days have their own particular readings.

The Gospel always comes last because these are the words of Jesus Himself, who is the “way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). We sing “Alleluia” beforehand, which is an old Judaic expression of joy, which means “praise the Lord.” It’s a hymn and attitude of triumph...recognizing Jesus’s triumph over all the darkness that this world can throw at us. Since Lent is a time to consider how this world’s darkness has been negatively affecting us that year, we cease the use of “Alleluia” as way to heighten our desire for our Lord’s triumphant power at Easter. To emphasize more the importance of Jesus’s word, we sign ourselves with the cross on our foreheads, lips, and chest, as to express the desire for our Lord’s words to pierce our mind, tongue, and heart. In addition, the priest or deacon makes a cross on the Gospel after introducing it, expressing that these words are what leads to our salvation. On Sundays and feast days, he may incense it as well. At the end of the Gospel, he will kiss the text, while quietly saying “may the words of the Gospel wipe away our sin.” Of course, at the end of the Gospel we all say “Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ...[or] *Laus tibi, Christe*”...what words would be more fitting than these after hearing our Lord’s message of our salvation?

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***“A young man named Eutychus who was sitting on the window sill was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. Once overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and when he was picked up, he was dead.”
(Acts 20:9)***

As we can see from scripture, homilies can be deadly. We have all been through our fair share of dreadful homilies, and perhaps for some of us, it's a deterrent for wanting to go to Mass. So, what's the point? At its essence, a homily is supposed to show how the readings are relevant to our lives right now and also to prepare us to encounter our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. The word *homily* is Greek for “explanation.” It was an ancient Jewish custom in the synagogues that after the Bible readings there was an explanation of the sacred text. In fact, Jesus took advantage of such instances (e.g. Mk 1:21 and Lk 4:16). As seen from Acts, Paul himself continued the practice, as well as the entire early Church. St. Timothy said, “Until I arrive attend to the reading, preaching and teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was conferred on you through the prophetic word with the imposition of hands” (1 Tim 4:13-14). As you can see from Timothy, he links the homily with the ordained. This doesn't mean the ordained are smarter or more gifted in public speaking; rather, it points to the fact that just as Jesus works through the cleric at the altar, so too in a similar fashion is our Lord present in the cleric at the ambo.

But why are homilies so bad? I think it's important to realize that by its nature, a homily is no easy task. We say the homily is to show how the readings are “relevant to our lives,” but let's face it: we are all very different. Different ages, different experiences, different obligations, different headaches and stresses, different personal struggles, different family background, etc.. Thus, on any given weekend, what is relevant to one person may be not be to another. Another key difficulty, that unlike in some protestant “mega churches,” the homily is not the main point of the Mass. It is not even of secondary or tertiary importance (in my opinion), because for us Catholics, the main point is to have the Sacrifice of the Cross represented to us, so that we can have the graces (merited on the Cross) applied to our lives, and consequently be in a better position (emotionally-spiritually-mentally) to take on the upcoming week. That is the main point...the representation of the Sacrifice of the Cross is the “cake” and the homily is simply “icing” on top.

This reality has several implications. First, if we experience a “bad” homily, it is impossible for that to objectively ruin a Mass. Subjectively we may be disappointed, but objectively we still have the graces of the Cross represented to us in a sacramental way, and that's what it is all about. Secondly, because this is the main focus at the Mass, it also affects our expectations/training of seminarians. Seminarians have some courses and training with homiletics; however, it's not the central concern of their formation. First and foremost is forming a man who loves our Lord, who can be prayerful and reverent at the altar, and who is authentic in sharing the faith. With saying this, it's not an outright excuse for bad homilies. All clerics should always strive to improve in how they present the faith. Nonetheless, it's not always someone's gift and talent.

So what can be done? First, I think it's always important to pray for our clerics that they don't lose their zeal for preaching. Secondly, I think we can pray for ourselves that we can overlook another person's human shortcomings. Thirdly, if we actively listen to the reading of the Scriptures and ask, “How does this apply to me?”, it will put us in a more open disposition to hear the homily. In turn, this will put us in a better position to receive an insight and be more aware of how we want the graces of the Cross to be applied to our life that week.

Fr. Nathan Bockrath

Source and Summit

40 Weeks with The Mass | Article 25 of 40

***“It is impossible to please God without faith, since anyone who comes to him must believe that He exists and rewards those who try to find Him.”
(Heb 11:6)***

Following the homily on Sundays and Feast days is the Creed. The name “creed” comes from the first word of the Creed in Latin, “*credo*,” which means “I believe.” The placement of the Creed at this point in the Mass is logical: Since the readings express the potential that our Lord desires for us, and it’s the grace of the Cross exposed to us at the altar that will give us the power to reach this potential, it is by an act of faith that our hearts are most fully open to respond to this grace. The Creed then acts as a “bridge” between what we heard and what we will experience. The profession of the Creed is a symbolic expression of our assent to what we have heard and, in turn, the openness of our “hearts” to receive our Lord’s grace.

The Creed was not composed originally for Mass. In early Christianity, a profession of faith was a prerequisite for baptism. Later, as Christianity spread and there were more robust reflections upon the faith, there emerged problematic teachings. The proclamation of the Creed then was used as a tool to curb heresy...there was a need to be precise with our terms. The Apostles Creed, which is commonly used with the recitation of the Rosary, was one of the ancient ones. But as time passed and people were still making erroneous conclusions, there emerged the Nicene Creed. This statement of belief was drawn up at the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.). It combined the truths of the faith professed by two earlier Church councils, Nicaea (325 A.D.) and Constantinople (381 A.D.). At the same time as these Creeds were being formulated, there was the practical problem of people attending Mass, but not having the same beliefs in who God is and how He encounters us. This is an awkward situation since the Mass is supposed to lead to communion with our Lord, but the people disagreed on the identity of God. So, to combat heretical views, the Council of Toledo (Spain) (589 A.D.) stipulated that the Creed was to be recited within Mass.

Today, the role of the Creed remains the same: (1) to open our hearts by an act of faith so that we are in the position to respond to the grace of Cross at the altar, and (2) to confirm that we all share the fundamental elements of the one Faith. The Creed begins by a confession of faith in God the Father. Then a confession of faith in Jesus (who He is, what He did, and what He will do). Then a confession of faith in the Holy Spirit, which is the means of our salvation. Final a confession of faith in the body/ context that this will all happen: the Church. It’s “one” (so not many), “holy” (in its mission/purpose, its members are still sinners), “catholic” (means universal, thus this Church is for everyone), and “apostolic” (there is a divine willed structure to it, by which its purpose is accomplished).



Finally before we approach the Altar, we have an Intercessory Prayer. The placement of this too is logical. As we just open our “hearts” to God’s grace through an act of faith, now we direct ourselves to what we want these graces to be particularly applied to in our lives. These are “general” since it applies to all of us, but we are also invited to call to mind our specific petitions as well. This practice of praying for the needs of the Church and of the world was an early Christian custom. St. Paul encouraged his disciple Timothy to do this: “First of all, then I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity” (1 Tim 2:1-2). St. Justin in 150 A.D. bears witness to this part of the Mass: “After the homily of the Bishop we all stand and raise our prayers... for our own selves, for those who have been just lighted up [baptized], and for all the rest, found elsewhere.”

The form of the prayer is different between the *Extraordinary Form* and the *Novos Ordo*. In the *NO*, its called the “General Intercessions” or “Petitions.” It consists of several petitions following this order: (a) for the needs of the Church, (b) for public authorities and the salvation of the world, (c) for those oppressed by any need, (d) for the local community, and (e) for the faithful departed. It is conducted in a “call” and “response” format (i.e. “we pray to the Lord ... Lord hear our prayer). In the *EF*, the intercessory prayer is incorporated into the Offertory prayers. This is a difference between the two forms of the Mass and will be explored more in week 29. Essentially the priest makes the prayers of intercession as he begins to offer the bread and wine. Take for example the first prayer in the *EF*, the *Suscipe sancte Pater* (my translation is the following):

Accept O holy Father, almighty and eternal God, this unspotted host, which I, Thy unworthy servant, offer unto Thee, my living and true God, for my innumerable sins, offenses, and negligences, and for all here present: as also for all faithful Christians, both living and dead, that it may avail both me and them for salvation unto life everlasting. Amen.

Now, are you finally ready for the Altar?

