



The Beginnings of Divine Worship **by Joe Sixpack**

Let's take a break from apologetics for a few weeks. Instead, for the next few weeks let's focus on just what divine worship is, and what it really means for us. You see, I'm firmly convinced that if Catholics truly understood what was taking place at the Mass they would desire to fall prostrate before the altar every time they entered their parish church, would never consider leaving after Communion and before the final blessing, and remain silent until they exited the building.

I'd like to begin with a disclaimer. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is a mystery of faith, and as such we cannot fully understand it, but we accept it on the basis of the Authority (God) who revealed it to us. So the fact of the matter is, this lowly son of the Church can only attempt to express these divinely instituted truths with human understanding and words. Very inadequate!

In order to aid our ability to understand what the Mass really is, let's begin by examining the very origins of divine worship. Although it may seem feckless to you, I mean go *all* the way back to the origins of divine worship.

Even before God created the world, He knew He would create man. Because He is infinite love, God's creation of man was an extension of that love. But after the fall, man became evil. Indeed, once our first parents yielded to temptation, the journey from innocent liberty to evil license accelerated at an alarming rate. God didn't leave us orphaned, though. When man fell, he promised us a redeemer to redeem us from sin.

In the meantime, though, the world became rife with evil, with man giving himself over to every sort of degradation and perversion he could conceive. In fact, man had so declined into the depths of abasement that everyone had forsaken and forgotten God—that is, all but one man who still found favor with him. That man was Noah.

God told Noah he would destroy mankind and everything inhabiting the world, but he promised Noah that he, his family, and every species of animal would be saved. So Noah built an ark according to God's instructions, and loaded two of every species of animal onto the ark. Then, according to God's promise, the floods came and all of mankind was destroyed.

When the flood waters receded and Noah and his family were able to again walk on dry ground, Noah built an altar to God and made sacrifices to Him. God was pleased with these sacrifices

and promised Noah that he would never again destroy mankind with a flood. As a sign of this covenant, God established the rainbow in the clouds.

So man repopulated the earth. And so it was until we get to the Patriarchy of Abraham.

Abraham was a friend of God—a just and upright man. He served God well, and God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation, with his descendants more numerous than the stars. So the nation of Israel was born of Abraham, and it grew.

The children of Israel had settled among the Egyptians. They had grown so large in numbers that the Egyptians feared they would become a threat. So they enslaved the Israelites, working them to build great structures and treating them cruelly. So God sent Moses to set his people free. Moses led them from bondage so they could settle in the promised land to become a great nation and worship God as He commanded.

After Moses led the children of Israel from bondage, God led them to Mount Sinai in Egypt. Then God said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.” So Moses went to God as He had been instructed. And it was there that God gave Moses the 10 commandments. But along with the moral code that we all have to live by, He also commanded Moses to build the ark of the covenant, a lamp-stand, their place of worship and its surroundings. And He even told Moses *exactly* how He wanted the inside of the place of worship to be set up.

Then God told Moses to establish the levitical priesthood. These men were to be set apart for God, so He told Moses how He wanted them to be consecrated, or ordained, to Him. Once God had set apart the levitical priesthood to worship and make sacrifices to Him on behalf of the people, God instructed Moses *exactly* how the priests were to be dressed to make themselves worthy to stand in His presence at the ark of the covenant.

It was then that God told them *exactly* how he wanted to be worshipped in word and deed. He demanded offerings of bread and grain, of wine, and of flesh to be made daily for divine worship.

God demanded absolute obedience to these sacrifices and everything connected with them for His worship! He said, “And if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments which I command you this day, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth” (Deuteronomy 28:1). “But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command you this day, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you” (Deuteronomy 28:15). So God was and is serious about how He is to be worshipped, and there are grave consequences for disobedience.

But what happened to the old covenant when Jesus established the new covenant? That will be the topic in next week’s article as we continue to look at the consistency between the old and new covenants in What We Believe... Why We Believe It. (I’d suggest you keep all these in the series until until we finish it.)

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