

CHAPTER 22

The Eucharistic Sacrifice

As a sacrament, we think of the Eucharist as a holy meal which Jesus told us to celebrate in memory of him. The Mass looks like a meal for it has a table (altar) covered with a cloth, bread, wine, water, and people praying, eating, and drinking together as one family in Christ.

But the Mass is also a Sacrifice. It has everything that is required for this act of worship to God: an altar dedicated for sacrifice, a priest who does the offering, and precious gifts to be offered. At the Last Supper, Jesus made the Mass a spiritual reliving of his sacrifice on the Cross. How? By the words he used. Think about the most important words at Mass, the *words of Consecration* which come to us from Christ himself:

This is my Body which will be *given up* for you.

This is the cup of my Blood, the Blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be *shed for you and for all* so that sins may be forgiven.

See how they remind us of a sacrifice—a body to be given up and blood to be shed? Of course Jesus was talking about his sacrifice on the Cross; but the Mass he gave us is closely connected with it. The *Sacrifice of the Mass* is not a *new* sacrifice or *another* sacrifice. It is really the same one that Jesus offered once for

all upon the Cross. How can this be? Well, in both events there is only one priest doing the offering (Jesus) and there is only one victim or gift being offered (Jesus). So if you have the same priest and the very same offering, it must be the same sacrifice! This is hard to understand, but again we must remind ourselves that it is a mystery that we believe by faith alone.





The Sacrifice of the Mass

Of course there is some difference in the way the sacrifice of Jesus was offered on the Cross and in the Eucharist.

Upon the Cross, Jesus offered himself in pain and bloody suffering. In the Mass he offers his Body and Blood without pain, under the appearances of the consecrated bread and wine. But it is the same Jesus.

Also, upon the Cross Jesus offered his sacrifice by himself. At Mass he offers it with his Church—through the priest and the congregation.

Saint Paul reminds us that the Eucharist is a reliving of the sacrifice of the Cross. In his first letter to the Corinthians he tells us: “Every time, then, you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes [again]!” (1 Cor 11:26).

We can also see that the Mass is a sacrifice by looking at the prayers used during its celebration:

Lord God, we ask you to receive us and be pleased with the *sacrifice we offer you* with humble and contrite hearts. (Priest’s Offertory prayer)

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 Church. (People’s Offertory prayer)

We offer you, God of glory and majesty, this *holy and perfect sacrifice*: the bread of life and the cup of eternal salvation. (Eucharistic Prayer I)

Lord, may this *sacrifice*, which has made our peace with you, advance the peace and salvation of all the world. (Eucharistic Prayer III)

Looking forward to his coming in glory, we offer you his body and blood, the *acceptable sacrifice* which brings salvation to the whole world. (Eucharistic Prayer IV)

The Mass in Our Lives

The Mass, or celebration of the Eucharist, is the greatest worship we can offer to God. If we remember that being at Mass is very much like standing with Our Lady beneath the Cross of Jesus, we will be sure to pray with love and devotion.

You may hear someone say that he “doesn’t get anything out of” the Mass. Well, first of all, we should never look upon the Mass as something we go to in order to “get” something. But we will get more from Mass if we put something of ourselves into it: If you want the Mass to help you grow in your friendship with Christ you must *prepare* yourself for it every week.

Words to Know:

words of Consecration
Sacrifice of the Mass

Preparing for Mass

1. One good way to prepare for Mass is to go to Confession frequently to receive God's help in overcoming your faults.
2. Spend a few minutes reading the Gospel passage that will be used at Mass. This will help you to learn about Jesus and his teachings.
3. Get to church a few minutes *before* Mass begins and ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to help you pray the Mass with faith, hope, and love.
4. Finally, do not rush out of church after Mass but try to spend a few minutes in private prayer with Jesus, whom you have just received. Speak to him in your own words as you would to a best friend, for he wants to be that to you.

Q. 147 *Is the Eucharist only a sacrament?*

No, the Eucharist is not only a sacrament; it is also the permanent Sacrifice of the new covenant, and as such it is called the Holy Mass.

Q. 148 *What is a sacrifice?*

Sacrifice is the public offering to God of a thing which is destroyed to profess that God is the Creator and Supreme Master to whom everything belongs.

Q. 149 *What is the Holy Mass?*

The Holy Mass is the Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, which is offered on the altar by the priest to God, under the appearances of bread and wine, in memory of the sacrifice of the Cross and in *renewal* of the sacrifice of the Cross.

Q. 150 *Is the Sacrifice of the Mass the same sacrifice as the Cross?*

The Sacrifice of the Mass is the very sacrifice of the Cross; the only difference is in the manner of performing it.

Q. 151 *What is the difference between the sacrifice of the Cross and the Sacrifice of the Mass?*

There is this difference between the sacrifice of the Cross and that of the Mass: on the Cross Jesus Christ sacrificed himself by giving his own blood voluntarily, and thus he merited all grace for us; on the altar, on the other hand, Jesus Christ sacrifices himself and annihilates himself mystically by the ministry of the priest, without shedding his blood again, and he applies to us the merits of the sacrifice of the Cross.

Q. 152 *For what purposes is the Mass offered to God?*

The Mass is offered to God to give him the supreme worship of adoration (called "worship of latria"); to thank him for his blessings to us; to placate him and to do satisfaction for our sins; and to obtain graces for the welfare of the faithful, living and dead.

Q. 153 *Is the Mass not also offered to the saints?*

No, the Mass is not offered to the saints, but to God alone, even when the Mass is celebrated in honor of the saints, sacrifice is due only to the Creator and Supreme Master.

Q. 154 *Are we obliged to hear Mass?*

We are obliged to hear Mass on Sunday and on the Holy Days of Obligation. But it is good also to attend Mass frequently, in order to participate in the greatest act of religion, the one which is most pleasing to God and most meritorious for us.

Q. 155 *What is the most proper way of attending Mass?*

The most proper way of attending Mass is to offer it to God in union with the priest, reflecting upon the sacrifice of the Cross, that is, on the Passion and death of the Lord, and by receiving Holy Communion. For Holy Communion is our actual and real union with the spotless Victim that is offered, and hence the fullest participation in the Holy Sacrifice.