Fr. Nathan Bockrath

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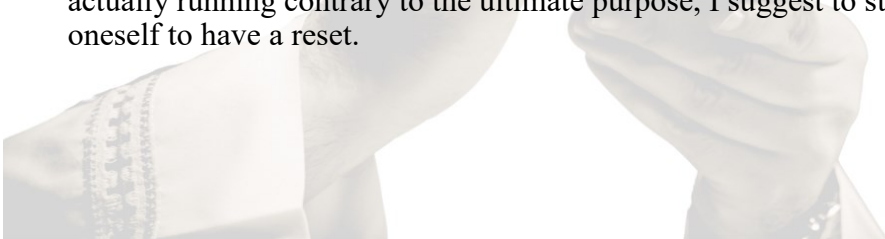
“On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, ‘Where do you want us to go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?’” (Mk 14:22)

As Jesus prepared for the Last Supper, where He will turn the reality of His sacrifice on the Cross into a sacrament, He had His disciples participate in this act. On the one hand it was for a practical purpose: help is needed to make the supper possible. But, on the other hand, there is a spiritual purpose where Jesus is inviting them to unite themselves to His sacrifice. This need to be united to our Lord’s sacrifice is expressed in so many ways in the New Testament: “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant” (Mt 26:28); “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Mt 16:24); etc. (cf. art. 7). By having a part in supplying the materials and setting up for the Passover meal, which Jesus will work through and turn into a sacrament, they are already allowing themselves to be united to Jesus sacrifice...which is the essential key for us to reach our ultimate purpose (cf. art. 6 and 2).

This twofold understanding is preserved in our Mass with the collection and offertory. St. Justin in the year 150 A.D. said “bread, water, and wine are brought forward” in the Mass. Historically, other items for charitable use were also brought forward, and the deacon(s) would sort out and put aside those that would be used in the Mass. Understandably, this practice of anything being brought forward became disorderly and impractical, and so it was scaled back gradually in the Middle Ages. Nonetheless, this sense of being united with our Lord’s sacrifice as well as being stewards of our Lord’s gifts was maintained: “As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Pet 4:10). Today, the wine, bread, and the collection (this depends on the practice of each church) is collected and presented. It shows both our physical participation in our Lord’s sacrifice that will be represented to us on the altar, as well as our spiritual participation. Beyond the gifts that are physically presented, it also serves as a prayerful time for us to recall what “sacrifices” we made for our Lord this past week that we want to join to Jesus’.

A note of caution on the collection. As stated, there is a spiritual and practical dimension to this practice. However, there always lurks the danger of this becoming a spiritual distraction that in turn becomes a personal deterrent. Now, part of the church’s role is always to discern and prioritize needs, and present those to the faithful as options (e.g. maintenance of the church’s patrimony, opportunities to promote the faith, etc.). The difficulty, as Jesus expressed, is that there will always be needs to address: “The poor you will always have with you” (Mk 14:7). The reason why this is a difficulty is because it lends to the to the dangerous, yet understandable, interpretation that the “church is only about money.” This is of course objectively false because monetary funds are in secondary service to our primary concern, which is spiritual. Nonetheless, if anyone ever begins to feel this way, in my honest opinion, the best thing to do is to stop giving immediately. Once that mindset begins to take place for whatever reason, it only leads us down a path of further suspicion and resentment. This in turns makes us skeptical of our Lord’s Church, whose fundamental structure was designed by God so that we can more fully encounter Him. Thus, it actually jeopardizes our ability to encounter our Lord. Therefore, even though the collection has a practical and spiritual purpose, if it is actually running contrary to the ultimate purpose, I suggest to stop immediately in order to allow oneself to have a reset.

Fr. Nathan Bockrath



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*“Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me;
still, not my will but yours be done”
(Lk 22:42)*

As we now approach the Eucharistic prayers of the Altar, it will be helpful to highlight the items that are used at the Altar: the Chalice, Paten, Pall, Purificator, Corporal, Burse, Veil, Cruets, and Ciborium. In general, you will notice that a lot of attention is paid to the details. This is so, in order to help foster respect and reverence on our part for the sacrament, which will soon be confectioned on the altar, and thus fight against any casual dispositions. It has long been recognized that one of the greatest detriments to spiritual growth is our own attitude. The Bible continuously highlights this reality: “A joyful heart is the health of the body, but a depressed spirit dries up the bones” (Prv 17:22). Therefore, the Church has traditionally been meticulous in its approach to the preparation of the altar and materials used. When this is overlooked, it brings to mind Jeremiah’s words: “Cursed be he who does the Lord’s work remissly” (Jer 48:10).

Chalice: The name is derived from the Latin for “cup.” It is to be of noble material (e.g. silver and gold) to reflect its purpose as being a container for the Precious Blood of our Lord. There can be multiple designs, but all should reflect the dignity of the purpose for which it is called.

Paten: This is the small plate that holds the host that the priest handles (e.g. elevates and breaks). It is to be made of the same material as the chalice, thus reflecting the unity of the body and blood.

Pall: This is a stiff square piece of cardboard covered with linen. The name means to cover, and it’s the piece that covers the chalice during the Eucharistic prayer. Its practical importance is to keep objects from falling into chalice (e.g. bugs).

Purificator: As the name indicates, this is the piece of cloth that aims to purify. Particularly, to keep the Precious Blood from dropping on an unconsecrated surface. The cloth is made of linen, and it’s used with every chalice. Since every drop of Precious Blood fully contains our Lord’s presence, each purificator is to be completely soaked in water after Mass.



Corporal: The name is derived from the Latin *corpus* which means “body.” It is called this because it’s the last piece of cloth placed on the altar, on which the sacramental body of Lord will rest. The cloth itself is a square piece of linen. It is carefully folded into nine squares, so as to carefully protect the inner most fold upon which the sacrament rests. For this reason, the corporal should never remain on the altar, but always be folded and unfolded in the traditionally prescribed way, so as to protect any possible fragments of the consecrated host that might remain.

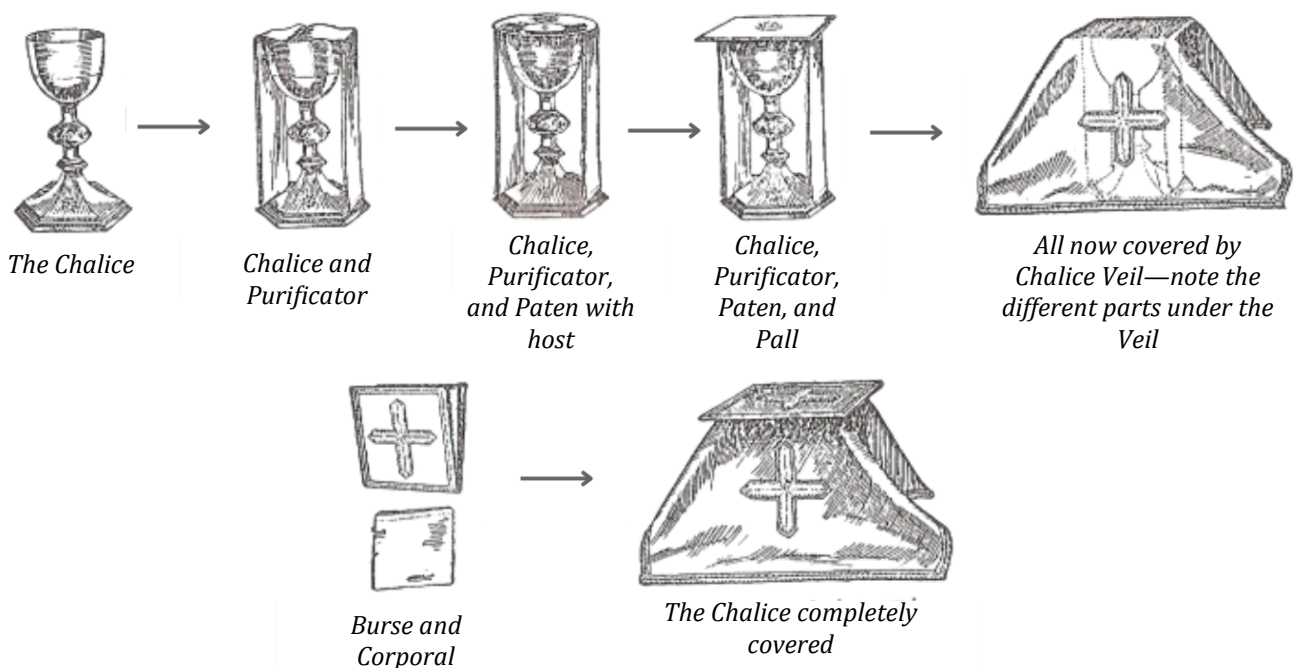
Burse: The name is from the Latin *bursa* meaning a “bag.” It is the receptacle in which the corporal is placed. It is made of two juxtaposed pieces of card-board, covered in cloth that matches the vestments of the priest, bound together at the three edges, leaving the fourth open in order to receive the corporal.

Chalice Veil: – This is piece of material that matches the priest’s vestments and completely covers the main chalice. The use of veils for worship in general can find its roots in the Book of Exodus (26:31-37). Here, our Lord described the worship setting in the desert Tent, and wanted a veil to separate the Ark of the Covenant from the people. The end-goal was not separation, but rather to help the people realize that there are aspects of God that are “veiled” from their human perception and understanding; thus, they should always approach the Lord with humility in order to achieve union. When this disposition is lost, we are back to the original problem of the Bible (cf. art. 3). The use of the Chalice Veil, then, is meant to remind us that while we understand aspects of our Lord’s saving act on the Cross, there will always remain a depth to this mystery of our salvation that we have yet to explore and appreciate.

