

Advent Retreat 2017

Come Lord Jesus: The Mass as God's Coming and Drawing Near to Us

Mystery

- I. What is the Mass? "The authority of mystery is a phrase used by Pope Benedict XVI to describe the power of the divine liturgy. For us, it is also a good way to understand the broader relationship between the Word of God and the people of God, the Church. The Church is born under the authority of mystery. It bears witness to the mystery of the Incarnation, the mystery of the Word of God made flesh. This Word, Jesus Christ, discloses the face of the Father and the mystery of his will, the plan of the mystery hidden for all ages. The mystery of God is his loving plan of salvation - to share his life with his people by means of a new covenant, making them divine sons and daughters in his Church, the kingdom of God. This mystery is remembered and celebrated through scriptural words and signs in the Church's liturgy. And this mystery is the source and purpose of the sacred mysteries - the sacraments of the Church, by which God establishes and renews his covenant with each believer. Understood in this light, there is an indivisible unity between the Word of God and the people of God. The Word - made flesh in Christ and spoken in the human language of Scripture - cannot be known or understood apart from the Church. All the interlocking organs of the Church's tradition - apostolic succession, the canon, the rule of faith, the teaching office, the divine liturgy and sacraments - serve the Church's mission of protecting and proclaiming the Word. (Introduction, Letter and Spirit)
 - A. Our relationship with God is one of mystery. We must wait for the Lord and he will act and will reveal himself to us in good time. "One thing I ask of the Lord; this I seek: to dwell in the Lord's house all the days of my life, to gaze on the Lord's beauty, to visit his temple. For God will hide me in his shelter in time of trouble, will conceal me in the cover of his tent; and set me high upon a rock. Even now my head is held high above my enemies on every side! I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and chant praise to the Lord. Hear my voice, Lord, when I call; have mercy on me and answer me. "Come," says my heart, "seek God's face"; your face, Lord, do I seek! Do not hide your face from me; do not repel your servant in anger; you are my help; do not cast me off; do not forsake me, God my savior! Even if my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me in...But I believe I shall enjoy the Lord's goodness in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord, take courage; be stouthearted, wait for the Lord!" (Ps 27,4-14) "I wait with longing for the Lord, my soul waits for his word. My soul looks for the Lord more than sentinels for daybreak." (Ps 130,5f)
 1. Elijah at the cave - Go out and stand on the edge of the cliff and God will come and speak in a small whisper, a gentle breeze
 2. Moses on Sinai - Moses hides in the cleft of the rock and God passes by, revealing the trailing edge of his glory
 3. We must come, stand before the Lord, and wait for him to reveal himself to us.
- II. Behold the Mystery
 - A. Be Still and Know that I am God
 1. We can best enter into and behold the mystery in stillness - silence, stillness, composure, attentiveness are all attitudes to prepare to enter into mystery
 2. Too much noise hides the face of God
- III. God is passing by
 - A. God is present and reveals himself through Jesus the Son, the Incarnate Word. To see the Son is to see the Father. The Father and I are one. No one has seen God, Jesus the Son makes him visible to us. "No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him." (Jn 1,18)
 - B. Jesus is present in the congregation, in the priest, in the Word, in the sacrifice of the altar, in the Eucharistic species
- IV. Mystery not entertainment
 - A. We are not at mass to be entertained. Entertainment is a diversion, an escape from what is real. Mass is real, drawing us into the mystery and the history, the story of a God that loves us so much that he is willing to empty himself and come to us.

