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A N S W E R S

A chalice, a ceremonial cup used in the Eucharist, is centered on a green textured background. The chalice has a wide, flared bowl with intricate cut-glass patterns and a stem leading to a foot. The background has a fine, woven texture. The title 'THE MASS' is overlaid in large white letters across the middle of the chalice.

THE MASS

Catholic Answers

20 Answers



The Mass

Fr. Hugh Barbour, O. Praem.



20 Answers: *The Mass*

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Published by Catholic Answers, Inc.

2020 Gillespie Way

El Cajon, California 92020

1-888-291-8000 orders

619-387-0042 fax

catholic.com

Printed in the United States of America

978-1-68357-264-0

978-1-68357-265-7 Kindle

978-1-68357-266-4 ePub

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Introduction

“It would be easier for the earth to live without the sun, than without the holy Mass.” These are the words of the renowned saint, mystic, spiritual director, and confessor of myriads of sinners, Padre Pio.

Why would this saint make such a claim about the Mass, and why would its offering raise him to such heights of prayer? And why did so many Christians find this such an attractive spectacle? What lesson are we to learn from such words and such a rare example?

Jesus said, “And if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to myself” (John 12:32). He was speaking of his sacrifice of his own body and blood, lifted up on the wood of the holy cross. This was the real, unique, bodily, and bloody act by which he chose to be offered up for the salvation of the whole world. “He was offered up because he willed it,” as we read in the Douay version of Isaiah 53:7 (taken from the ancient Greek and Latin versions).

And yet, we will never understand Our Lord’s suffering on the cross unless we understand what he did before it—when he instituted the holy sacrifice of the Mass. “With a desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15). These ardent and longing words of the Savior indicate the offering of the Last Supper as his consummate gift to us, revealing the intentions of his life for our salvation. Jesus did not wish to reveal his sacred wounds on the cross without first giving us the holy Mass—the means whereby *we could have access to his one sacrifice*, throughout time, until he comes again. He sacrificed his body and blood *before* his passion by instituting the Mass, in an unbloody offering under the appearances of bread and wine. In so doing, he taught us he never intended the one means of offering to be separated from the other.

From the cross, Jesus willed and foresaw the applications of its saving power for you and for me. Just as “he was offered up because he willed it” so, too, “He loved me and gave himself up for me” as St. Paul says (Gal. 2:20).

What a pain it must be for Our Lord that so many Christians do not know of this wonderful design of their Savior, or who even reject it, not comprehending his intention! To be sure, they may feed on him by faith and charity, but they do not perceive these graces as flowing from the holy Mass. They thus miss out on the chief consolation of life in Christ here on earth,

which he so greatly desires to give them.

The answers that follow will cover the nature of the holy Mass, its effects and its extensions, and its various forms and norms established by the Church, which is the custodian of this treasure instituted by the Lord. They will also answer some objections that you may have heard posed or even posed yourself. But most of all, I hope that these answers will bring you to a deeper understanding of Padre Pio's words and of the teaching of the loving Lord who moved him to say them. In this way, if you have a renewed and fervent faith and love, and hope-filled attention when the host and chalice are elevated at each holy Mass you attend, then I will have achieved my goal in writing. May he "draw you to himself" as he is "lifted up from the earth"!

1. What is the Mass?

The Mass can be defined under two aspects: one of which is essential and unchanging, and the other practically necessary but more flexible in nature. In the Savior's intention, neither aspect is meant to exist without the other.

The first is what we could call the *dogmatic* or *revealed* definition of the holy Mass, and the second may be called the *liturgical* or *practical* definition.

The second, concrete aspect is what you and I experience first. It is also what the apostles and other believers first experienced at what was the first Mass, in the Upper Room at the Last Supper. The Mass is the *ordered observance of the Lord's passion and death* using the outward signs he determined for doing so.

We can look for this definition in Church texts that show in practice how the Mass should be celebrated. For example, we have the very brief, succinct statement from the Roman Missal ("Mass book") of 1962 approved by Pope St. John XXIII: "The most holy sacrifice of the Mass, celebrated according to the canons and rubrics, is an act of public worship, rendered to God in the name of Christ and of the Church."