Cruets: The name means a “bottle” or “jug,” and in the context of Mass they are what contain the water and wine to be used at Mass.

Ciborium: The name is derived from the Latin word *cibus* which means “food.” It is called this because it is what contains the “food” of heaven: our Lord’s body. It is in the shape of a large cup with a lid, and it is the container in which we place the unconsumed hosts from Mass. The Ciborium is what we place in the Tabernacle.

Fr. Nathan Bockrath



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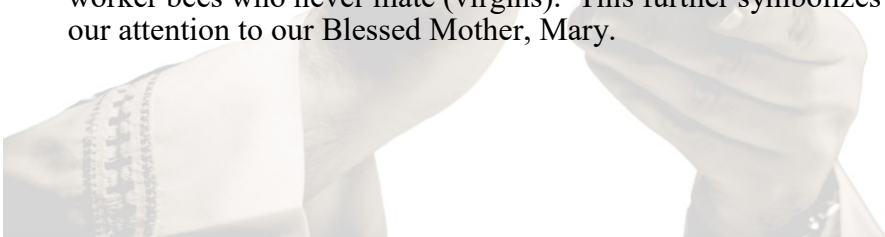
“After he had taken the body down, he wrapped it in a linen cloth and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb in which no one had yet been buried” (Lk 23:53)

Last week we discussed the items used on the altar, this week we will explore the altar itself. Next to the tabernacle, the altar is the central point of focus in a church because it is the place for which the entire purpose of a church exists: the representation of our Lord's sacrifice on the Cross. It's an altar, not a table, thus indicating it's a place of sacrifice. Throughout the Bible, if a person a “biblical hero,” notice their attention and reverence towards an altar...they see it as a physical place through which spiritually they draw closer to our Lord. In fact, every Covenant after the Fall had some reference to an altar. Noah gets off the ark, then builds an altar, then God established a covenant with him (Gen 8:20). After God called Abraham and articulated His promises, Abraham “built an altar” (Gen 12:7). After God established His covenant with Moses, He told him “an altar of the earth you shall make for me” (Ex 20:24). And before God established His covenant with King David, David had an altar to worship Him (1 Chr 16:40). Even St. John envisioned an altar in Heaven (Rev 8:3). With Jesus, through which we have the definitive and everlasting Covenant, the altar on which He was sacrificed was the cross. In a deeper sense, we can also say that He Himself is the altar because His body is the very “place” of His sacrificial offering. Jesus's body thus fulfills and replaces every previous altar erected to worship God (cf. Heb 13:10). So, while we have an altar in our churches, it actually is a symbol of Jesus Himself; thus, when an altar is consecrated it is marked with five crosses (four to indicate the four corners of the world and the fifth to indicate that Jesus is at the center of all of it) and anointed with Chrism oil (because Jesus is the true “Messiah,” which means “Anointed one”).

Because the altar is a symbol of Jesus, it is prescribed for it to be covered with three linen cloths: the first two cover the entire surface of the altar, while the upper and finer cloth should reach almost to the ground on the left and right. The reason for pure linen is rooted in the above Scripture reference; it is the material in which our Lord was wrapped when taken down from the Cross. Thus, it draws our attention even more to the sacrifice of Jesus. Furthermore, the use of three pieces of linen reminds us how Jesus's sacrifice is aimed to effect the three-folds of the church: the Church suffering (i.e. souls in purgatory), the Church militant (i.e. us in this life), and the Church triumphant (i.e. those who embraced the grace of the Cross and are now in heaven). St. John described those in Heaven as the bride of Christ “allowed to wear a bright, clean linen garment” (Rev. 19:8). So too within the altar is placed a relic of saint, showing person who responded to the graces of the altar and is praying for us (cf. Rev. 6:9). In addition, an “altar Cross” is placed on the altar since the altar too represents Mount Calvary...the physical location of Jesus's sacrifice.

Around or on the altar are placed candles. There can be two, four, or six and they represent Jesus identity as being the “Light of the World” (Jn 8:12). It's from the altar of His sacrifice that His light truly spreads; thus, the altar is in a sense the “7th” candle (“7” being the number of perfection). The wick of candle symbolizes Jesus's divinity which is hidden by the wax, which in turn symbolizes His humanity. As the candle burns, it also symbolizes Jesus's sacrifice of Himself. Finally, the candles that should be used are 100% beeswax, which is also significant because the wax is made by female worker bees who never mate (virgins). This further symbolizes Christ's perfect purity, but also draws our attention to our Blessed Mother, Mary.

Fr. Nathan Bockrath



Source and Summit

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***“O God, in your goodness, in your great tenderness wipe away my faults;
wash me clean of my guilt, purify me from my sin” (Ps 51:1-2)***

The first prayers are the Prayers over the Offerings. These prayers intend to properly orientate ourselves to our Lord by acknowledging Him as the Creator and His intention for the bread and wine. In the *Novos Ordo*, the prayers are the following:

“Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation. For through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life”

“Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the wine we offer you: fruit of the vine and work of human hands, it will become our spiritual drink”

In response to each of these prayers, the congregation is invited to say “Blessed be God for ever.” This is reminiscent of the prophet Daniel’s prayer: “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever” (Dan 2:20). It is a way of saying, “may God be praised forever”...which is the antidote to this fallen world (art. 3).

In between these two prayers, a small amount of water is mixed with the wine, and the cleric says, “By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” The spiritual reason for the mixing of the water and wine points to Jesus Himself: “One soldier thrust his lance into His side, and immediately blood and water flowed out” (Jn 19:34). Another symbolism presented here, as is reflected in the prayer itself, is our union with our Lord’s divinity. The wine is seen as symbolizing Christ and the water symbolizes the faithful. Based on this symbolism the water is blessed with the sign of Cross as to indicate our need for blessing; whereas, the wine is not blessed since Jesus is in no need of blessing.



In the *Extraordinary Form* of the Mass, the Offertory prayers are different. In art. 25, I already shared the first prayer, *Suscipe, Sancte Pater*. Following this prayer, the water and wine is then mixed accompanied by this rich prayer and then the next beautiful prayer:

O God, Who in creating human nature did exalt his nature very wonderfully and yet more wonderfully did establish it anew; by the Mystery signified in the mingling of this water and wine, grant us to have part in the Godhead of Him Who has deigned to become a partaker of our humanity, Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord; Who lives and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God. World without end. Amen.

We offer unto You, O Lord, the chalice of salvation, entreating Your mercy that our offering may ascend with a sweet fragrance in the sight of Your divine Majesty, for our own salvation, and for that of the whole world. Amen.

After the chalice is placed again upon the corporal, the priest in both forms of the Mass says the following prayer quietly while profoundly bowing towards the altar: “With humble spirit and contrite heart may we be accepted by you, O Lord, and may our sacrifice in your sight this day be pleasing to you Lord God.” As the beginning prayers put our proper focus on our Lord, this prayer aims to assure we have the right inner disposition. The prayer is rooted Psalm 51 that addresses the desired sacrifice, which is a properly disposed heart: “A humble and contrite heart, O God, you will not spurn” (vs. 19). It also reflects the prayer of the prophet Daniel: “With contrite heart and humble spirit let us be received” (Dan 3:39). An additional prayer is included in the *EF*: “Come, the Sanctifier, Almighty and Everlasting God, and bless this sacrifice which is prepared for the glory of Your holy Name.”

Next, the priest washes his hands (in particular his fingertips). In the *EF* Psalm 25:6-12 is prayed, while in the *NO* the following is simply prayed: “Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.” While this ancient custom does have practical purpose to help assure that the fingers that will touch the host and chalice are clean, there is a more spiritual purpose as the prayer indicates. So much of the activity that we do is conducted through our hands, and so by washing them it symbolizes an interior purification of the whole person.

Finally, the priest pleads to congregation to now be unified in their purpose: “Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.” Notice the language of “sacrifice” being stressed. In turn, the congregation responds: “May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good, and the good of all his holy Church.” This little prayer reverses the mistake of Adam and Eve (art. 3) by putting the attention back on right worship of Lord, whom we are made for (art. 2), and this orientation in turn puts us in the proper position to reach our full potential (art. 1).