- B. We are always in danger of falling into idolatry and worshipping false gods. We want to worship what our hands have created, what we can see and understand, rather than what is shrouded in awe and mystery. The mass is given to us as a gift by Jesus. It is the way that God desires to be worshipped. It is not something that we have made up or created but it is something that we have received. It is liturgy, the work of God and the work of his people that we participate in. This work transforms the world. It does not require our creativity but our obedience and faithfulness. "I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12,1f)
- C. God got his people out of Egypt but after he needed to get Egypt out of his people. God draws us out of the secular world but we still too often carry the secular world in our interior being rather than the sacred nature of God.
- D. The penitential rite at mass is meant to prepare us to enter into sacred space.
- V. Beauty and wonder
 - A. God does something beautiful for us, we must have the desire to do something beautiful for him.
 - B. The offering of Abel vs. Cain. Offering the best we have to give. Making a sacrifice for our offering. Not convenience and comfort but sacrifice and suffering.
 - C. We sacrifice and suffer for love
- VI. Advent - God comes to us in the Christ child. We can't summons God, we must stand and wait for him. Jesus is the Adventus, the one who comes. In the Mass, Jesus comes in Word and Sacrament to reveal to us the Way to the Father.
 - A. Jesus comes to us so that we can then come to him. John the Baptist: there is one coming...behold, the Lamb of God. Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.
 - B. In the Eucharist on the Lord's day, we enter into the rest of God. We share in the Sabbath rest.
 - C. We rest in the love of a gentle and compassionate Father as his children. Like a weaned child at rest on his mother's lap, even so my soul. (Ps 131)
 - D. Rest is a sharing in love and joy. It is a complete abandonment in trust.
 - E. Usually ascending a mountain requires work and effort. We have to expend ourselves.
 - F. From the mountaintop we see the world in a different way. We have a bigger picture before us.
- VII. "When we speak of the Mass, we cannot help but confront profound mysteries. This is as true today as it was in the first days of the Church. Saint Paul looked to the Mass as the sign of Christian unity, but also the source of Christian unity: "Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1Co 10,17). The Mass makes the Church even as the Church, empowered by Christ, makes the Mass. This is a great mystery. Yet it is only one aspect of the Mass. If we ponder the doctrine, if we pray for light, we will discover that the Mass has many dimensions. It is Christ's sacrifice on Calvary, now made present in an unbloody manner in the sacrament of the altar. It is a banquet where we are fed by the living Christ and come to deep and intimate union with him. It is Christ's real presence, a unique presence, a presence not just in action, but in himself: body and blood, soul and divinity. Our Eucharist is a "who," not a "what." It is Someone. If we profess the Catholic faith, there should be nothing more important to us than active participation in the mystery." (Cardinal George, The Mass)
- VIII. The Mass is the school of discipleship and prayer. On the mountain of the Lord, instruction goes forth. It is a school of love, devotion, discipline, obedience and fidelity. "The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but recapitulates *the heart of the mystery of the Church*. In a variety of ways she joyfully experiences the constant fulfilment of the promise: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20), but in the Holy Eucharist, through the changing of bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord, she rejoices in this presence with unique intensity. Ever since Pentecost, when the Church, the People of the New Covenant, began her pilgrim journey towards her heavenly homeland, the Divine Sacrament has continued to mark the passing of her days, filling them with confident hope." (Ecclesia eucharistica, JP II)
- IX. The Mass is worship in Spirit and Truth. "Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You people worship what you do not understand; we worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth." (Jn 4,21-24)

