

THE NEW

your questions answered

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-The new Mass
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THE NEW MASS

your questions answered

By William J. Jacobs



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INTRODUCTION

It is terrifying when something old and familiar suddenly becomes new and strange. It is a great shock when we suddenly learn that something we thought we understood thoroughly is almost completely beyond our understanding. This has been the experience of many Catholics as the new changes in the Mass have been developed. It is the purpose of this booklet to try to straighten out some of the things that are confusing people and causing them to wonder, to question themselves and even to question the wisdom of the Church in putting these new things into effect.

Let us say, first of all, that it is the will of the Church, as officially stated in Vatican II, that the Mass be changed as it has been changed and will be changed in the future. The purpose is twofold, so that the Mass may give the greatest possible glory to God, which is its main intention, and, secondly, that the People of God, the members of the Mystical Body of Christ, may receive the most from the Mass.

We all know that the Mass is the central act of Christian life, the thing through which we have the greatest opportunity to give to God. We also know that the Mass is the source of our greatest blessings. Most of us, however, have a great deal to learn about both giving and receiving at Mass. It is the work of a lifetime to give as perfectly as possible in the Mass. It is the work of a lifetime to learn how to receive as perfectly as possible all of the good things which God wishes to give us through the Mass.

In this booklet we will try in simple question and answer form to clarify as many points about the Mass as we can. Although the form will be brief, we urge you to read it in a spirit of prayer and meditation, since its only intention, and the only way in which it can be of any real value, is if it ultimately becomes a part of prayer, the greatest prayer of all, the prayer of the Mass.

PART I: PREPARATION

Question: *Is it really necessary to prepare for Mass?*

Answer: Yes. Since the Mass is the most important thing that any of us can possibly take part in, it stands to reason that it is not sufficient merely to walk into a church and pick up as the Mass begins. We should begin to prepare for the Mass well in advance so that we can participate fully in this great community action.

Question: *How should one prepare for Mass?*

Answer: Most people attend Mass only on Sundays and holydays. It is a wonderful idea for families to get together the night before Mass to review the Mass of the next day by going over its main points, trying to grasp some of its meaning, so that they can reflect on what will take place in the Mass which they are to offer.

A major help for this is the *St. Andrew Bible Missal*. If every family owned at least one copy of this missal and would meet together for a brief time Saturday evening, perhaps just after dinner, to go over the Mass for the next day and to prepare for it properly, their worship would be greatly increased.

Another excellent source of preparation for Mass is the *Church's Year of Grace* (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn.) which provides full details for every Mass of the year. It can be purchased in paperback form.

Those who attend Mass more frequently will not al-

ways be able to have a full family preparation, but they should try to at least think ahead to the Mass which they will share in offering and to prepare themselves for it.

It is also a good idea to try to make some preparation just before Mass. This need not take more than a few minutes, but there should be a time of quiet either at home or on the way to Mass or in church just before Mass begins, when we reflect briefly on what we are about to do, how important it is and how we can best do our part in the celebrating of this sacrificial banquet.

Question: *What else can we do in this immediate preparation for Mass?*

Answer: Whenever possible it is a good idea to think over in advance what our intentions for the Mass will be. There is really no limit to the number of intentions we can have and they should be both general and particular. That is to say, we should think over the meaning of the liturgical seasons or the particular feasts and form some intentions which would help to express the things which the Liturgy expresses in the given Mass. We will learn more about this kind of intention the more we concentrate on the kind of preparation just discussed. In general, though, we are talking about praying that God's will be done in all things and that all men will come to know Christ, to love Christ, and to live in Christ.

Then there are our more direct intentions for our spiritual and material well being, for our families, friends, benefactors, the people we work with, missionaries, anyone who may have special need of our prayers . . . the

sick, the poor, the needy, prisoners, the persecuted. The more we think through our intentions, the more we will realize the value of our prayers and the more our prayers will truly be extended in a universal manner.

Basic Questions About the Mass

Question: *We hear the word "community" used more and more in connection with the Mass. Why is this word so important?*

Answer: The word "community" in many ways holds the key to all of the new liturgical emphasis. Historically, Catholics have drifted into great excesses of private piety and this took place even during the Mass, which is essentially a community action. This needs to be explained.