Fr. Nathan Bockrath

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“Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine, and being a priest of God Most High, he blessed Abram” (Gen 14:18)

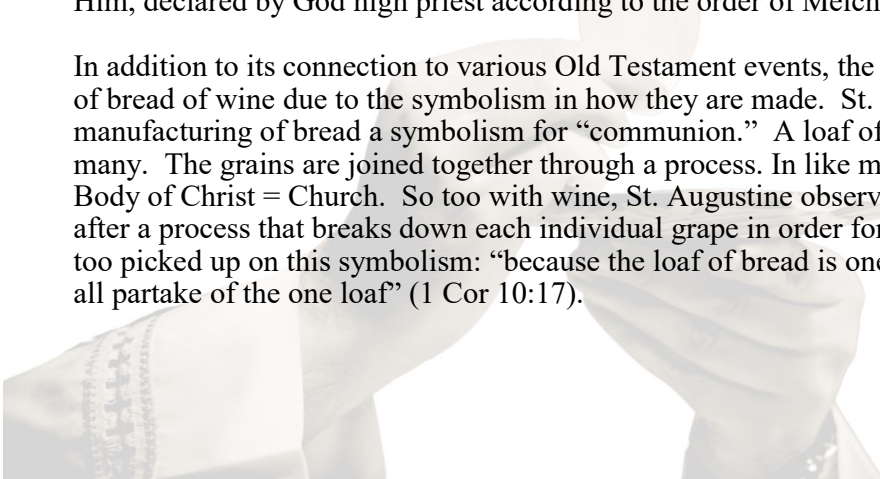
As we have seen (cf. art 7), a key significance of the Last Supper is that Jesus made His sacrifice on the Cross into a sacrament (i.e. Priesthood and Eucharist) which in turn is represented to us at Mass. In each biblical scene of the Last Supper (Mt 26:26-29, Mk 14:22-25, Lk 22:17-20, 1 Cor 11:23-26), we also see that Jesus chose bread and wine as the sacramental elements through which their essence/substance will be replaced with the essence/substance of Jesus’ body and blood (cf. art 11). This is why, for example, we call the bread to be used for Mass “hosts,” from the Latin *hostire* meaning “to strike,” which was a term given to any animal about to be sacrificed. Nonetheless, this raises the questions: Why was bread and wine chosen? Could other items have been chosen? What is the significance?

Since Jesus is God, He could have certainly established this sacrament through anything in His creation. However, it seems there are numerous practical and symbolic reasons for why only bread and wine were chosen. From a practical point of view, it seems His primary reason for choosing bread and wine is its connection with the previous revelations of the Old Testament, and thus how it was preparing the people for the moment of Jesus. In the previous Covenant, bread and wine were offered in sacrifice among the first fruits of the earth as a sign of grateful acknowledgment to the Creator (Ex 23:19). Even before this, bread and wine received new significance in the context of the Exodus event. The unleavened bread that Israel eats every year at Passover commemorates the hasty departure that liberated them from Egypt (Ex 12:14-15)...this is also the reason why we use unleavened bread at Mass, to remind us that we are a people “on the go” to Heaven. In addition, the remembrance of the manna in the desert will always recall that Israel survived by the bread of Heaven (Ex 16:4). At the end of the Jewish Passover meal, there is the “cup of blessing,” which adds a festive joy to the meal as it points to our Lord’s end goal of the Messiah’s arrival.

Still before the Exodus account, the Bible recalls the unique encounter of Abraham with Melchizedek, a priest of God and a king of Salem (an accent reference to *Jerusalem*, where the Temple will be built for sacrifice, and where Jesus will ultimately be sacrificed). By the way, each of our churches contain an image of the this encounter: at St. Joe’s and St. Adalbert’s, it’s on the high altar; at the Cathedral, look at the ceiling above the altar, and it’s to the right of the painted crucifix. Now, this is the first time a priest is mentioned in the Bible (Gn 14:18), and it’s a rare occasion when a king is at same time the priest. This scene occurred right before God established His Covenant with Abraham, and here Melchizedek had a role in his preparation: He blessed Abraham and offered bread and wine on his behalf. St. Paul would ultimately see Melchizedek as a prefigurement of Jesus our true king and priest, that prepares us for our Covenant with the Father. St. Paul said Jesus “became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him, declared by God high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 5:10).

In addition to its connection to various Old Testament events, the church Fathers saw a reason for the use of bread of wine due to the symbolism in how they are made. St. Augustine, for example, saw in the manufacturing of bread a symbolism for “communion.” A loaf of bread does not take just one grain, but many. The grains are joined together through a process. In like manner, the sacraments shape us into the Body of Christ = Church. So too with wine, St. Augustine observed how many grapes become wine only after a process that breaks down each individual grape in order for it to become something more. St. Paul too picked up on this symbolism: “because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Cor 10:17).

Fr. Nathan Bockrath



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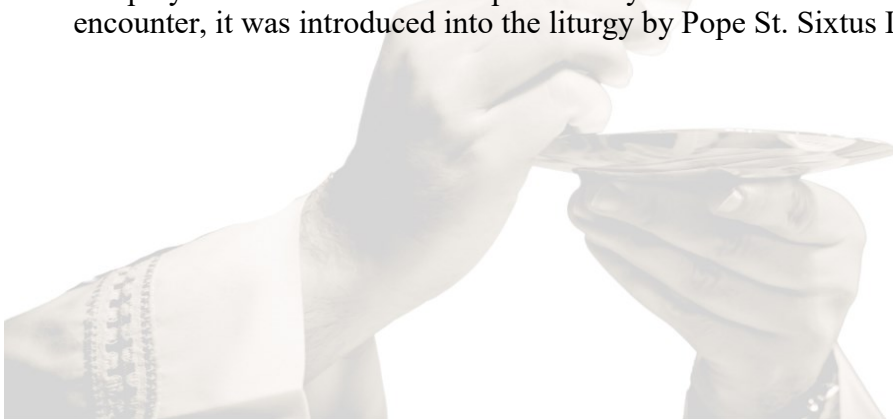
***“For from the rising of the sun, even to its setting, my name is great among the nations; And everywhere they bring sacrifice to my name and a pure offering”
(Mal 1:11)***

Finally, we arrive to the Eucharistic Prayer. This prayer is comprised of eight elements, the first four we will address here and the other four in article 32: (1) Thanksgiving, (2) Acclamation, (3) Epiclesis, (4) Consecration, (5) Anamnesis, (6) Oblation, (7) Intercessions, and (8) Doxology. The Church currently allows several forms of this Eucharistic Prayer, and all eight elements will be present in each. Some of these Eucharistic Prayers find their origin in the early Church. For example, the *Roman Canon* (which is noticeable at it lists all those saints...and this is the only form allowed in the *Extraordinary Form*), originated in Rome at the end of the 4th century, and developed into its present form during the time of Pope Gregory the Great in the 7th century. In all, each of these elements are meant to put our focus on the sacrifice of Jesus that is made available to us in a sacramental way.

Thanksgiving. This is particularly present in the prayer that precedes the Eucharistic Prayer proper, which is appropriately called the *Preface*. There are several forms of the *Preface* that correspond to the nature of the Mass being celebrated (e.g. Advent, Easter, Funeral). This is the prayer that begins with the dialogue between the priest and the people: “Lift up your hearts...Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” Interestingly, not one word of this dialogue has changed since the celebration of Masses in the 3rd century. The prayer properly sets our attention on our Lord in a spirit of thanksgiving, which we saw is so important (cf. art. 13). The prayer will give our reasons for being thankful by drawing our attention to the figure of Christ. For example in the Christmas *Preface* (which is the same for both forms of the Mass), the reason it offers for our thankfulness is: “For in the mystery of the Word made flesh a new light of your glory has shone upon the eyes of our mind...” After being reminded of the reason to be thankful, we are encouraged to offer our praise/worship with the angels. It calls to mind that our Lord is being worshiped by the angels in Heaven, and if we too worship God, then our prayers in fact join the angelic choir: “many angels who surrounded the throne ...they cried out ‘worthy is the Lamb that was slain’” (Rev. 5:11-12).

Acclamation. This element, also known as the *Sanctus* (which is Latin for Holy), refers to the final prayer before we kneel. The prayer in particular is meant to prepare ourselves to encounter our Lord’s presence. It does this by calling to mind two biblical scenes. The first part is that of the call of Isaiah the prophet, where God appeared on His Heavenly throne surrounded by angels crying out: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of host! All the earth is filled with his glory” (Is 6:3). The second part is that when Jesus arrives on Palm Sunday to His place of passion, the people cried out: “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Jn 12:13), “hosanna in the highest” (Mt 21:9). Because this prayer was seen as the most perfect way for the faithful to realize what they are about to encounter, it was introduced into the liturgy by Pope St. Sixtus I (119-128 AD).

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At this point, the congregation is invited to kneel. It is quiet and the focus is directly on the altar. It draws to mind that in the ancient Old Testament sacrifices, the high priest, carrying the blood of the victims (Heb 9:7), entered alone the Holy of Holies, leaving behind the people for whom he would offer the sacrifice. He offered the sacrifice to God in an atmosphere of awe and respect for God.

Epiclesis. This is a Greek word that mean “invocation,” since its the part of the prayer where the priests asks that the bread and wine be made holy and worthy of consecration into our Lord’s body and blood. This happens at the beginning of the Eucharistic prayer, and you can detect it in two ways. First, the priest extends his hands, palms downward over the chalice and host, and then traces the sign of the cross over them. As the priest does this, he asks God to make these gifts holy. Secondly, you will hear the servers ring the bell one time. The bell serves as a way to give emphasis and grab our attention to the most important parts of the Mass...thus, when the priest asks for the Holy Spirit to be present at the altar so that we may enter into Jesus sacrifice on the Cross, it has been an ancient custom for the server to ring the bell.