- X. “You have not approached that which could be touched and a blazing fire and gloomy darkness and storm and a trumpet blast and a voice speaking words such that those who heard begged that no message be further addressed to them, for they could not bear to hear the command: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” Indeed, so fearful was the spectacle that Moses said, “I am terrified and trembling.” No, you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel... Therefore, we who are receiving the unshakable kingdom should have gratitude, with which we should offer worship pleasing to God in reverence and awe. For our God is a consuming fire.” (Heb 12,18-29)
- XI. The Mass is the Wedding feast, a celebration of covenant. A binding together. The water of ordinary life is transformed into the finest wine of joy and celebration. The Wedding Feast of the Lamb, “A voice coming from the throne said: “Praise our God, all you his servants and you who revere him, small and great.” Then I heard something like the sound of a great multitude or the sound of rushing water or mighty peals of thunder, as they said: Alleluia! The Lord has established his reign, our God, the almighty. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory. For the wedding day of the Lamb has come, his bride has made herself ready. She was allowed to wear a bright, clean linen garment.” (The linen represents the righteous deeds of the holy ones.) Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who have been called to the wedding feast of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These words are true; they come from God.” I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Don’t! I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brothers who bear witness to Jesus. Worship God. Witness to Jesus is the spirit of prophecy,” (Rev 19,5-10)
- XII. “There are not two liturgies, one on earth and one in heaven. There is one liturgy, on earth and in heaven. The liturgy of the Church is the heavenly liturgy as it is practiced on earth, and it is crucial to restore this eschatological dimension to our practice of liturgy. In the liturgy we do what the angels do, namely, lose ourselves in a joy that erupts in praise. St. John Chrysostom said joy issues when the lover receives the beloved. In that case, the liturgy issues when the Church receives her beloved. The liturgy is our trysting place with God. According to the dictionary, a tryst is “an agreement, as between lovers, to meet at a certain time and place.” Exactly! God, our Divine Lover, has agreed to meet us on holy ground for communion, and from that encounter with the Father through the risen Christ, the Holy Spirit creates “theologian souls.” In order to identify this reality, we call the liturgy “sacramental.” Paul Evdokimov speaks of sacraments as “an action of ‘punching holes’ in the closed world by powerful explosions from the Beyond.” By the sacraments we are taught “that everything is destined for a liturgical fulfillment.” So the Divine Liturgy, the liturgy of the hours, the sacraments, and sacramentals, and our personal liturgies of devotion, piety, and ministry to charity, are all points at which the reign of God presses through the partition that sin has constructed. The kingdom of God approaches us in liturgy in a way that is material, communal, and ritualistic, which is why the Church is a sacramental, political, and social entity... Liturgy is not, then, a performance of our religion. Liturgy is the religion of Christ - the religion he enacted in the flesh before the Father - perpetuated. The religion that Jesus did in his humanity, he left to his Church to continue performing. We join Jesus in his liturgy to the Father and on behalf of the many. That would be why Pope Pius XII defined liturgy this way: “the sacred liturgy is...the public worship which our Redeemer as head of the Church renders to the Father, as well as the worship which the community of the faithful renders to its founder, and through him to the heavenly Father. It is, in short, the worship rendered by the Mystical Body of Christ in the entirety of its head and members.” It is not a thing that Jesus left to his Church, but himself, the mediator of the Father’s grace to us, and the mediator of our thanksgiving to the Father, all in the Holy Spirit. Liturgy is best understood as a relationship. Liturgy is participating in the relationship of love that flows between the persons of the Trinity.” (Fagerberg, Letter and Spirit)

Draw Near to God

- I. “Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.” (James 4,8)
- A. We come to the house of God seeking God, his truth and his love
 - B. God draws us to himself
 - C. We come to God with a desire for intimacy with God. We want an intimate relationship with the Lord who is the source of life, love and joy. Jesus, in the Incarnation, makes this intimacy possible. We come to Holy Mass with a desire for intimacy with God.

- D. Intimacy with God does not come from an intellectual pursuit but from an encounter with the living God. Holy Mass is a place of encounter. Here God draws near to us in Jesus so that we may have an encounter with his love and mercy. It is this encounter that is decisive in our lives. The mystery of the Incarnation makes possible a personal encounter with the living God as Father. Requires real presence.
- E. Advent is “coming”: It is God who is coming always into our lives, seeking us and calling us to new life.
- F. We come to God for healing from our sin. We have wandered away from God and now we are coming back, returning to the source of life.
- G. “To dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.” (Ps 27,4) “Let us go up to the house of the Lord.” (Is 2,3)

1. We go up to the Lord for instruction, for enlightenment, for communion
2. We want to dwell in the house of God, in his love, in his truth. “Remain in me and I will remain in you. If you remain in me you will bear much fruit.
 - a) Introit of the mass speaks of our desire to go up to the house of God, to his temple, to dwell there in his presence, to receive life from him. The shekinah of God and the indwelling of the Trinity.
 - b) We go to the house of the Lord to receive God, his gifts and his grace. His word and the new life in the eucharist that he offers to us in his Body and Blood.

3. We go up to the house of the Lord as children. The Lord’s house is the Father’s house where there are many dwelling places. We are children of God.

F. Come Lord Jesus. (Rev 22,20) The ways that the Lord Jesus comes to us in Holy Mass: the gathered Body of Christ, the Word made Flesh, the presider as Alter Christus, in persona Christi, the Holy Eucharist as the Body and Blood and Real Presence of Jesus.