We know that we are members of the Mystical Body of Christ. Bearing that in mind, let us remember that in the Liturgy Christ, in His glorified humanity, offers worship to God the Father, just as He did when He walked on earth. That worship of the Father by Christ is continued now through the Liturgy of the Church, and, since we are members of Christ, we have an important share in offering that worship. Therefore, the more unity, the more uniformity of purpose and intention we can have in the celebration of the Liturgy, the more perfect praise of the Father will be.

To stress the idea of community just a little more, let us think of the term "People of God" which you will hear more and more as the Liturgy of the Church continues to remain in the forefront of our lives.

By the People of God we mean this: that following the fall of man, God made a covenant or agreement, a solemn contract, with a man named Abraham. He told Abraham that if he would do His will He would make him the father of nations, head of a great people. It was implied that from this people would come a redeemer, as God promised in almost the same breath with which He sentenced Adam and Eve to their punishment.

Descendants of Abraham eventually came to Mount Sinai following the Passover and Exodus in which Moses led the Hebrew people from the land of Egypt. At Mount Sinai the covenant was renewed, ratified and expanded as God gave the Law to the Hebrew people. It was at this time that the scattered Hebrews became a real people, a nation, a united people, the People of God of the Old Testament. Testament means covenant.

This People of God went through a history of ups and downs, sin, repentance and forgiveness, but from them indeed did come the Redeemer, Christ, our Lord. During His lifetime, Christ began the formation of a new People of God. With His redemptive death, Resurrection and Ascension this new People of God, this new Israel, became a reality, the reality we now know as the Catholic Church, the Mystical Body of Christ.

We are a people; we are to be saved as a people. We are not merely scattered individuals. It is, therefore, essential that we worship as a people as much as possible. This is what is meant by community. A community is any gathering of members of the People of God for any of God's purposes, but especially for worship.

If we think a bit about this community as the People

of God, if we apply the concept to our families, our parishes, the Church in our native land, and the Church throughout the world, we begin to get a sense of the cosmic significance of community worship.

Question: *Does this new emphasis on community mean that I am no longer important as an individual?*

Answer: Of course not. The importance of the individual becomes greater as he understands his role in the community better. We have a common base as members of the Mystical Body of Christ and we have a common destiny in the new heavens and the new earth. As members of Christ we share in all that Christ is—priest, prophet and king.

We are priestly in that we are able to share in offering the great sacrifice of the Mass. We are prophetic in that we may serve as spokesmen of Christ, if only through the genuine Christian character of our daily lives. We are kingly in that we share in all of the actions of the Prince of Peace, Christ the King, He who is to restore order, to do away with the chaos resulting from the sin of our first parents, and from all of the sins that have followed.

Now while it is true that we have all of these things in common, each of us has his own talents, abilities, strong points and weak points, each has his own particular vocation, his own very special role to play. It is only in perfecting these things that we serve the community best, and only in helping the community to grow in the best way possible, that we can serve God according to His holy will.

There is nothing contradictory in this stress on both the individual and community. A man who exists solely for himself, never fully realizes himself. A man who thinks only in terms of the community, neglecting to realize *his* importance to the community, is not fully realizing himself and is, in fact, hurting the community. He is parasitic, taking and receiving, but not giving.

Question: *We were always taught that the Mass is a sacrifice. Now we hear it called other things. What is the Mass anyway?*

Answer: Of course the Mass is a sacrifice; it is the greatest sacrifice of all. It is the re-presentation of the sacrifice of Calvary, Christ's redemptive death and offering of Himself to the Father for the salvation of men. The Mass, however, is not exclusively a sacrifice.

At the time of the Reformation there were many men who insisted that the Mass was not a sacrifice. In defending the fact that it is, the Church drifted a little from stressing some of the other things the Mass is. This accounts for some of the confusion we have today.

First of all, there are two principal elements to the Mass. One is sacrifice; the other is banquet. We might refer to the Mass as a sacrificial banquet. Throughout the Old Testament we see that when a covenant is made solemnly it is sealed by a sacrifice. In the Old Testament sacrifices the victim was a goat or a lamb, some special possession of the persons making the agreement. After the sacrifice was offered to God, it was the custom to eat the sacrificed victim. Even important contracts among

men which would not be as solemn as the covenant at Mount Sinai, were sealed by the eating of a meal.