Consecration. After we pray for the Holy Spirit’s presence, the priest then recalls the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper and how it is connected to His sacrifice on the Cross. Then, in a dramatic shift, the priest shifts his voice into the first-person singular and speaks the words of Christ at the Last Supper. On the one hand, this is done because it’s the words our Lord Himself spoke at the Last Supper. On the other hand, it stresses that it is actually our Lord Himself working in that moment, through the voice of the priest (cf. art. 12). It is precisely at this moment that bread/wine is transubstantiated into the body/blood of Jesus (cf. art. 13). **This is the highest point of the Mass**, for the reality of the Cross is not made present to us (cf. art. 7). To emphasize this part, the bells are rung three times for the when the host is elevated and when the chalice is elevated. Three times to recognize in the reality of the sacrament the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By elevating the host and chalice, we offer to the Father this only one Victim of our salvation. As Jesus said: “So must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life” (Jn 3:14-15). After the elevation, the priest calls for us to recall the Mystery of Faith rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus (in the *Extraordinary Form*, the priest says this as he genuflects after the elevation of the chalice)...this prayer has appeared united to the consecratory formula since the 7th century.

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*“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord”
(1 Cor 11:26)*

Last week we explored the first four elements of the Eucharistic Prayer (i.e. Thanksgiving, Acclamation, Epiclesis, and Consecration). Now we will look at the final four.

Anamnesis. After the “Mystery of Faith” prayer, the priest then transitions into this prayer which calls to mind our Lord’s passion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. The word “anamnesis” is Greek, and it means “to call to mind.” It is included in this part of the Eucharistic prayer to remind all of us that we are acting in obedience to our Lord’s command. Furthermore, we acknowledge the Eucharistic elements as a sacrament of our Lord’s sacrifice. For example, in the Roman Canon it states:

“Therefore, O Lord, as we celebrate the memorial of the blessed Passion...we, your servants and your holy people, offer to your glorious majesty...the holy bread of eternal life and the Chalice of everlasting salvation”

Oblation. In the offertory prayer, the priest asks our Lord to accept the bread and wine. Now that they are consecrated, we now offer Christ Himself to the Father. The intention is that the faithful not only offer the Victim but also learn to offer themselves and so as to form a more complete union with the Father and each other. In the Roman Canon, the prayer states:

“In humble prayer we ask you, almighty God: command that these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high in the sight of your divine majesty, so that all of us, who through this participation at the altar receive the most holy Body and Blood of your Son, may be filled with every grace and heavenly blessing”

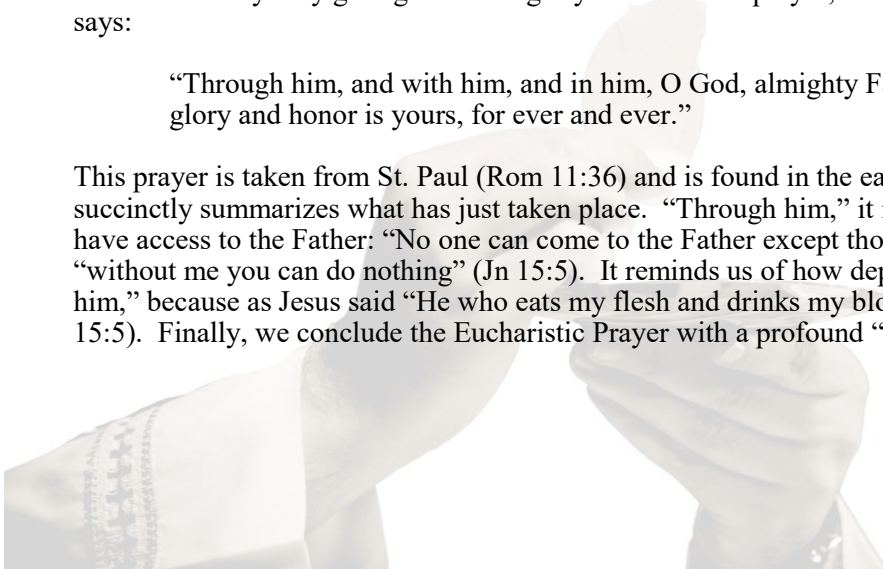
Intercessions. Since Jesus’s entire sacrifice itself is an intercession (i.e. an action done on our behalf, cf. arts 5 and 6) and the Mass represents this sacrifice to us, it is very fitting that intercessions are included in the Eucharistic Prayers. These intercessions make it clear that we celebrate Mass not just for ourselves, but for all the members of the church: living and dead. There are three basic clauses in the Intercessions. First is a prayer for entire Church in the world who is shepherded by the Pope and locally by our bishop. Second is a prayer for all the deceased members of the Church, that they may be welcomed into heaven. Third, we seek the intercession of the saints that we may enjoy eternal life with them.

Final Doxology. The word “Doxology” is a Greek word, meaning “to give glory.” Thus, we end the Eucharistic Prayer by giving our Lord glory. In this final prayer, the priest lifts up the chalice and host, and says:

“Through him, and with him, and in him, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, for ever and ever.”

This prayer is taken from St. Paul (Rom 11:36) and is found in the earliest forms of the Eucharistic prayers. It succinctly summarizes what has just taken place. “Through him,” it is only through Jesus’ mediation that we have access to the Father: “No one can come to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). “With him,” because “without me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). It reminds us of how dependent we are on our Lord (cf. art. 8). “In him,” because as Jesus said “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him” (Jn 15:5). Finally, we conclude the Eucharistic Prayer with a profound “Amen” (cf. art. 22).

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“Lord, teach us to pray” (Lk 11:1)

With the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer, we now move into the Communion Rite of Mass. It may be wondered that if the Mass is supposed to represent the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross, why then do we have Communion? Actually, the consumption of the host was required in the ancient sacrificial practice. It symbolized that person as being a guest of God since the sacrificial gift is now His and yet He gives part of it back. This was a sacrificial symbolism before Christ, but through Mass we join Jesus’s self-offering to the Father, and the Father in turn offers Him as spiritual food.

In the early Church, the Communion Rite was simpler: Breaking of the Bread, Lord’s Prayer, then Communion. Throughout the centuries different prayers and ceremonies were added to assist the faithful in their focus and devotion during this most august moment. Now, there is the Lord’s Prayer (preceded by the invitation to pray and followed by the Embolism and the people’s acclamation), Rite of Peace, Breaking of the Bread (with the Commingling and “Lamb of God”), Priest’s personal preparation, Invitation to the sacred banquet by the showing of the host, Communion of the priest and the faithful, Silent Prayer, Post Communion Prayer.

It may at first seem peculiar or random to include the Lord’s Prayer here in the Mass; but, think of prayer’s ultimate purpose: to align our hearts and minds with our Lord’s. Being aligned with our Lord is the key to being our best selves (cf. art. 2), and misalignment is the cause of our deepest distresses and failures (cf. art. 3). Considering that Communion is all about being properly aligned with God, it is fitting that prayer is present immediately before so that our hearts and minds are prepared for this encounter. The apostles themselves knew the importance of prayer, and yet were aware how their own personal short-comings frustrated the effectiveness of their prayer. Thus, they ask Jesus “how to pray.” This prayer, composed by Jesus Himself, most appropriately shows how we are to approach our Lord. Due to the essential importance this prayer has in our preparation for a Holy Communion, let’s consider the clauses:

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Our Father: Jesus used the Aramaic word “*Abba*,” which is the word a child called their father. Probably best translated as “daddy.” Thus, it indicates that God wants to deal with us as his little children. It indicates our Lord’s love for us, as well as the fact we are part of a greater family.

Hallowed be thy name: This is not that we make God’s name holy by our prayers; rather, we are asking that God’s name be holy for us personally. In this first petition we are essentially asking that our Lord will in fact be our first and most important priority, and nothing else takes that place...for we seen what happens when it does (cf. art. 3).

Thy kingdom come: In this second petition, we ask that our Lord may reign in everybody’s will. It’s a petition that we may realize the fullness of His plan in this life and the next.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven: This third petition is not a presumption that our Lord’s will needs our prayers to be actualized (God can do what He wants). Rather, it’s a petition that we may carry out His will. It’s a prayer for our will to align more perfectly with His.

Give us this day our daily bread: This fourth petition is the request for us to be and remain in Communion with our Lord. The word “daily” is an unfortunate translation of the Greek term used “*Epiouision*,” which means “supersubstantial.” In other words, give us the bread not of this world, but the bread of Heaven that lifts our soul.

