

Lenten Retreat: The Mass: The Paschal Mystery Unfolds

- I. The two part nature of the mass that beckons us to enter into and become transformed by the sacred mysteries we celebrate as a part of our life of faith. These are truly “mysteries of faith”. The two central mysteries of our faith are the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery. The Incarnation is remembered and celebrated in the first part of the mass that is the Liturgy of the Word. Here we encounter the Word-Made-Flesh, Jesus the teacher, who shares with us the “words of everlasting life.” This is more than simply telling a story and remembering past events. The Word is alive to us today and it has a power to transform our lives and to accomplish God’s purpose. As we receive the Word, we become living witnesses to the Word as we are conformed into Christ by the renewal of our minds. We encounter the Truth and are brought to a place of decision in our lives to live that Truth more profoundly in our lives, through concrete actions and conversion. Ultimately, our encounter with the Word compels us to profess our faith and to pray for the whole world in an intercessory fashion.
- II. The second part of the mass is the Eucharistic Sacrifice. This Sacrifice expresses, remembers, celebrates and makes present (dispenses) the graces of the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Jesus Christ is the Paschal Mystery in his suffering, death and resurrection. Heaven and earth come together in this part of the mass to celebrate the sacrifice that is offered for the salvation of the world. The mystery of our redemption and the expiation of our sins is revealed in the saving action of the sacrifice of the cross. The mass is a re-presentation of the event of salvation so that the saving graces may be dispensed to us today.
 - A. The mass is the sacrifice of Calvary but also a wedding banquet in which the Church as the bride of Christ is wedded to the Lamb who is the bridegroom, Christ. There is a great celebration in heaven and on earth of the victory that Christ has won over death. Death is vanquished and we are given to eat from the Tree of Life that gives us eternal life. The Eucharist is the Bread of Life that gives eternal life to those who receive it. Our participation in the Eucharist weds us to Christ the bridegroom in a unity that unites us to the Holy Trinity and to one another as the Body of Christ. The blood of Christ, mingled with the water of life in the Spirit, flows from the side of Christ, washing us clean of all sin and satisfying our thirst for eternal life, meaning and purpose. The blood of Christ is a river of living waters that gives fullness to life.
 - B. The Paschal Mystery is a mystery of new life that we share in as the children of God, as a holy people, and as the Bride of Christ, united in eternal love to the bridegroom Jesus. The children of God have a place at the table in the Father’s house, where holy things are prepared for a holy people (sacred gifts are dispensed), and where we drink from the blessing cup, the cup of thanksgiving, the bridal cup of joy, love and peace.
 - C. CCC 1085: “In the liturgy of the Church, it is principally his own Paschal mystery that Christ signifies and makes present. During his earthly life Jesus announced his Paschal mystery by his teaching and anticipated it by his actions. when his Hour comes, he lives out the unique event of history which does not pass away: Jesus dies, is buried, rises from the dead, and is seated at the right hand of the Father “once for all.” His Paschal

mystery is a real event that occurred in our history, but is unique: all other historical events happen once, and then they pass away, swallowed up in the past. The Paschal mystery of Christ, by contrast, cannot remain only in the past, because by his death he destroyed death, and all that Christ is - all that he did and suffered for all men - participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times while being made present in them all. The event of the Cross and Resurrection *abides* and draws everything toward life.”

- D. CCC 1089: “Christ, indeed, always associates the Church with himself in this great work in which God is perfectly glorified and men are sanctified. The Church is his beloved Bride who calls to her Lord and through him offers worship to the eternal Father.” Sanctification and glorification in worship.