This is what takes place today at Mass. We offer sacrifice to God the Father, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. We offer this with, in and through Christ. Then, we eat a covenant meal, the Eucharistic Banquet. This, in effect, seals anew the covenant which God made newly and eternally when Christ redeemed us. It is through this covenant meal, this great banquet of the Mass, that we receive the nourishment of Christ which unites us and which gives us the grace to live apostolic lives in the true spirit of Christ.

There is also a part of the Mass in which God teaches us in a very special way. This, called the Liturgy of the Word, is something we will explain in greater detail later. It should be noted, however, that it is not only in the Liturgy of the Word that we are taught at Mass. God acts in many ways throughout every Mass to teach us, to form us, to guide us.

Question: *We were always taught that it was very important to have the proper dispositions at Mass, that if our dispositions in attending Mass and receiving Communion were not proper, we did not receive as much grace. With all of the new participation, dispositions seem rather hard to come by. What about this?*

Answer: Dispositions are as important now as they ever were, but the whole idea takes a little understanding. First of all, it is not exactly correct to say that the man with the most perfect disposition at Mass and in re-

ceiving the Eucharist will necessarily receive the greatest amount of grace. This is the result of a mechanical kind of thinking which would limit the freedom of God.

God may, in fact, give the most to the one who is least disposed. Certainly that is His privilege. That, however, does not mean that we no longer should strive for proper dispositions at Mass. The only real difference between the old emphasis and the new is that we should be conscious of the fact that our dispositions should be of a communal nature. Our prayer is more perfect in a kind of proportion to the extent that it is communal. That is to say, if the whole congregation at a given Mass were to have the same intention, the same disposition at the same time and this were to be the most correct and proper intention for the given time within the Mass, then the worship would be most nearly perfect. The real intention of this discussion is to point out what the intentions or dispositions should be at each stage of the Mass.

Anyone who will think about this and make a sincere attempt to form correct dispositions, to have the intentions suggested, and to do this in communion with all of his brothers and sisters in Christ during the celebration of the Liturgy, will find that he has lost none of the comfort, none of the beauty of the Mass, but has gained an entirely new dimension in piety and worship.

Question: *With all of this new emphasis on community are we to say that private prayer has no place in our lives?*

Answer: Of course not. Christ told us very plainly that

we must pray in secret. The private prayer life of any individual is as important as ever. The thing to bear in mind is simply that there are two ways in which we pray: 1) in the official public worship of the Church, the Liturgy, which is communal in nature; 2) in our private prayer which should not take place during the communal worship. However, some form of private prayer should certainly be part of our everyday lives. If we concentrate on good liturgical worship, our private prayer will become easier and also will be more meaningful.

Standing, Sitting, Kneeling, Singing

Question: *The Mass is supposed to be the holiest part of our week. Why then have we stopped kneeling? Lately we seem to be standing all the time at Mass.*

Answer: The Mass is no less sacred now than it ever was. However, many people have false attitudes and ideas about what is going on at various parts of the Mass. Essentially, if we understand what we are doing, there is no difference between our interior disposition and our exterior posture. Above all, we should strive for the most perfect worship of the whole man.

The reason for standing during much of the prayer of the Mass is that our standing during worship honors Christ who arose from the dead. Therefore, we arise to stand with Him. Standing also symbolizes the honoring of any personage. We honor the person of Christ who is among us; Christ as He lives on the altar, in sacramental

form; Christ as He is represented by the priest, Christ as He lives in each and every one of the members of our community of the holy People of God who make up the congregation.

We also stand to reflect our own dignity in offering the Mass. Kneeling primarily symbolizes abject humility in penance or absolute adoration. However, it is not necessary to kneel to adore. We have great dignity as members of the priestly People of God, called by St. Peter himself a royal priesthood. We have the sublime privilege of offering the Mass with the priest. For this we stand as we make our offering to God, as we offer Christ in the Mass as members of Christ.

Our kneeling should now be reserved to those parts of the Mass in which we wish to express a penitential attitude, reflecting on our sins, or a time in which we are witnessing the most sacred possible part of the Mass. For this reason we kneel at the Consecration, when the bread and wine are actually turned into the Body and Blood of Christ by God through the ordained priest at the altar.

