

## WHAT IS MASS?

Dear Parishioners,

We are in the process of Eucharistic Revival in our Universal Catholic Church and in our diocese. Many people express their desire to know and understand better what **Mass** is beside knowing that it is a sacrament. How does it differentiate from other sacraments?

The Holy Eucharist in the Mass is different from all the other sacraments in that it is conferred not just on single individuals (or a couple, in matrimony), but rather it is a universal sacrament because it is a universal sacrifice. Let's see what St. Thomas Aquinas says about this:

*The usefulness of this sacrament is universal because the life it gives is not only the life of one person, but, so far as concerns itself, the life of the entire world: and for this the death of Christ is fully sufficient. "He is the offering for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the entire world" (1 John 2:2). We should note that this sacrament is different from the others: for the other sacraments have individual effects: as in baptism, only the one baptized receives grace. But in the immolation of this sacrament, the effect is universal: because it affects not just the priest, but also those for whom he prays, as well as the entire Church, of the living and of the dead. The reason for this is that it contains the universal cause of all the sacraments, Christ.*

As we can see, the sacrament of the altar is not just about me, it is about the whole world. Our worship at the Mass is still a thing of incomparable power for our consolation and conversion of heart. How so? Because it is first and foremost a sacrifice. In fact, it is the once for all Sacrifice of Christ on Calvary that transcends time and space, made present for us again in an unbloody manner. It is the perfect Sacrifice that all the Old Testament sacrifices prefigured (*see Malachi 1:11*). In it, Jesus Christ lovingly offers Himself in an Act of Oblation to God the Father on our behalf. He adores God the Father, He atones for our sins, He offers thanks and praise, and He intercedes for our needs.

As Catholics, we have the privilege of attending this Sacrifice, and uniting ourselves to Christ's self-offering. Put in another way, we can imitate Christ by offering ourselves, soul and body, to God the Father as living sacrifices as St. Paul says. This is what participation in the Mass really means. In the prayer: Let us pray: the priest acknowledges this participation of the faithful when he prays, *"Pray brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the Almighty Father."*

There are four ends or purposes of the Holy Mass:

- 1) **ADORATION:** The Holy Mass is first and foremost an act of loving adoration. It is worship of God Our Father. Why? Because He deserves it! Almighty God is the most perfect of all Beings, the self-existing One and all that exists owes its existence to Him. He is the Supreme Good, the Good from which all other goods received their meaning. He is the Supreme Beauty, the sole standard by which we can recognize and understand that which is beautiful. And He is Love itself, giving of Himself from all eternity. He alone is worthy of our awe-struck adoration.

*“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you did create all things, and, by your will, they existed and were created.”* - the Saints and Angels cry in the Book of Revelation, and the Mass is participation in this heavenly worship.

- 2) **THANKSGIVING:** All that we are and have, comes from God’s generous hand. Every good and every blessing finds its source in God alone. Our very existence is dependent on His will. In response to God’s endless generosity, which we often don’t even notice, thanksgiving is the only acceptable response. *“I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.”* G.K. Chesterton
- 3) **ATONEMENT:** We are all sinners and, while we do our best to rationalize and minimize it, all sin is a grave offense against God. But we are not without hope. On the Cross, Jesus Christ atoned for our sins, totally and completely, and we have the assurance that, if we turn to Him in repentance and faith, we can find forgiveness and healing.

The Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross is our certain hope, and the Holy Mass is the representation of this Sacrifice. Therefore, the third end of the Mass is atonement for our sins. The Book of Revelation describes Christ appearing as *“Lamb as if it had been slain.”* In heaven, Jesus stands before God’s throne, offering God the Father his once for all sacrifice in continual atonement for our sins and the sins of the whole world. This reality is made present at every Mass.

- 4) **PETITION:** The Mass is a powerful form of prayer: *“Without doubt, the Lord grants all the favors which are asked of Him in the Mass, provided they be fitting for us.”* Many of the saints tell us that bringing our requests before Our Lord after the Consecration is one of the most effective ways to obtain all that we need spiritually and physically.

In summary, in every Mass, Jesus Christ descends upon the Altar in the fullness of His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. He is truly present, giving himself to us completely in the Holy Eucharist. It is truly the Sacrifice of Calvary made present once again. What a beautiful and profound reality! As Saint Padre Pio once said, *“If we only knew how God regards this Sacrifice, we would risk our lives to be present at a single Mass.”* In light of these words let us find the time and go to Mass.