

Lesson 12

Introduction to the Liturgy of the Eucharist

Our Mass has two major parts: The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. They have been included from the beginning and form a unity. It is good to remember that we as Catholics celebrated the Mass before even before the Gospels were written. This is an important point because:

1. It reminds us that the Mass we will celebrate today was celebrated in essentially the same way by the very earliest of the Christian communities. What we do today has been repeated for over two thousand years.
2. It helps explain part of the reason why the accounts of the Last Supper in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and in St. Paul's First letter to the Corinthians have differences. These various accounts may reflect the different ways that the Christian communities celebrated the Mass. Celebrations of the Mass are not always identical- there can be relatively minor variations between priests although it must always follow strict Canonical laws and guidelines of the Universal Church in order to be valid.

In the first part of the Mass our celebration of the Liturgy of the Word is centered on opening ourselves to the Word of God. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist we join with the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must never forget that the Mass is a re-presentation of Our Lord's sacrifice on Calvary. In a mysterious way we go back to the actual time Christ died on Calvary. We literally stand or kneel with our Blessed Mother at the foot of the cross with the priest serving in a mystical way as Christ.

In this part of the Mass- the Liturgy of the Eucharist- we bring the bread and wine to the altar. The priest takes the bread and says the blessing over it. This action then leads into the Eucharist Prayer, when we pray a great prayer of giving

thanks (literally what Eucharist means) and the priest consecrates the bread and wine into the true body and blood of Jesus, before we all partake in communion. Reflecting on this, St. Paul told the Corinthians: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26).