We sit at the Lesson or Epistle of the Mass because our function at that time is to learn, to hear the Word of God proclaimed. We have the same function during the reading of the holy Gospel but we stand, again, in honor of the Risen Christ who speaks through the Gospel.

A final thought on posture. Ideally, everything within the Liturgy has a meaning. When we are inclined to doubt or question something in the new changes that calls for our doing something within the Mass that we

don't quite understand, we would do well to seek the real meaning of the action, whether it is a word that we speak, a change in posture, or some simple action which we don't immediately comprehend. A little thought will often show us the reason. A little inquiry beyond that will often make us sure of the reason. In any case, we have no reason to doubt.

Question: *But this speaking out aloud. Granted that we should pray as a people, why can't we do it silently as we always have?*

Answer: There is nothing wrong with silent prayer on the part of the people if it is unified and offered in the same way at all times. However, our own experience tells us that this is not usually the case. If we have to concentrate on giving voice to our prayers and sentiments aloud and in unison with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are less apt to be distracted, less apt to miss the point of what we are doing.

But there is an even more important reason. We want to give praise and honor and glory to God in the best possible way. We want to cry out with our whole bodies and our whole souls with all that we are as we offer all that we have. Therefore, it seems quite proper to do this aloud, singing out, speaking out, even though this means overcoming a certain amount of natural or acquired reserve.

Question: *I don't like this singing though. It doesn't sound as good as it used to when just the choir sang.*

Answer: It has been said that he who sings at Mass prays twice. The reason for singing is simply that it expresses our joy and our oneness in Christ even more fully than speaking. It doesn't make too much difference how good or how bad it sounds. The Mass is a family affair, a family meal and it is more important that the family enjoy it together fully than that it sound like a highly professional chorus.

Anyone who tries can follow the simple hymns of the Church—and the new music that will come in the future—without any great difficulty. Anyone who will overcome his initial shyness will find himself enjoying songs at Mass.

Perhaps the singing will make more sense if we dwell on the idea that the Mass is truly a celebration. Of course, it is solemn and sacred, but it is an occasion of great joy and that is best expressed through singing. Although it may seem strange to us to sing going to and from Communion, what could possibly make more sense than singing on the way to a great banquet, a banquet in which Christ Himself is received, in which the food of salvation is made ours? If there is ever a time in life to sing, this is it.

The Divine Office starts at the hour of Matins almost every day of the liturgical year with Psalm 94, the first words of which are: "Come let us sing joyfully to the Lord." This should be our intention. This should be the way in which we sing. This is the reason for which we sing. We are joyful, we want to show it. We want to sing out with all our hearts to the great God who has allowed us to come together to worship Him.



PART II — THE MASS ITSELF

The Entrance Rite

Question: *Why do we now sing at the very beginning of Mass?*

Answer: The entrance hymn is one of the oldest parts of the Liturgy. Ideally, the Mass should begin with a solemn procession of priests and ministers to the altar. This should not be a hurried rush from the sacristy. It would seem fitting that the procession should come from the main door of the church to the altar. During this time a hymn is sung. In earlier Christian times a psalm was sung by the people as the priest and ministers made their way to the altar. This psalm is now part of the Mass in shortened form, the part we call the Introit. We sing to wel-

come each other to worship and to welcome Christ into our midst as He is represented by the priest coming before the altar of God.

Question: *What about the attitude of contrition that we were told to develop at the beginning of Mass?*

Answer: We should still be humble and contrite, and aware of our sins as the priest approaches the altar. We do not, however, require a long period of time to reflect on our sinfulness, because we are involved in a celebration. It is sufficient to recall that we are sinful, but that we are in the presence of Him who washes away all sin. We should humbly confess our faults and our sins to the Lord, beg His forgiveness and then rejoice because we know that He will give us that forgiveness.

Question: *What is the significance of the Kyrie?*

Answer: As we say with the priest “Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy” we are obviously calling for the mercy of God, but we are doing more than that. We are affirming the fact that we believe in God’s always abundant mercy, an infinite mercy always available to us sinners, always ready to raise us up from the worst sins to everlasting life. So, even though in a sense we are begging forgiveness and are terribly conscious of our sinfulness, the Kyrie expresses our joy because we know that God’s mercy is greater than our weakness.