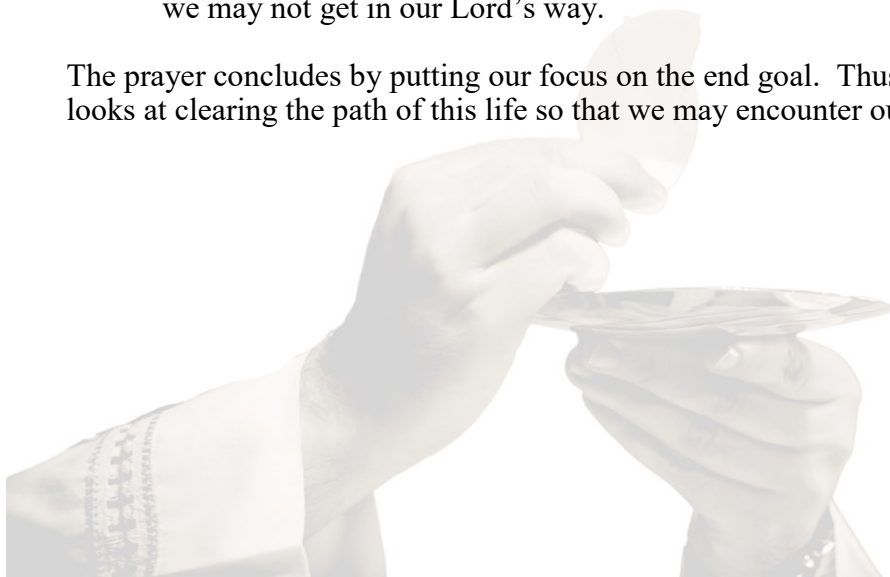
Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive...: One of the worst things we can do in the spiritual life is be naive and delusional about our own status because it causes to remain in mediocrity and not break through to greatness. This fifth petition challenges us to be mindful of our shortcomings...not to be negative, but to be aware of the opportunities before us. In addition, with the clause about forgiving others, it challenges us to grow our hearts into Jesus own Sacred Heart.

Lead us not into temptation: This sixth petition is a request for our Lord’s assistance not to succumb to the evil temptations of this world that keep us from being our best, and reaching real happiness and meaning.

Deliver us from evil: In this seventh petition (notice there are seven petitions [cf. art. 2], the biblical number for perfection), we request our Lord’s assistance to remove any evil that is present in our life. Evil always weighs us down, God wants to build us up...here, we pray that we may not get in our Lord’s way.

The prayer concludes by putting our focus on the end goal. Thus, the private intercession of the priest looks at clearing the path of this life so that we may encounter our Lord.

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“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” (Mt 5:23-24)

With the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, we now enter into the Rite of Peace. Here the priest addresses the congregation, “The peace of the Lord be with you always” or “Pax Domini sit semper vobis cum.” In the Extraordinary Form, the Rite consist simply of this address and the congregations response “Et cum Spiritu tuo” (and with your spirit). In a Solemn High Mass, the ministers would offer a sign of peace to each other, but only them. In the *novus ordo*, while it is an option, it has become very typical at parishes for the priest to extend the following invitation, “Let us offer each other the sign of peace.” While it's a kind gesture, the deeper reason for the Rite reminds us more fundamentally of the kind of person we ought to be...the person we should be transformed into through Holy Communion; that is, a peacemaker. Our Lord's fundamental mission was to reconcile this broken world (first to Himself, which in turn leads to reconciliation amongst us) (cf. art. 6). St. Paul said, “God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18). Since our Lord is all about reconciliation, and we are striving to be in communion with our Lord, this too entails being apart of His ministry of reconciliation. St. Paul, in fact, had to address the Christian community in Corinth about this topic because they failed to see this connection between Communion with our Lord and peace with others (cf. 1 Cor 11:17-34). In contrast to Christ, the devil is all about division: division first with our Lord, which in turn leads to division with others (cf. art. 3). Holy Communion is designed to reverse the effects of the evil one: union with our Lord, which in turn will lead to true peace with others...true peace with others will never happen if we are not first fully in communion with our Lord, simply because we are not designed that way (cf. art. 2). Any attempts of reconciliation which are independent of union with our Lord, will only create a temporary façade of peace. If you look closely at Jesus' teaching on peace, you will see this connection. For example, in the Beatitudes, He associates peacemakers with those in communion with the Father: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Mt 5:9). Jesus Himself at the Last Supper even connects this true sense of peace with Himself and contrasts it with the secular understanding: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you” (Jn 14:27). Because of this fundamental and necessary connection between communion with our Lord and peace with others, Pope Innocent I (401-417 A.D.) made this Rite an obligatory prelude to Communion.

As the Rite of Peace comes to a conclusion, the priest moves into the Fraction Rite (i.e. Breaking of the Bread). In the Extraordinary Form, the Rite of Peace is actually in the middle of the prayers for the Fraction Rite. For both forms of the Mass, the priest takes the host and breaks it over the chalice. He places a small piece into the chalice while saying, “May this mingling of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.” The act of “breaking” is the action of our Lord Himself. In the feeding of the 5000 (an event that served as a precursor to the Eucharist), it says Jesus took the loaves “and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing over them, broke them” (Lk 9:16). Similarly at the Last Supper, it says “then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them” (Lk 22:19). Also, after the Resurrection when Jesus appeared to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, they did not recognize Him until “he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him” (Lk 24:30-31)...they themselves retold this encounter to others how Jesus “was made known to them in the breaking of the bread” (Lk 24:35). In fact, the early Church spoke of Mass in reference to this action: They devoted themselves “to the breaking of the bread” (Acts 2:42). In a deeper sense, the act of breaking reminds us again of Jesus's body on the Cross: His body was “broken” for us so that we can be reconciled with the Father. The action of *Commingle*ing the piece of host with the Precious Blood is meant to point to the Resurrection of Jesus. Just as the separation of the blood from Jesus body symbolizes His Death, so too the uniting of them represents His resurrected life. In turn, it also points to the new life that He wants to share with us through this Holy Communion (cf. art. 1).

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***“Though he was harshly treated, he submitted and opened not his mouth; like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth”
(Is 53:7)***

Back in the beginning of our journey through the Mass, we reflected on the role of sacrifices in the Old Testament (cf. art. 5) and how Jesus is the definitive “Lamb” that can actually effect the reconciliation desired from the Old Testament sacrifices (cf. art. 6). As we now step closer to the moment of communion, we proclaim the “Lamb of God.” This was established in the Mass by Pope St. Sergius I (687-701 A.D.), and it is meant to help us focus more on the identity of the person we are entering into communion with: Jesus, who is the Lamb of God. This identity of Jesus being God’s Lamb is expressed in different ways throughout Scripture. John the Baptist was the first one to make this connection, “Behold, the Lamb of God” (Jn 1:29). The role of the lamb was foreshadowed by the paschal lamb that the Jews sacrificed on the eve of their departure from slavery in Egypt. St. John (the Apostle and Evangelist) who was at the foot of the Cross, observed that Jesus’s legs were not broken as in the case of the two thieves (Jn 19:33). This is a fascinating detail when considering God’s prescription for the paschal lamb: “You must not break any bone of it” (Ex 12:46). Jesus is bought with 30 pieces of silver, which were funds originally destined to buy lambs for the daily sacrifices (the funds were given to Judas from the chief priests, and the priests received them from the people looking to have the lambs sacrificed). Furthermore, Jesus died at 3:00pm the time when the lambs were sacrificed in the Temple (Mk 15:33). Finally, St. John envisions heaven as the wedding of the Lamb (i.e. Jesus) with His bride, the Church, as described in the book of Revelation (Rev. 19:5-10). In addition to us singing this chant, this title is also used in the final address to the congregation from the priest: “Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins of the world.”

In between the chanting and priest’s declaration of the “Lamb of God,” there is a brief period of silence. Here the priest says some prescribed prayers in private, and the congregation is invited to prepare themselves in private as well. This action is rooted in St. Paul’s instruction to the church in Corinth: “Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup” (1 Cor 11:27-28). Below are the two prayers the priest says in silence. They are from the 10th century and are theologically rich. You are welcome to use them for your own personal preparation as well:

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, who, by the will of the Father and work of the Holy Spirit, through your Death gave life to the world, free me by this, your most holy Body and Blood, from all my sins and from every evil; keep me always faithful to your commandments, and never let me be parted from you.”

“May the receiving of your Body and Blood, Lord Jesus Christ, not bring me to judgment and condemnation, but through your loving mercy be for me protection in mind and body and a healing remedy.”

The priest also says the following prayer privately in the *Extraordinary Form*, but it is said aloud and publicly in the *novus ordo* after the “Our Father.”

“Lord Jesus Christ who said to your Apostles: Peace I leave you, my peace I give you, look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and graciously grant her peace and unity in accordance with your will.”