III. Our Sacred Worship in Spirit and in Truth.

- A. God gives very special details about how he is to be worshipped at Sinai. He pays great attention to liturgical law.
- B. The Eucharist is the New Passover. It is a passover meal but transformed and made new and different. Jesus is the Lamb of sacrifice of the passover, his blood redeems us from death, the cup of blessing is received, the bread of affliction becomes the bread of life, the new manna of the messiah, the hidden manna.
- C. The Eucharist is worship in Spirit and Truth. “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 4,23f) Jesus institutes the new worship at the Last Supper when he breaks the bread and shares the cup that is now his body and blood. We are instructed, ““This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.”” (Lk 22,19f)
- D. CCC 1093: “In the sacramental economy the Holy Spirit fulfills what was prefigured in the Old Covenant. Since Christ’s Church was “prepared in marvelous fashion in the history of the people of Israel and in the Old Covenant,” the Church’s liturgy has retained certain elements of the worship of the Old Covenant as integral and irreplaceable, adopting them as her own.”
- E. The new worship instituted to celebrate the New Covenant in Christ’s blood is a fulfillment and a transformation of the worship according to the Old Covenant given at Sinai. Elements from the Old Testament are present in the mass.
 1. Altar of sacrifice - now an unbloody sacrifice is offered to sanctify the people of God.
 2. Jesus is the Lamb of sacrifice who freely lays down his life in love.
 3. The Eucharist is the new manna, the bread come down from heaven that gives life to the world. All who eat this bread will never die. The Eucharist is the Panis Angelicus, the bread of angels. It is heavenly food. It is the “daily bread” that sustains us in life. The Messiah was to feed the people once again on the manna from heaven.

4. Bread of Presence - the bread that was a sign of God's love, the bread that represented God's presence among his people. The Eucharist is the True Presence of Jesus.
5. The Lampstand that kept a light always burning before the Presence of the Lord. The Sanctuary lamp that is burning always before the Blessed Sacrament.
6. The Ark of the Covenant - in the Holy of Holies where the Shekinah presence of God would dwell. Now the Tabernacle that contains the Blessed Sacrament.
7. The forms of worship are preserved and transformed by Jesus. The Eucharist is the New Passover, a Passover meal but changed and transformed and given a new end.
8. The new worship was celebrated on "The Lord's Day", the new day, the first day, the day of the resurrection. In the Eucharist we receive the Risen Christ. He is revealed and made known in the "breaking of the bread", as at Emmaus. CCC 1166: "By a tradition handed down from the apostles which took its origin from the very day of Christ's Resurrection, the Church celebrates the Paschal mystery every seventh day, which day is appropriately called the Lord's Day or Sunday." The day of Christ's Resurrection is both the first day of the week, the memorial of the first day of creation, and the "eighth day," on which Christ after his "rest" on the great sabbath inaugurates the "day that the Lord has made," the "day that knows no evening." The Lord's Supper is its center, for there the whole community of the faithful encounters the risen Lord who invites them to his banquet."
9. God is not pleased when people try to make their own ways of worship as with the golden calf at Sinai and with Jeroboam, Israel, and the golden bulls at Dan and Bethel.

IV. Anamnesis - CCC 1104: "Christian liturgy not only recalls the events that saved us but actualizes them, makes them present. The Paschal mystery of Christ is celebrated, not repeated. It is the celebrations that are repeated, and in each celebration there is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that makes the unique mystery present."

V. Epiclesis (invocation upon) - CCC 1105: "the Epiclesis is the intercession in which the priest begs the Father to send the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, so that the offerings may become the body and blood of Christ and that the faithful, by receiving them, may themselves become a living offering to God."

VI. Parts of the Liturgy of the Eucharist: Catechism of the Catholic Church:

1350 The presentation of the offerings (the Offertory). Then, sometimes in procession, the bread and wine are brought to the altar; they will be offered by the priest in the name of Christ in the Eucharistic sacrifice in which they will become his body and blood. It is the very action of Christ at the Last Supper - "taking the bread and a cup." "The Church alone offers this pure oblation to the Creator, when she offers what comes forth from his creation with thanksgiving."¹⁷⁵ The presentation of the offerings at the altar takes up the gesture of Melchizedek and commits the Creator's gifts into the hands of Christ who, in his sacrifice, brings to perfection all human attempts to offer sacrifices.