The Kyrie demonstrates one excellent reason for participation. In a way the Mass is a dialogue between

God and man. And this is beautifully demonstrated in the exchange of prayers and supplications with the priest.

Question: *What is the significance of the Gloria?*

Answer: The Gloria is a simple hymn of praise to the Trinity. It has its foundations in the Gospel of St. Luke.

The Gloria is an extremely joyful hymn. For that reason it is not used in ferial Masses, that is, Masses celebrated when there is no special feast, and it is omitted during penitential seasons or special days of penance as well as in Requiem Masses. When the Gloria is included in the Mass it is one of the times when we as a worshipping community should be closest together, very conscious of our oneness in offering joyful praise to God.

Question: *What about the oration or Prayer of the Assembly? Isn't this what we used to call the Collect?*

Answer: Collect is still a good term, because it means that the priest offers the collected intentions of the faithful. The Prayer of the Assembly, as we now call it, is one of the three priestly prayers. These are the Prayer of the Assembly, the Prayer over the Gifts (Secret) and the Postcommunion. However, this does not mean that these prayers are reserved to the priest in the sense that they express only his intention. The priest as the president of the assembly of the People of God prays on behalf of all present.

The Collect is a special prayer in each Mass, one specially designed to express the intentions which should be foremost in our minds at this particular celebration.

The Liturgy of the Word (Introit to Offertory)

Question: *We hear the same Lessons (Epistles and Gospels) year in and year out. What are they supposed to teach us?*

Answer: First of all, the Lessons of the Mass may well be changed considerably in the near future, and it is likely that the changes will continue for a long time. However, whether that happens or not, the Lessons read at Mass from Sacred Scripture are as important as anything could be. In order to understand that, we have to understand something about Scripture.

Sacred Scripture is the inspired Word of God. In the Hebrew context there is very little difference between spoken word and accomplished deed. As Scripture is read during the Mass a great deal happens, some of which we are not aware of. God's holy Word is proclaimed: this is what God wants to say to us here and now. God teaches us if we will listen. God's work is wrought within us as we hear His Word. The proclaiming of the Word, whether it be from one of the Epistles or from the words of one of the Old Testament prophets, brings a message to pass within us; effects come about within us.

There is a charismatic element in the proclamation of the Word. Charismatic refers to special gifts of the Spirit. Therefore, it is essential that the Word be proclaimed with great solemnity and with great clarity, and that we listen attentively, for we are hearing the most important words we can ever hear, words inspired by God Himself. For this reason it is not desirable to read

the Lesson or the Gospel from a missal. This should be done before Mass so that we will be familiar with the Lesson and the Gospel. When they are actually proclaimed, our function is to hear the proclamation.

Question: *What is meant by meditation song?*

Answer: By this we mean the Gradual, Alleluia and Tract as they occur in the Mass at various times in the liturgical year. These are abbreviated forms of psalms which used to be read after each Lesson in the ancient liturgies. In general, they continue the basic theme of the Mass which is introduced with the Introit.

Question: *What do writers mean when they say Christ Himself speaks when the Gospel is proclaimed?*

Answer: In the strict sense God speaks to us through all Scripture. In the Epistle, or first Lesson, He speaks through the prophets and Apostles.

The Gospel, however, is the expression of the faith of the early Church and that faith was indeed total commitment to the person of Jesus Christ and identification with Him. It is the person of Jesus Christ who taught the evangelists and it is His message which they recorded under holy inspiration.

Now, aided by genuine charism, a special power given by God, when the priest proclaims the Gospel, it is the word of Christ Himself that we hear, and we should remember that this Word is more than heard. It is implanted in us and has effects in us; we should at least be aware that these effects do take place.

