The Meaning of the Mass: Part Four
by Fr. Brian Mahoney

The celebration of the Mass is broken up into four different sections: the Introductory Rites, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Concluding Rite. The four parts of the Mass are intended to work together, to open us to the presence of Christ in our midst, unite us together with Him, and lead us to give true praise and thanksgiving to God the Father. The reality of what our lives are about is so easy to forget. Simply put, God made us to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him this world, and to be happy with Him forever in the next. In order to do this, we must worship God by faith, hope, and charity; that is, we must believe in Him, hope in Him, and love Him with all our heart. The whole structure of the celebration of the Mass is intended to lead us into a true worship of God. And how we worship God in the Mass is how we are called to worship Him in our lives. Our worship is intended to lead us to where we do not simply come to love God, but to fall in love with God, who has first fallen in love with us.

The Mass opens us to recognize the presence of God among us through the presence of the people He has gathered. It is God who has summoned us, as His people, to both witness His love for us and give witness to that love to others. As we acknowledge his presence, in that moment we open ourselves to hear his voice. For our God comes not simply to gather us together to worship Him, but in order to speak with us. God wants to have a conversation with us, and in this celebration that is exactly what He does. He speaks his very words to us, and through his people we hear the voice of the living God. As we recognize God’s voice in our heart and in our soul, we become open to actually experience his “physical” presence in the Eucharist. As we will explore later, Christ is present in the Eucharist not in a symbolic way, but in a real way. His real presence is given to us so that we can share directly in his life and be connected to Him both spiritually and physically. As we receive the Eucharist, Christ comes to unite himself with us in mind, body, and soul. The whole of Christ is consumed by us so that as we receive his presence, we become his presence. Then, we are prepared to go out into the world, to bring the true presence of Christ to others through the life we live.

We come to recognize that our participation in, and reception of, the Eucharist is fundamentally grounded in our relationship with Christ. It is about uniting ourselves to the saving actions of Christ and making that union the very foundation of every choice we make. The Eucharist ultimately becomes the context for living our lives fully as disciples of Christ. Therefore, the Eucharist is not simply what we do on Sunday; it is the very expression of our relationship with God and his saving actions in our lives. It is intended to define the relationship that leads to our salvation: it allows us to experience the salvation that Christ won for us through our direct participation in his actions. God’s love leads us to union with Him through our participation in the saving actions of Christ, and thus deepens our conversion to Christ so that He truly becomes all things for us.