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“I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world” (Jn 6:51)

In Matthew’s gospel, we see Jesus encounter a Centurion who has a problem: his servant is paralyzed and suffering dreadfully. Obviously terrible for the servant, but also for the Centurion...on the one hand this means he is one worker less; however, more importantly, it’s clear that the servant is also a friend. He is in pain to see this suffering and he feels utterly hopeless. Realizing his powerlessness, that he needs help, that he is nothing without our Lord, he then approaches Jesus and says, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof, but only say the word and my servant shall be healed” (Mt 8:8). Jesus, amazed at what he said, immediately replies, “Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith...let it be done for you” (Mt 8:10, 13). The servant was then healed...not because the Centurion “wooed” Jesus; but rather, because Centurion allowed his pride and ego to fade away, and in turn his humility allowed God’s grace to operate in his life.

This spiritual dynamic (i.e. humility as the “doorway” to grace) is consistent throughout the Bible for people who experience God’s working in their lives. For example, the Blessed Mother’s response to the Archangel Gabriel: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). Of course we are not born without sin like Mary, so for centuries the Church has invited us to respond to the Lamb of God (cf. art. 35) with the words of next “greatest” figure (look again at Jesus’s own words) of humility, the Centurion. We repeat his words, changing the intention for our own soul. While the words are powerful, the important part is to allow the words to reign true in our hearts, so with our humility our Lord’s grace can take effect through the Blessed Sacrament.

After we recite the Centurion’s humble proclamation, the priest receives his communion. Often you will see the priest say a private prayer beforehand. In the *Extraordinary Form* the prescribed prayer consists of the priest making the sign of the cross with each species (i.e. the Body and Blood) to bless himself before receiving it, and to say in Latin: “May the Body [or Blood] of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve my soul unto eternal life. Amen.” In fact, this is how communion is offered to faithful in the *Extraordinary Form* (although the “my” was changed to “your”). In the *Novus Ordo* the current practice is simply to say “the Body of Christ,” to which the faithful responds “Amen.” Personally I have retained the classical practice for myself throughout my entire priesthood, as the prayer most appropriately and succinctly sums up goal of this moment and the whole spiritual life (cf. arts. 1, 2, 7, 8).

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You will also notice that the priest receives both species, which is a required action. This is so because it completes the sacrificial act begun with the Eucharistic prayer. During this act, the priest too makes his communion with our Lord. The faithful, on the other hand, are not required to receive both species. In fact, while the faithful are asked to attend Mass weekly, they are only asked to make communion once a year. The idea being that we don't treat the moment of Holy Communion too hastily, but properly prepare ourselves the best we can. The reason why the faithful are not required to receive both species is because (1) they are not completing the sacrificial act, rather the priest is; and (2) they can make a full communion with our Lord under either specie. Our Lord is fully present under the smallest particle of host or drop of Precious Blood (cf. arts. 9, 11).

While much can be said on the posture and manner of receiving communion, I prefer not to get into the "weeds" of that debate since the Church allows several options. Rather, I would like to offer two biblical points of focus that will enrichen our experience: that is of "what" is happening and "why" it is happening. The "what" is that through communion we are allowing ourselves to most fully connect with the sacrifice of the Cross. While in the desert, Moses wanted to ratify the new Covenant between God and the people. He read the Covenant to the people and asked if they would accept. Then he offered a *sacrifice* to God, and "then took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words of his'" (Ex 24:8). This set the tone for the rest of the biblical sacrifices (including Jesus's) and our need to unite with the sacrifice (cf. art. 7). Through communion, we are "sprinkled" anew with the blood of our Lord...the new and everlasting covenant (Heb 8:8, 13). The "why" is union with our Lord to reach our full potential (arts. 1, 2). The last book of the Bible describes this final union in terms of a "wedding": "Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory. For the wedding day of the Lamb has come, his bride has made herself ready...Blessed are those who have been called to the wedding feast of the Lamb" (Rev. 19: 7, 9). In other words, when we come to receive Holy Communion, not only are we being united most perfectly with the sacrifice of Jesus, but we also renew this most intimate relationship with our Lord by actually sharing our lives together. If our hearts are in it, we are bound to have the same experience as the Centurion who welcomed Jesus "under his roof."

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“You nourished your people with food of angels and furnished them Bread from heaven, ready to hand, untoiled-for, endowed with all delights and conforming to every taste” (Wis 16:20)

After Communion, the priest returns to the altar and collects any remaining particles. He purifies the paten or ciborium over the chalices, and then the chalice itself. The *Extraordinary Form*, there is a prescribed way in which the priest has his fingers and chalice purified with wine and water (known as the Ablution prayers). The first prayer said, is the same prayer as said in the *Novos Ordo*. In silence he prays:

What has passed our lips as food, O Lord, may we possess in purity of heart, that what has been given to us in time may be our healing for eternity.

There is also a second prayer that is also said in the *Extraordinary Form* and could also be said in the *Novos Ordo*:

May Thy Body, O Lord, which I have received, and Thy Blood which I have drank, cleave to my bowels; and grant that no stain of sin may remain in me, who have been fed with this pure and holy Sacrament; Who livest and reignest for ever and ever. Amen

You will notice that the priest and/or deacon takes careful time purifying each of the vessels and folding the corporal (i.e. the upper cloth). While this may seem like a waste of time, it is meant to show reverence for the Eucharist since even under the tiniest particle of host or drop of Precious Blood, our Lord is still fully present. From my perspective at the altar, there are always leftover fragments (e.g. broken pieces, small specs of the hosts, etc.). To not address this would be tantamount to leaving a consecrated host unguarded on the altar. Not only is that disrespectful, it opens the door to sacrilege. One of the worst things a parish can ever do is to become careless with the Blessed Sacrament, because that would soon lead to indifference, which in turn will lead to faithlessness.

The ultimate point of this time is to foster a space for reflection, so that the faithful are able to process what has taken place and how best they can react to the graces received. There is no one set of prescribed prayers to be said. Some days, our post Communion prayers will be filled with thanksgiving, as we are most mindful of our Lord's blessings in our life. Other days we may be more aware of our unworthiness and sinfulness, and so we use this time to repent and consider adjustments. Perhaps we may find ourselves still in awe of the mystery of that day's readings and/or the sacrament itself, and find ourselves in blissful contemplation. The point is that the Holy Spirit will always pull at our heart differently so that we are in best position going forward...this post Communion period is best suited for following the Spirit's lead.

After this time of reflection, the priest will stand and say, “Let us Pray.” The final collect is read (cf. art. 22). You will often notice in this final prayer an emphasis on allowing the Eucharist to take effect in our lives: graces for the soul; increase in the theological virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit; remedy for the body; unity of the Mystical Body of Christ (i.e. the Church); and eternal life. For example, consider our closing collects for this weekend's Mass (*Novos Ordo* is the first prayer):

Grant that your faithful, O Lord, whom you nourish and endow with life through the food of your Word and heavenly Sacrament, may so benefit from your beloved Son's great gifts that we may merit an eternal share in his life. Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Having received Your Heavenly sacrament, O Lord, may we make progress, we beseech You, toward our everlasting salvation. Through Jesus Christ, thy Son our Lord, Who lives and reigns with Thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, world without end.

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***“You are witnesses of these things. And behold I am sending the promise of the Father upon you
...They did him homage and returned to Jerusalem with great joy” (Lk 24:48-49, 52)***

After the final collect is said, we enter into the Concluding Rite. In the *Novus Ordo* it consists of a blessing, dismissal, and the reverence of the altar. In the *Extraordinary Form*, it consists of a dismissal, private prayer by the priest, reverence of the altar, blessing, and then the reading St. John’s prologue (1:1-14). This reading of the Gospel, commonly known as the “Last Gospel,” was a custom introduced in the 13th century and became prescribed by Pope Pius V in the 16th century. The prayer said by priest in the *EF* finds its roots in the 10th century, and was placed in the Mass in the 15th century, and it is the following:

May the tribute of my homage be pleasing to you, O most holy Trinity. Grant that the Sacrifice which I, unworthy as I am, have offered in the presence of your majesty, may be acceptable to you. Through your mercy may it bring forgiveness to me and to all for whom I have offered it. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

For both forms of the Mass, the blessing begins with the same formula: “The Lord be with you...and with your spirit.” While it may sound odd to say “spirit,” it draws our attention to the soul of the priest that was permanently marked at his ordination, and through which our Lord operates (cf. art. 12). Conversely, it’s a challenge to the priest to cooperate with the Holy Spirit.

Although we speak of it often, an obvious question that we should ask is: “What is a blessing, and what does it do?” As we have seen throughout the Mass, several blessings are made, both on objects (e.g. water) and people. In general, a blessing fundamentally reminds us that we live in a *fallen* world. The Bible often depicts our world in terms of a war between good and evil. For example, St. John said, “We know that we belong to God, and the whole world is under the power of the evil one” (1 Jn 5:19). So too St. Paul speaks of the effects of this battle on ourselves: “Our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with principalities, with powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with evil spirits in the heavens” (Eph 6:12). As well as on the physical world, “We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now” (Rom 8:22). This is the setting, but we see with Jesus that He is the “Light” that “shines in darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (Jn 1:5). In this analogy of a “spiritual war,” we know that Jesus won the battle on the Cross (cf. art. 6): “but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:57). Nonetheless, in this life the war continues even though we know the outcome is predetermined. The role of a blessing, either on people or objects, is to bring it into the dominion of our Lord from that of evil (so we bless objects so that they inspire us with goodness), and to tap it into the power of Christ’s victory on the Cross (we bless people routinely so that they have the spiritual power to keep fighting off the ways of the evil one). With this basic understanding in place, it is logical then to offer a blessing on the faithful at the end of Mass as they prepare to return to the “battle field” of this fallen world.