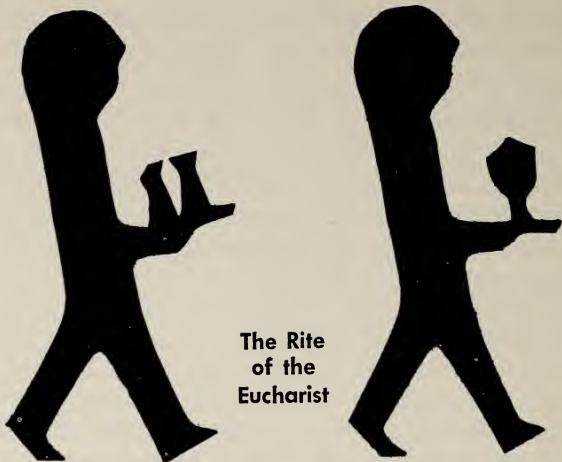
Question: *All my life I've been listening to sermons, now they call them homilies. What's going on anyway?*

Answer: A homily is simply a more proper term for the preaching which takes place at Mass. The homily is a part of the Mass not something separate from it. It is a time when the priest as direct representative of Christ on the altar explains and interprets the meaning of the Mass which is being celebrated. He comments on what has been said in the Lessons.

We must remember that the charismatic element we spoke of also applies to the homily. Both the preacher and those who hear the preaching must bear in mind that it is Christ who speaks through the priest. The priest is the mouthpiece of God Himself explaining the Word of God, bringing it closer to home in more everyday words, making it a part of our lives.

Question: *How do we respond to the Liturgy of the Word?*

Answer: Our most obvious response is in the recitation of the Creed, which follows the homily on Sundays and major feasts throughout the year. In the Creed we unite as the worshipping community of the holy People of God to express together as with one voice the principal truths of our faith. We are in effect saying, "Yes, Lord, I believe." We are expressing our acceptance of what has been taught to us in the Liturgy of the Word and our readiness for the action that follows.



**The Rite
of the
Eucharist**

THE OFFERTORY

Question: *The Offertory used to be a nice quiet time at Mass when I could sit down and think my own thoughts. Now it's more like a torchlight parade. Why the difference?*

Answer: Of course, there is really not much time in the Mass when one can sit down and think his own thoughts, nor should there be. There's plenty of time for that outside the Mass. The reason for the great emphasis on the Offertory in today's Liturgy is that it is a very important and dramatic preparation for the Consecration and the Sacrifice of the Eucharist. It is also the part of the Mass which merges and blends most beautifully the things of the world and the things of the spirit.

We remember that we are truly one, one in Christ,

and as one we offer the fruits of our lives. The bread and wine which are borne to the altar at the time of the Offertory represent the first fruits of our labor, they represent in a sense ourselves. As one priest says, "We place ourselves upon the paten."

The bread and wine which are to become the Body and Blood of Christ should be borne to the altar solemnly. We should be aware that in offering them we offer all that we have, our very selves. It is quite fitting, therefore, that we sing a hymn of joy at this time, expressing the sentiments of the Offertory.

Question: *What about the Prayer of the Faithful?*

Answer: Actually, the Prayer of the Faithful or intentions of the celebration, sung or recited at Mass in many places, was originally used in the Liturgy when it was not possible to have a homily preached. However, this is a splendid custom which has been approved in instructions from the Holy Father.

It should be borne in mind that while we offer the Mass with the priest we do not have to follow his every action and his every word exactly. We do not have to be doing the same things at the same time if our intentions are the same. Therefore, during the Offertory it is perfectly fitting that we should sing or take part in some other expression of our devotion. The Prayer of the Faithful would normally be held at the very beginning of the Offertory and be completed before the Offertory rite itself is carried out.

In the Prayer of the Faithful we remind ourselves

and each other of the principal intentions of the Mass, both general and particular. Some of these intentions should relate to the particular Mass of the day; others should be for the good of our community, for the good of the entire People of God, for the good of all that God has made.

Question: *How is the preparation for the Eucharistic Sacrifice completed?*

Answer: It is completed with the Prayer over the Gifts, formerly called the Secret. It was called the Secret because it was recited silently by the priest. However, it is now recited aloud. This prayer also reflects the general liturgical tone and theme of the day. It brings to an end the preparatory portion of the Eucharistic rite, commonly called the Offertory.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

Question: *What happens when the Preface is recited at Mass?*

Answer: The Preface is a joyful immediate preparation for the Eucharistic prayer which is also known as the Canon. Canon means the part of the Mass which is fixed and invariable, although there are minor variations within it on special occasions. This part of the Mass may eventually be in English too. In any case, the Preface is a special hymn with special sentiments for the Liturgy of the day. It is climaxed by the recitation of the Sanctus,

“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty. Heaven and earth are filled with Your glory, Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.” This is another time of Mass when our participation is most important because we are offering the highest praise to our Lord God.