G. Jesus is the Emmanuel, God-With-Us. “If you have seen me you have seen the Father.” (Jn 14,9)

II. Promise and fulfillment. Advent presents us with the promises of the coming of the Messiah. The Mass is a celebration of fulfillment. God has fulfilled his promises in Christ to redeem us and to lead us into a new life of freedom as children of God. We sing and we praise because God has fulfilled his promises of love to us. We remember all that the Lord has done for us and we make it present in our lives today.

A. Old Testament and New Testament and Gospel in the Liturgy of the Word. Jesus is the fulfillment of all of God’s promises. We glorify God because he has come to us in our need and fulfilled his promise of redemption in the birth of Jesus the Christ.

III. The Incarnation - the central mystery of Christmas. The Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. In the Holy Mass, the Word of Life becomes the Bread of Life which becomes incarnate and true food and drink for our souls. His flesh is true food and his blood is true drink. A. We come to the Lord to share in the Divine Life and he comes to us to share in our humanity.

B. In the Incarnation, all of human flesh is sanctified to be a Temple of the Living God

C. The Incarnation makes possible an encounter with the Father who loves us, forgives and restores us to life, offers us a fullness and abundance of life and allow us to touch and be touched by this mystery of love and eternal life. At mass we have an encounter with the Father. Out of the silence comes the word which speaks to us and calls us to himself, and then in the eucharist, he becomes present to us so that we may receive him fully in communion and unite ourselves to him, as he becomes a part of us.

D. In the Incarnation, God empties himself of his divine prerogatives so that he can share in our poverty due to sin. “Blessed are the poor in spirit...” We come to mass as the poor in spirit to receive our life from God. We become detached from the world so that we can become attached to God, the source of true and abundant life. This is our beatitude, our blessing and our happiness. To refuse poverty means that we walk away sad. (Mt 19,22) “We go out, we go out, full of tears, carrying seed for the sowing. We come back, we come back, full of joy, carrying their sheaves.” (Ps 126,6) At mass, we go out in tears during the penitential rite, where the seeds of new life and hope are sown, we come back full of joy from our celebration of communion when we have received the Body of Christ, our sheave.

IV. Jesus will come again. We wait in joyful hope for the coming of our savior, Jesus Christ. “The Eucharist is a straining towards the goal, a foretaste of the fullness of joy promised by Christ (cf. Jn 15:11); it is in some way the anticipation of heaven, the “pledge of future glory”. In the Eucharist, everything speaks of confident waiting “in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ”. Those who feed on Christ in the Eucharist

need not wait until the hereafter to receive eternal life: *they already possess it on earth*, as the first-fruits of a future fullness which will embrace man in his totality. For in the Eucharist we also receive the pledge of our bodily resurrection at the end of the world: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (*Jn 6:54*). This pledge of the future resurrection comes from the fact that the flesh of the Son of Man, given as food, is his body in its glorious state after the resurrection. With the Eucharist we digest, as it were, the "secret" of the resurrection." (Ecclesia eucharistic, JP II)

A. The mass is our joyful place of hope as we wait for the coming of the Lord.

B. We wait for the Lord and he will act. (Ps 37,5) Silence is an important aspect of the Mass as we wait for God to speak, for God to make himself present to us, for God to come to us in communion through the Body and Blood of Christ. "Be still and know that I am God." We wait for God who is coming to us and who is coming for us. He will come to take us to himself so that where he is we also may be. "I will come back and take you to myself so that where I am you also may be." (*Jn 14,5*)

C. We wait in our poverty. We sit by the side of the road as beggars and wait for the Lord to pass by and to heal us and bring us into new life. Everything we have that is of value and that is lasting we receive from the hands of the Lord. We receive the Eucharist as gift, it is not something that we can take because it is owed to us but that we must receive in our poverty as sinners.

V. Practical preparations for Mass and the Advent of God in Jesus Christ.

Remote preparations. Ecclesial communion and penance. Fasting. The Word and prayer - seeking an intimate knowledge of God. Silence. Stillness. Composure. Attentiveness. Reverence. Awe and wonder.

