



General Presentation of the Mass

Pilgrim friend,

One can only approach the subject of the Mass on one's knees and trembling a little... What a mystery!

God created us to worship and serve Him. Out of love He wished to raise up worshippers in spirit and in truth. The original sin of our first parents caused a wound that God wanted to redeem by sending his son to offer his life as a sacrifice to open the gates of Heaven to us and offer us the beatific vision: "*O God who has wonderfully founded human nature and restored it in an even more admirable way...*" (offertory of the Mass).

What is the Mass?

The Mass is the most important thing in the world, it is an ascending (the sacrifice) and descending (the sacrament) mediation of Christ the high priest to his Father. The Mass is the highest liturgical manifestation, it is "*the source and summit of all Christian life*". The Church teaches us that the Eucharist is the first and greatest of the sacraments (a tangible sign, established by Christ, which produces and increases grace in us) because the author of grace gives himself to it

totally. The other sacraments depend on this central sacrament and are ordained there. In the host as in the chalice after the consecration, under the appearances of bread and wine, it is Christ himself who is present, not in a pictorial way, not symbolically, but with his body, blood, soul and divinity through the transformation of the whole substance: **transubstantiation**. He offers himself to us and allows us to witness and, even more, to associate us with the mystery of the redemption of the world. **During the Mass, in a single act, the different moments of the history of salvation are brought together, and more particularly the Last Supper, the Passion and the Resurrection.** And the central point of all this mysterious and admirable redemption is the Cross, for it is indeed the Cross that is meritorious. It is the axis of creation and the whole cosmos moves around this tree of life. Of all the modes of Christ's presence on earth – when two or three are gathered in his name, for example – his sacramental presence in the Eucharist is the only one through which Our Lord is substantially and truly present.

The Mass is a sacrifice

The Mass is the unbloody renewal of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross offered to God by the ministry of priests, and this sacrifice itself covers:

- a sacrifice of worship,
- a sacrifice of thanksgiving for the blessings of God,
- a sacrifice to obtain his forgiveness,
- a sacrifice of demand.

We express these four aspects in the song of the *Gloria* : *Adora- mus te... Gratias agimus tibi... Qui tollis peccata mundi... suscipe deprecationem nostram...*

At the altar, the priest is the minister who allows the sacramental and sacrificial action to be carried out. This is eminently manifested by the words of the consecration pronounced in the first person. Another manifestation of this priestly function is expressed by the distinct communion of the priest, before that of the faithful. **In this sacred action, it is Christ who offers, consecrates and accomplishes the burnt offering by manducation, which is the destruction and assimilation of the whole of the oblate, bread and wine.** Since the Mass is a sacrificial act, the presence of the people is not an essential condition for its full realization. Very desirable, highly recommendable and always welcome presence for

the faithful, but nevertheless optional, although each Mass is always a social and public action. The laity are never required to receive communion; The priest is obliged to do so, without his communion the Mass is incomplete. The abbot of Tanoüarn, in a work of meditations, explains: " *What the priest does at the altar, he does as an instrument, but the rite does not belong to him. Cardinal de Bérulle died while celebrating his mass, and it was one of the members of his institute, the Oratory of France, who finished it. The Mass does not belong to the priest but to the altar. [...] it is up to the priest to conform to the altar [...].* »

Our participation: the offertory

" *The Holy Council would indeed hope that at each Mass all the faithful who attend it would receive communion not only spiritually and from an interior feeling of devotion, but also through the sacred reception of the Eucharist, so that they may share more abundantly in the fruit of this most holy Sacrifice.* »

This excerpt from the Council of Trent (1545-1563) testifies to the ancient concern of Holy Church for the participation of the faithful. We find in the encyclicals *Tra le sollecitudini* of Pius X (1903) and *Mediator Dei* of Pius XII (encyclical on the liturgy of 1947) this expression which would later make the liturgical reform successful. The expression covers various interpretations. The most accurate has been detailed in *Mediator Dei*: "*Let the laity participate with an attention and fervour that unites them closely to the High Priest, according to the words of the Apostle: 'Have in yourselves the same sentiments that were in Christ Jesus,¹ offering with him and through him, sanctifying themselves in him.* »

It is through the offertory and its admirable prayers that this participation of the faithful is most perfectly concretized. **This rite of the Offertory introduces us to the sacrificial character of the Mass and invites us to offer ourselves to Christ, before Our Lord offers Himself to His Father through the prayers of the Canon.** It is therefore not an anticipation or a duplication but an essential step in the great mystery of the Mass. The offertory is the ascent to the sacrifice. The drop of water blessed by the priest and added to the chalice symbolizes that we offer to Our Lord what we are and what we ask so that He Himself may offer it to God at the consecration.

1. Phil 2:5.

This drop of water clearly manifests our vocation to be hoisted from earth to Heaven as Henri Charlier wrote in 1973: " *The Offertory is our sacrifice, sinners, laity, people of God not designated by and for a ministry (and the priest, as a man, is with us, at our head). We humbly offer what we have received, the fruits of the earth; this is our sacrifice to honor God and to have our faults forgiven; Receive, O Holy Father, Almighty and eternal God, this spotless host that I offer you [...].* »

Our participation also and supremely lies in the community by uniting ourselves to Christ himself through the consecrated host.

Attend Mass?