Question: *What happens next?*

Answer: A lot of people are slightly confused because the recitation of the Sanctus aloud and in English is suddenly followed by a very silent and solemn part of the Mass. It is important at this time that our intentions be very clear because this is a time when we can and should pray silently.

Question: *What should we pray for?*

Answer: We pray, first of all, for the general good and needs of the Church. We pray for the Pope, for our Bishop, for all those who teach the Catholic Faith. Then we remember those for whom we especially want to offer the Mass.

Then we unite ourselves fully with the Mystical Body of Christ, reminding ourselves that this includes not only Christians now living on earth, but also all of the saints in heaven and all of the souls in purgatory. We make a special communion with the holy Apostles and martyrs, and with the Blessed Mother, as we approach the most sacred part of the Mass, the Consecration.



THE CONSECRATION

Question: *What should be our disposition at the time of the Consecration?*

Answer: As we approach the Consecration we should be very conscious of the great privilege which is ours of beholding the great mystery of the altar wherein the bread and wine which we have just offered are transformed into the Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior.

We should pray for deliverance from sin, beg God to count us among those who will be saved, those who will to accept the salvation which God offers to all. That done, we recall the Last Supper wherein Christ instituted the Blessed Sacrament. We watch as the priest bends low over the Host and says "*Hoc est enim corpus meum,*" "This is My Body." The priest will then raise the Host. We should look at it and adore it.

This is the time of Mass for us to be on our knees in profound adoration. We should not hide our faces, but rather, gaze upon the Lord Jesus as He is held before us in sacramental form.

THE OBLATION

Question: *How do we actually go about offering the Body and Blood of Christ to the Father with the priest?*

Answer: We do this by recalling, immediately after the Consecration, Christ's Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension into heaven. We should remember that it was not simply Christ's death on Calvary that saved us but His whole Presence on earth, healing, teaching, sanctifying. All this is inseparable in the economy of redemption.

Having made this recollection we then join ourselves as fully as possible to all the other members of the congregation and to the priest realizing that we are at this time to be most especially one in Christ, because it is at this time that Christ offers Himself to the Father for the redemption of mankind. We offer with the priest with, in, and through Christ in the Holy Spirit.

Question: *Is Calvary really repeated again in the offering of the Mass?*

Answer: Historically speaking, it is not. The sacrifice of Calvary, nevertheless, is the same sacrifice that is offered on the altar in an unbloody manner. Historically, the sacrifice of Calvary could take place only once in time and space. However, what was the sacrifice of Calvary? It was the sacrifice of Christ, offering Himself, His life, His Body and His Blood to the Father. In this sense the sacrifice is repeated.

Christ acts on the altar. He offers Himself. We as

members of Christ take part in this offering. It is, therefore, the most sublime possible action, one which we cannot regard too highly, one in which we cannot take part too intensely.

Question: *How is the Canon or Eucharistic prayer completed?*

Answer: After the Oblation, we offer our prayers for the dead and we recall again the holy ones of the Lord, the ancient saints. We ask God to let us share their company being fully aware that we could not do this through any good of our own but only through His great mercy. We tell God the Father that we realize that all that we have and all that we can be and all that we can ever hope for comes to us through Christ our Lord, through whom He makes holy, makes alive, makes blessed and gives to us all good things.

This leads to those most beautiful words which are said along with what has always been called the Minor Elevation, "Through Him, and with Him, and in Him is given to You, Father Almighty, together with the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory forever."

Question: *What is meant by the great Amen?*

Answer: The great Amen, this one word response which we are to make as a worshipping community, is perhaps the most significant word that we speak in our lives. It concludes the Eucharistic prayer or the Canon. Its meaning is great. It means that we express our oneness in Christ as we ratify the sacrifice of the altar. Our

Amen in effect means “yes” . . . yes to the sacrifice of Calvary, yes to the offering of ourselves along with the offering of the Body and Blood of Christ.