The dismissal of the Mass has several formations in the *NO* and only one in the *EF* (i.e. “*Ita Missa Est*” or “go forth the Mass has ended”). The reverence of the altar consists of a kiss. As mentioned in a previous article (i.e. art. 20), the “kiss” draws to mind the sinful woman who bathed Jesus’s feet with her tears and then kissed them (Lk 7:38). The Mass is officially over at this point in the *NO*, and after the final Gospel in the *EF*.

Even though the Mass is over, we still have the final procession (cf. art. 20) which symbolizes the power of the Cross now going into the world. Often there is a closing hymn as well to capture the theme of the Mass (cf. art. 18). From 1884-1965, there were additional prayers said before the final procession, known as the Leonine Prayers. These were prayers introduced by Pope Leo XIII in reaction to anti-clerical political and social developments in Europe. In effect, he was directing the graces of the Cross to this problem. These were short prayers, one of which was the prayer to St. Michael, the patron saint for spiritual battle. While the prayers are no longer obligatory, our Bishop has invited the parishes of the diocese to recite the St. Michael prayer at the end of Mass due to the issues facing our nation.

Fr. Nathan Bockrath

Source and Summit

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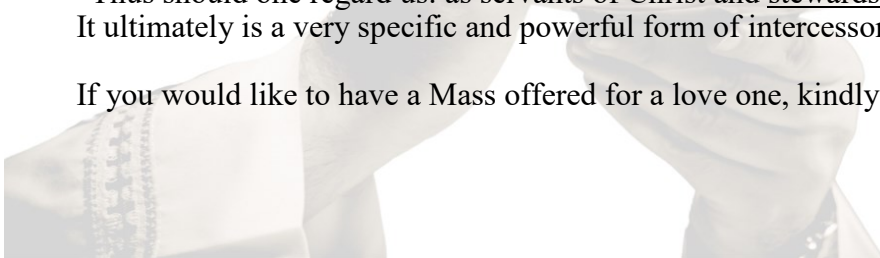
“First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions and thanksgivings be offered for everyone” (1 Tim 2:1)

What is the deal with Mass intentions? Why do we offer Masses for our loved ones who have passed? How does this work? You probably have noticed at Mass that we mention deceased parishioners whom we are offering that particular Mass for...why is that? To appreciate this practice, it will be helpful to take a step back and ask: How does intercessory prayer even work? The basic theological principle is the non-competitive transcendence of God. Our Lord exists in such a way that He doesn't stand over and against His creation as if it's a zero sum game. So it's not "if I'm paying attention to creation, then I'm not paying attention to God." It doesn't work that way...rather, God is the very source of creation, in and through which finite things exist. This is a fancy philosophical way of saying that God does not compete with creation, but delights in involving His creation in His own providential design. So, we get the privilege of cooperating with God's providential purpose. St. Paul beautifully expresses this understanding in his reflection of the Church as the Body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-31) where Jesus "is the head of the body, the Church" (Col 1:18). Part of this cooperation with our Lord comes in with prayer. God deigned to give some of His graces through precisely the intercession of certain figures who cooperate with His grace. When we say "will you pray for me?," I am not asking that "you take the place of God." That's ridiculous; rather, I am asking "can you cooperate with God in such a way that He will give His grace precisely through your prayer...because I know from Scripture and Tradition that that is how our Lord operates." So in a similar way, at a higher pitch, we ask for the intercession of the saints. This is interestingly expressed in the book of Revelation ch. 5, where 24 elders receive the prayers through incense, and brings them before the Lamb of God (i.e. Jesus) in heaven. With all of this, God is not denigrated or insulted, but delights in this cooperation that He invited. He deigns in His love and providence to channel His graces through these secondary causes.

So, how does this work with Mass? Remember that Mass is the re-presentation of the Sacrifice of the Cross, and thus all the graces and benefits that Christ attained through His sacrifice are made available to us at Mass. When these graces and benefits are received by the Church, they are called fruits...the end results of Jesus sacrifice. The Church has traditionally made a four-fold distinction of these "fruits." First is the general fruit which is the grace that falls to the whole Church (this includes the living and dead) when a Mass is said. Just as Christ's Sacrifice is beneficial to those who were not present at Calvary, so too is it the case at its re-presentation in Mass. Second is the special fruit which is the grace imparted to the faithful who co-operate in the Sacrifice. These are the people who attend that Mass, and the abundance of the fruit received is based on the measure of one's own co-operation at Mass (e.g. devotion, personal sanctity). Third is the personal fruit, referring to the grace the priest receives by offering the sacrifice in the person of Christ...and I need all the help I can get! The fourth and final fruit, and this is where Mass Intentions are concerned, is the ministerial fruit. This is the fruit that is imparted to those for whom the priest celebrates Mass. Not only does the priest offer the sacrifice, he also is empowered to determine to whom the fruit of the Sacrifice should be applied (both to the living and departed). St. Paul alludes to this role of dispensing when he says "Thus should one regard us: as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor 4:1). It ultimately is a very specific and powerful form of intercessory prayer by the priest.

If you would like to have a Mass offered for a loved one, kindly contact the parish office.

Fr. Nathan Bockrath



Source and Summit

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“‘Mass’...why that name”?

“You are worth more”...we began our journey through Mass by contemplating this statement of our Lord in article 1. We saw that our Lord sees a potential in us that we may not see, but we certainly feel it...we know when something is off. We further saw in article 2 that it is only when our Lord is in the picture that our potential can be actualized. Our Lord’s grace (i.e. His own Divine Life), fills the void of our soul. It’s only when we are united with this Divine Life and cooperate with it, that we feel fully alive, reach our full potential, and become the person we have always been meant to be. As we have seen, the Mass precisely provides this grace through representing our Lord’s sacrifice on the Cross. The thing about this Divine Life is that it operates completely opposite of demonic life, which is characterized by pride (cf. art. 3) that leads one to be self-enclosed. Divine Life is characterized rather by love...“God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). This is not the emotional kind of love, but rather it’s the Greek *agape* love that conveys a choice or orientation to desire the best in others. This how God operates: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16). This love that characterizes our Lord’s Divine Life, is always looking outwards (not inwards...that’s pride) and looking to spread goodness. It’s precisely this Divine Life that we are called to unite and cooperate with in our lives if we want to reach our full potential: “God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him” (1 Jn 4:16). It’s no wonder when our Lord calls people in the Scriptures, He is also sending them out...putting this love into action, not only because the world needs it, but also because we need it since that is how we cooperate with His grace! Jesus called the 12 apostles and then sent them out (Mt 10:1-5); He called the 72 disciples and then sent them out (Lk 10:1); before he Ascended to heaven Jesus told the eleven to go preach and baptize (Mk 16:15-16); at Pentecost they were to go forth after receiving the Spirit (Acts 2:1-47); and another example of this is St. Paul, he was converted and his first action was that of proclaiming the gospel (Acts 9:20).

The Mass obtained this name “Mass” because it was the final words said in Latin at the Liturgy: “*ita missa est.*” This is roughly translated as “go, you are dismissed.” There is proof that early Christians referred to this liturgy as the “Mass” already in the 4th century in the writings of St. Ambrose (397 A.D.). “Mass” comes from the Latin verb *mittere* meaning “to send.” While it served a practical purpose in letting the faithful know of the ending, it also took on this deeper spiritual meaning of the need now to cooperate with this grace. It points to our own mission, our calling, our need to live this out if we want to experience our fullness. At the end of Mass, we are encouraged not to exit the doors the same way we entered...we certainly can, but remember the classical definition of insanity: “doing the same thing over and expecting different results.” Rather, the goal is to be changed through the lessons and encounter with our Lord, and so engage the world differently, in a way that reflects a cooperation with our Lord’s grace. It’s only then that we will feel fully alive.

The Mass is not akin to a theater where we expect entertainment (if that is our expectation, we will surely be disappointed...it has never been designed for this purpose); rather, it’s more of a doctor’s office: we acknowledge that something might be off, that the doctor knows something we don’t, it might not be immediately pleasing, but it’s best for the long haul, and when we leave we should expect some changes in our lifestyle. Through these articles I hope you have seen how every aspect of the Mass is carefully designed to address all aspects of our spiritual life. It pushes and pulls us, so that we are spiritually healthier and can be fully alive. The challenge for us is to maintain this health and avoid the spiritual poisons of this world. Are we up to this task...for the good of others, our love ones, our own personal good? *Ita missa est* ... the Mass has ended!

Amen.

Fr. Nathan Bockrath