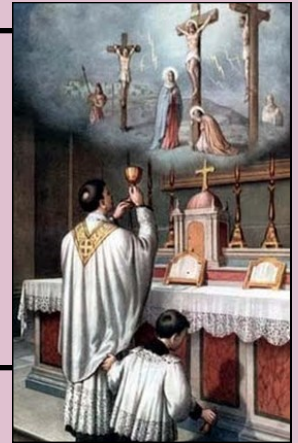


The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass



The Many Names of the Mass

The most common title you will hear for the Mass is simply “Mass.” But the Mass has other titles as well, many of which are ancient and were used by the early Christians. Let’s look at a few, and the meaning behind them.

The Mass—our Liturgy concludes with the sending forth (Latin: missa) of the faithful, so that they may fulfill God’s will in their daily lives, the Latin term became known in English as the “Mass.”

The Eucharist—The word is from the Greek word for thanksgiving. The Mass is an act of thanksgiving to the Lord.

The Lord’s Supper—this title shows the connection to the Last Supper of Jesus and foreshadows the banquet table in heaven.

The Breaking of the Bread—this is how the early Christians referred to the Mass. In the account of the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-35) we see that Jesus was made known to them in the “Breaking of the Bread

The Holy Sacrifice—this title recognizes that Christ’s one time sacrifice on the cross is made present to us during the Liturgy.

The Sacred Mysteries—this reminds us that the Mass is a gift; an action of the Lord.

The Eucharist is the source and summit of our Catholic faith—Christ Himself. The Mass is how we participate in this great gift from Our Lord. We learned in Lesson Eight that at the Last Supper Jesus had given His Apostles the power to turn the bread and wine into His Body and Blood when He told them to “do this in memory of me” -Luke 22:19. We also learned that this power has been passed down through Apostolic Succession to our bishops and priests today. They use the same words that Jesus used here with the same results—the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. Although we still see the appearance of bread and wine, there is no trace of bread and wine left when it has been consecrated by a validly ordained bishop or priest.

Let’s take a closer look at the parts of the Mass, alongside of the biblical model for the Mass, the Road to Emmaus.

The Road to Emmaus—Jesus and the Mass



The Mass has two main parts: The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The Liturgy of the Word— This is the first part of the Mass, beginning with the Introductory Rites. The Introductory Rites help us enter into this time of prayer. We make the Sign of the Cross, ask forgiveness for our sins, recite or sing the “Gloria” hymn, and the priest leads us in the opening collect prayer. Let’s look at the remaining parts of the Liturgy of the Word and compare them to the Road to Emmaus account (Luke 24:13-35).

We hear three **readings** at Mass, one from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament, and one from the Gospels. In between the reading from the Old and New Testament we sing a **Psalm**. After the readings comes the **homily**, or sermon, when the priest breaks open the Word, explains the context and teaches us how to apply Scripture to our lives. How does this relate to the journey to Emmaus? Because that’s exactly what Jesus did as He walked with the two disciples. Saint Luke tells us that “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to Him in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:27).” Later the two will recall that their “hearts were burning” within them as he “opened the Scriptures” to them. After the readings and the homily, we recite the Nicene Creed, a summary of our beliefs, and then pray the “General Intercessions” where we pray for the each other, the Church and the whole world.

So, on the first part of the Emmaus journey Jesus helps the two disciples to understand his passion and death and its significance. Yet they still do not recognize that it is the Risen Lord Jesus who is speaking to them. In a certain sense their faith in Jesus had been shaken by the cross; now as he walks along with them it is being restored. Although they don’t recognize him, they do not want him to leave. So, when do they recognize Him? In the “Breaking of the Bread.”



The Liturgy of the Eucharist—This is the part of the Mass where the bread and the wine are brought forth, and the priest prays the ancient prayers and consecrates the bread and wine into the actual Body and Blood of Our Lord. Where is this shown in the Emmaus account? When they were gathered at table, Jesus “took bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them.” These are the same words used to describe Jesus’ actions at the Last Supper. As he does this, “their eyes were opened and they recognized him.” He then mysteriously vanishes from their sight. He is, of course, still present, in the bread He has consecrated for them to consume.

The Call of the Events of Emmaus and the Call of the Mass

What should our response be to the unfathomable gift of receiving our Lord in Holy Communion? Should we keep our joy and the love of Christ to ourselves? Again, we can look to the Emmaus disciples. What did they do? They leave everything at once and return to Jerusalem, to the apostles and other disciples. They immediately "go out" and spread the good news of the Gospel they have learned during their encounter, their Mass, with Jesus. So too, are we called to do.

A Note About Holy Communion...



One of the most frequent questions about the Catholic Church is from those wondering why non-Catholics are not permitted to receive Communion? Many think it seems unwelcoming, and that if the Church believes Jesus is present in the Eucharist, we shouldn't be preventing people from receiving Him. Let's look at some of the reasons for this teaching. First, let's remember that the teaching that the Eucharist is the true Body and Blood of Jesus comes right from Christ Himself: *"So Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of*

you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." -John 6:53-56. This is the first teaching of Christ on the Eucharist. He clearly states (again and again in John 6) that the Eucharist is not just a symbol of his Body and Blood, but truly becomes his Body and Blood. Otherwise it would make no sense for his followers to understand him literally (John 6:41 & 6:52) and then walk away from him (John 6:66) without Jesus clearly explaining that he was speaking figuratively.

What is the basis the Church uses for deciding who can receive Communion? That is also from Scripture, and the main verse is from none other than the great Saint Paul himself: *"Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself."* -1Corinthians 11:27-30. This is a strong warning from Saint Paul, about the reverence due to the Eucharist. The Church practices closed Communion to protect those who do not fully know Church teaching on the Eucharist from inadvertently acting against Saint Paul's words here. There are also other considerations—To receive the Eucharist does not only mean we believe in it, but in all that the Catholic Church holds to be true. It says with the body "I am Catholic and hold all that the Church teaches to be true as truth and I therefore unite myself to Jesus and all his Catholic Church, through the bonds made in the Eucharist." It also isn't just non-Catholics that have restrictions due to this teaching. Catholics, also, should do a full examination of conscience, be sure they are free from mortal sin, and utilize the Sacrament of Penance before receiving if needed to be sure they are in the proper state to receive our Lord.