1351 From the very beginning Christians have brought, along with the bread and wine for the Eucharist, gifts to share with those in need. This custom of the collection, ever appropriate, is inspired by the example of Christ who became poor to make us rich:¹⁷⁶

Those who are well off, and who are also willing, give as each chooses. What is gathered is given to him who presides to assist orphans and widows, those whom illness or any other cause has deprived of resources, prisoners, immigrants and, in a word, all who are in need.¹⁷⁷

1352 The anaphora: with the Eucharistic Prayer - the prayer of thanksgiving and consecration - we come to the heart and summit of the celebration:

In the preface, the Church gives thanks to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, for all his works: creation, redemption, and sanctification. The whole community thus joins in the unending praise that the Church in heaven, the angels and all the saints, sing to the thrice-holy God.

1353 In the epiclesis, the Church asks the Father to send his Holy Spirit (or the power of his blessing¹⁷⁸) on the bread and wine, so that by his power they may become the body and blood of Jesus Christ and so that those who take part in the Eucharist may be one body and one spirit (some liturgical traditions put the epiclesis after the anamnesis).

In the institution narrative, the power of the words and the action of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit, make sacramentally present under the species of bread and wine Christ's body and blood, his sacrifice offered on the cross once for all.

1354 In the anamnesis that follows, the Church calls to mind the Passion, resurrection, and glorious return of Christ Jesus; she presents to the Father the offering of his Son which reconciles us with him.

In the intercessions, the Church indicates that the Eucharist is celebrated in communion with the whole Church in heaven and on earth, the living and the dead, and in communion with the pastors of the Church, the Pope, the diocesan bishop, his presbyterium and his deacons, and all the bishops of the whole world together with their Churches.

1355 In the communion, preceded by the Lord's prayer and the breaking of the bread, the faithful receive "the bread of heaven" and "the cup of salvation," the body and blood of Christ who offered himself "for the life of the world":¹⁷⁹

Because this bread and wine have been made Eucharist ("eucharisted," according to an ancient expression), "we call this food Eucharist, and no one may take part in it unless he believes that what we teach is true, has received baptism for the forgiveness of sins and new birth, and lives in keeping with what Christ taught."

VII. The Sacramental Sacrifice: Thanksgiving, Memorial, Presence

A. CCC 1358: We must therefore consider the Eucharist as:

1. thanksgiving and praise to the Father
2. the sacrificial memorial of Christ and his Body
3. the presence of Christ by the power of his word and of his Spirit

VIII. The Eucharist - "Pledge of the Glory To Come"

1402 In an ancient prayer the Church acclaim the mystery of the Eucharist: "O sacred banquet in which Christ is received as food, the memory of his Passion is renewed, the soul is filled with grace and a pledge of the life to come is given to us." If the Eucharist is the memorial of the

Passover of the Lord Jesus, if by our communion at the altar we are filled "with every heavenly blessing and grace,"²³⁹ then the Eucharist is also an anticipation of the heavenly glory.

1403 At the Last Supper the Lord himself directed his disciples' attention toward the fulfillment of the Passover in the kingdom of God: "I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."²⁴⁰ Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist she remembers this promise and turns her gaze "to him who is to come." In her prayer she calls for his coming: "Marana tha!" "Come, Lord Jesus!"²⁴¹ "May your grace come and this world pass away!"²⁴²

1404 The Church knows that the Lord comes even now in his Eucharist and that he is there in our midst. However, his presence is veiled. Therefore we celebrate the Eucharist "awaiting the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ,"²⁴³ asking "to share in your glory when every tear will be wiped away. On that day we shall see you, our God, as you are. We shall become like you and praise you for ever through Christ our Lord."²⁴⁴

1405 There is no surer pledge or dearer sign of this great hope in the new heavens and new earth "in which righteousness dwells,"²⁴⁵ than the Eucharist. Every time this mystery is celebrated, "the work of our redemption is carried on" and we "break the one bread that provides the medicine of immortality, the antidote for death, and the food that makes us live for ever in Jesus Christ."

IX. How can the mass be boring - so much is happening, so much is offered, so much is received, so many graces are poured out.