We should never forget that it is desirable for us as we offer the Body and Blood of Christ to the Father to offer ourselves as victims with Christ, praying only that God’s will may be fulfilled in us. This being so, you can see the tremendous significance when the priest says: “Per omnia saecula saeculorum,” and we answer: “Amen.” We are indeed saying yes to God, and in effect this action is the central action of all religion, it summarizes religion. Religion is saying “yes” to God.

The Rite of Communion

Question: *Why do we recite the Our Father after the great Amen?*

Answer: The great Amen ends the Canon; the Our Father begins the actual rite in which we partake of the Eucharistic Banquet. This is, as we have indicated before, the source of our greatest joy, and it is fitting that we pray together joyfully. Since it is Christ Himself who is received in the banquet, it is quite proper that the joy we express be in the words with which Christ Himself taught us to pray.

Question: *What happens next?*

Answer: After the Our Father, we pray briefly for deliverance from evil, for protection from harm, and distress. Then the priest wishes us the peace of the Lord

and we wish it to him. This is another beautiful example of the dialogue of the Mass. It would be ideal if we could exchange some greeting of peace moments later, something like the old liturgical kiss of peace or merely shaking of hands with the person nearest to us. Sometimes this is done in smaller congregations. It is common in religious communities. We pray finally that the mingling and Consecration of the Body and Blood of Christ may lead us to everlasting life.

Reception of Communion

Question: *We have heard the word "encounter" used a great deal in reference to the sacraments as well as the Mass. What does it mean?*

Answer: The word "encounter" has indeed become a very important one in referring to the Mass and the sacraments. It means just this. In the Mass and in the sacraments Christ acts. He acts to bring about certain effects in us. And His action calls for action on our part. A genuine response.

When Christ acts or calls to us and we act or respond the result is an encounter. And it is this encounter in the Mass, at the time of oblation for instance, which brings great things to pass within our souls and in the over-all spiritual order which are far beyond our understanding. This is also especially true in the reception of the Blessed Sacrament. We must reach out, be as prepared as we can be to respond to the loving call of Christ, so that our sacramental encounter will be as perfect as possible.

Question: *It seems that this is one time we should be quiet rather than singing as we march up and down.*

Answer: No, I don't agree for reasons stated earlier. It is true that the reception of Communion is one of the most solemn acts of our lives, if not the most solemn act. However, it is also the most joyful and we should celebrate our joy with song because the Eucharist is above all a sacrament of unity, a sacrament which makes us one. We find evidence of that in the Epistles of St. Paul and later in the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas.

There is always time for silent thanksgiving later and we certainly should never neglect to make it unless circumstances positively force us to do so.

Question: *What is the best way for an individual to complete his participation in the Mass?*

Answer: By remaining for every last bit of the Mass. The Communion and Postcommunion prayers which are offered after the reception of Communion are very important in that they round out the liturgical theme of the day and express our final intentions to the Lord. Then we offer with the priest the final prayer that our offering may be acceptable and may gain mercy and forgiveness for us and those for whom we have prayed. Then we receive the priestly blessing.

Question: *The Mass ends then with the priest's blessing?*

Answer: Yes, but only in the strict liturgical sense.

When the priest says "Go, the Mass is finished," this is not really an ending, but a sending.

He is saying in effect: "Now you have received the great gifts of the Lord, you are filled with His love. Take it and give it to others. You have offered God to God in the Mass. Now offer God as He lives in you to God as He lives in your neighbor. Be an apostle. Be a peacemaker. Let love shine forth in your every word and act. Make your life a Mass . . . a constant offering to God, a constant dialogue with God, a constant banquet with God and your neighbor."

Question: *Is there some way of keeping the main ideas of the Liturgy fresh in our minds?*

Answer: I believe it is helpful to think in terms of liturgical dimensions . . . historical or commemorative, eschatological or prophetic, vertical and horizontal. By this we mean that the Mass looks to both the past and the future and, in a sense, makes them part of our present. We commemorate the events of Salvation History and they are re-presented to us, as explained earlier. We look ahead to the second, final coming of Christ, the Parousia, the fulfillment of all our earthly yearning and the consummation of Salvation History. Also, there is a vertical dimension in encounter . . . our reaching up to God and His reaching down to us. There is a horizontal one in that grace flows among the members of our community and of all the People of God. This should be reflected in our open love and fellowship with each other.