VI. The Mass in its entrance rites and celebration of the Word of God, the Liturgy of the Word, is an Advent. We are preparing for the coming of the Lord in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We listen to the promises of salvation that God has prepared for us in the coming of Christ. We acknowledge our sins and our need for salvation and God's grace to enter into our lives. We experience our longing for the coming of the Lord, we yearn to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our lives. We want our lives to be always a dwelling in the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of his Word, the Temple of the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Indwelling presence of God in our hearts.

Advent Themes

- I. Come, Lord Jesus - the first and second coming - we remember, we celebrate, we believe that he will come again, Seeking the face of God. In Advent we celebrate the Coming of Jesus the Christ. He has come to us in the Incarnation and has accomplished our redemption. He will come again in glory with salvation for his people when he comes to judge the living and the dead.
- II. Preparing the Way - John the Baptist - calling us to the penitential rite - Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand - preparing for the one who comes
- III. Waiting and watching - while we wait for the Lord we prepare our hearts, Mary waits with us for her child to be born. All Judah waits to see what John the Baptist will become.
- IV. The triumph of hope over despair
- V. Joy - the birth of Christ is news of great joy - Gloria. Joining the angels and saints. The song of the heavens. When we sing the Gloria we have ascended the mountain and climbed to the summit. We have entered into heaven through the door of Christ.
- VI. The Incarnation - Emmanuel, God-With-Us, the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us, Spirit becomes flesh and flesh is born again to become spirit, we are born again with Christ, God becomes a child and we must also become new children of God
- VII. Promise and Fulfillment
- VIII. Heaven comes down to Earth and Earth is raised up the Heaven. Heaven and earth are brought together in one act of worship.
- IX. Grace and gift

Parts of the Mass: The Liturgy of the Word

- I. Introit - Let us go up to the House of the Lord, in the Father's house, in my Father's house there are many dwelling places, Life as a journey of ascent to the Father's house, singing and praising as the Ark of the Covenant ascends to the mountain of God. "In days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it; "Come, let us climb the Lord's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths." For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem...O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!" (Is 2,2ff)
- II. Sign of the Cross and Greeting, the cross as the new tree of life, the Eucharist as the fruit of the Tree of Life. The cross is the doorway into heaven that is Jesus. "After this I had a vision an open door to heaven, and I heard the trumpetlike voice that had spoken to me before..." (Rev 4,1)
- III. Penitential Rite - purification before entering into the sacred. Getting the world out and the Spirit in. A time of preparation. Prepare the Way of the Lord. "Come now, let us set things right, says the Lord: though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; though they be crimson red, they may become white as wool. If you are willing, and obey, you shall eat the good things of the land; but if you refuse and resist, the word shall consume you: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken!" (Is 1,18ff) We are all sinners first, all have sinned - "For there is no distinction; all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God. They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as an expiation, through faith, by his blood, to prove his righteousness because of the forgiveness of sins previously committed, through the forbearance of God - to prove his righteousness in the present time, that he might be righteous and justify the one who has faith in Jesus." (Rom 3,23-26)
- IV. Gloria - Joining with the angels in praise and worship. Entering into God's rest through joy. We experience the joy of sharing in the mission of proclaiming the gospel, the good news of great joy!
- V. Opening Prayer - Our yearning for the coming of our Lord. Our prayer to express our desire for God to come to us to save us. The prayer takes all of our needs and expresses them as one. A congregation has been formed, a people of God, placing ourselves under his providential care and protection.
- VI. First Reading - Promise. Contained within the Old Testament are all the promises of the New Testament and in the New Testament an understanding of the fulfillment of the Old Testament.
- VII. Psalm - The prayer of the Church
- VIII. Second Reading - The Spirit at work in the Church. Jesus is the Way and the new people of God, the Church, are the People of the Way. The Liturgy of the Word - the way on which the redeemed walk. A highway in the desert. A straight way through the desert of this life. Instruction goes out from the mountain of the Lord.
- IX. Gospel Acclamation and Procession
- X. Gospel - Fulfillment in Christ Jesus. The Word becomes flesh and dwells among us.
- XI. Homily - Today, this reading is fulfilled in your presence
- XII. The Creed - We believe, a decision of faith, a Way of Life
- XIII. Prayers and Intercessions