It is perhaps good to rediscover and accept the beneficial " *attendance* " at Mass, which is not passivity but meditation and contemplation. And in order to contemplate, silence is necessary, but also a healthy distinction between liturgical functions. The eminent models of this assistance are Our Lady and the Apostle Saint John at the foot of the Cross.

Does not the attendance at the barely whispered low masses of the abbeys, a spectacle that had deeply gripped Cardinal Ratzinger during a stay at the Benedictine abbey of Fontgombault, demonstrate that the spiritual fruits of our participation do well without an active participation too often synonymous with action?

One can regret the use of expressions that disturb the correct understanding of the Mass and the priesthood: expressions such as " *celebrant assembly* ", " *celebrant community* " or the " *right of the faithful to celebrate the Eucharist* ".

The Pontifical Mass

We have spoken of the low Masses, and let us approach the pontifical Mass celebrated with great solemnity, which is the reference from which the other types of celebration (solemn Mass, sung Mass, low Mass) are derived. It is the oldest and most normative form of the liturgy. **Through its sumptuous unfolding, it is an image of the heavenly liturgy that is the reality of the saints and of the nine choirs of angels gathered around the Trinity.** The richness of the Pontifical Mass helps us to grasp the capital and organic link between the Church and the liturgy, it has the highest ecclesiological aim.

The Mass is a meal: the sacrament of communion

Mass is also a meal and communion is food. Remembering that the Mass is first and foremost a sacrifice, we should not lose sight of this other aspect contained in the Scriptures: "[...] *whoever eats me will also live through me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. It is not like manna, which your fathers ate, after which they died. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. He said these things while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. Many of his disciples, when they heard him, said, "This is a hard word, and who can listen to it?"*"².

It is such a confusing reality that it is difficult to grasp its deep reality; it overwhelms us, shocks us or leaves us too indifferent out of habit and lack of attention. Many want to see it as nothing more than a symbol.

We find the expression "*two tables*" in connection with the Mass: the table of the word and the Eucharist. This expression is not new. It is a telling image, absolutely founded in the order of analogy, and which is found, for example, in the Imitation of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures nourish our intelligence and our faith (*fides ex auditu*). This expression, however correct it may be, should not lead us to conclude that the presence of Christ in the Scriptures is identical with the real sacramental presence. Another manifestation of communion as food is the communion table adorned with its white tablecloth at which we come to kneel to receive the holy host; the delicacy and dignity of the ceremonial emphasizes that it is an incomparable food that is offered to us, neither profane nor vulgar because: "*The true bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.*"³

Communion unites us very deeply and must make us look at our loved ones with a completely different gaze: "*If, therefore, you present your offering at the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to your brother; then come and present your offering.*"⁴ This union through communion does not reside in the sharing of hosts consecrated at the same Mass, but in the real presence of Our Lord, regardless of the moment at which the parcel we receive was consecrated.

2. Jn 6:58-6.

3. Jn 6:33.

4. Mt 5:23-24.

It is not communion that makes presence, it is real presence that makes communion.

Let us conclude by addressing some more practical questions. It is necessary to distinguish the Sunday precept of attendance at Mass from that of annual communion (commandments of the Church which are in a way the vital minimum of the Christian). It is necessary to attend the whole Mass in order to fulfill the Sunday precept without the need for Communion. However, if one is well disposed, communion during Mass is very desirable, it also infuses our total participation in the sacrifice by receiving the host (in Latin, the "victim"); but it is also possible to receive Communion outside Mass, and it is a grace that is given, for example, to the sick who cannot go to church. Finally, to receive Communion, one must be sufficiently well disposed internally, especially when in a state of grace. It is useful to refer to all the pages of this notebook which present the sacrament of penance, well convinced that a good pilgrimage cannot do without a good confession.

Conclusion

May we, fellow pilgrims, by faithful and assiduous frequentation of these holy mysteries, deepen and experience the greatness of this incomparable sacrament so that " *what our lips have received, O Lord, may our soul receive with purity, and may the gift given to us in this life be a remedy for us for eternal life* ". (Missal, prayer of the priest after communion).

▄▄ Citations C - Presentation of the Mass

A great deal of study and much action are undoubtedly necessary, but a great deal of study and much action are often not worth a high mass.

Reverend Father Humbert Clérissac

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks the chalice of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. Let man, therefore, test himself, and thus eat of this bread, and drink of this chalice; for whoever eats and drinks of it unworthily eats and drinks his own condemnation, not discerning the body of the Lord.

1 Cor 11:27-29

O memorial of the Lord's death, living bread giving life to man, grant my soul to live by You, and to taste You with everybody. Good pelican, Lord Jesus, purify me, unclean, by your blood, of which a single drop can save the whole world from its crimes. Jesus, whom I now see veiled, I pray You, grant that I may thirst so much, that, contemplating Thy Face uncovered, I may rejoice at the sight of Thy glory.

Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Adoro te devote* (excerpts)

One does not attend Mass as an accident, a spectacle or a scene of ordinary life [...]. We are taking part in it. It's strong; we "take part".

Father Bernard de Chivré O.P.

The sacrifice of the altar is like the supreme instrument by which the merits of the Cross are distributed to the faithful.

Pius XII, encyclical *Mediator Dei*

Christ includes all human offerings, necessarily unperfected, in his one offering.

Abbot of Tanoüarn



To go further

The Mass, treasure of faith

Cycle of videos to watch on claves.org or on the YouTube channel