This is the first thing we notice about the Mass: it is an act of public worship, whose rite is determined by the Church.

This use of the Church's authority goes back to the first Mass in Jerusalem on the first Holy Thursday, when Christ himself gave directions about how the supper was to be arranged and conducted. We read of this in the missal approved by Pope St. Paul VI in 1969:

As Christ the Lord was about to celebrate with the disciples the paschal supper in which he instituted the sacrifice of his body and blood, he commanded that a large, furnished upper room be prepared (Luke 22:12). Indeed, the Church has always judged that this command also applied to herself whenever she decided about things related to the disposition of people's minds, and of places, rites, and texts for the celebration of the most holy Eucharist.

Places, rites, and texts: these are the elements of an act of public worship, and they are the first things a Catholic child or an adult convert learns about the Mass. This *liturgical* (a word from ancient Greek that means "pertaining to public worship or service") aspect of the Mass means that the Mass is always and everywhere meant to be celebrated "by the book," that is, in obedience to the approved rites of the Church. Sometimes it can happen that priests (even bishops) or lay people may not follow the rules for the liturgy (called *rubrics*) or they may ad-lib or change its words. They should not do this, because Christians have a right to have an experience of worship that is correct and authentic, not made up by private individuals. On this point, the Second Vatican Council solemnly warns the clergy that no one, "even if he be a priest, may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 22).

As important as this second aspect or "order" of the Mass is, the first aspect is infinitely deeper, and utterly unchanging, because it concerns the revelation of the "mystery of faith" as the Mass is sometimes called. Unlike the practical details of public worship, it cannot vary according to times and places. According to this revelation, the Mass is the offering up to God of the sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ, once offered on the cross and now offered in commemoration and application of that sacrifice, under the signs or appearances of bread and wine. As a *sacrifice*, the Mass fulfills all the purposes of a sacrifice: (1) to adore God, (2) to thank him, (3) to repair for sins against him, and (4) to obtain from him the things we ask.

These four "ends" of the Mass are called *adoration, thanksgiving, reparation, and impetration* (a technical word for obtaining what we ask for in prayer).

Christ the Lord intended that this mystery of the offering of his body and blood should continue in his Church, every day, until his coming at the end of time. The Mass is thus the very lifeblood of Christ's body, the Church.

In the form of a *memorial rite*, the symbols of bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus by the *words of consecration*, first spoken by the Lord at the Last Supper and repeated by the priest who now acts in Christ's place. By memorial we do not mean at all "only" a memory, or by symbol "merely" a symbol. No! the appearances of bread and wine, the symbols of his body and blood, really, truly, and substantially convey the real body and blood of Christ. The sacrifice of the Mass is one and the same as that of Calvary; not a different body, but a different way of offering the same body.

This infinite mystery of Christ's sacrifice is what the public worship offered at holy Mass in your parish church contains and accomplishes. It is by far our greatest treasure as Catholic Christians.

2. What are the effects of the Mass?

Considering the nature of the Mass, we might better ask, "What is *not* an effect of the Mass?"!

The Mass contains the offering of the body and blood of the Son of the living God, and since his body and blood are united to his human soul and to his divine nature, we have in each celebration of the Mass the value of all of Our Lord's bodily powers.

We have all the value and power of his blood's nourishing and life-giving substance. We have all the value and power of his soul: his memory, his imagination, his feelings, his knowledge, his unsearchable wisdom, his will, and his love for everyone—from his eternal Father to his mother and all the saints and angels, all the way to the least of us—with its infinite merits.

We have the infinite value and unlimited power of his Godhead: the power to heal, to pardon, to delight, to make happy; and what is infinitely more, we have his eternal birth from the Father and his breathing-forth of the Holy Spirit, his embrace of love in the bosom of the Holy Trinity.

In short, *anything that Jesus is and does* is there in the holy Mass. Now apply that to the four ends of sacrifice we listed in the prior answer.

Infinite adoration: The Mass is the adoration that the Son of God offers to the blessed Trinity. Normally, even a perfect human act of worship has just a limited value, but Christ's worship is the worship of a man who is a divine person, so the honor and glory given to the three-in-one God is truly, concretely, actually without limit.

Perfect thanksgiving: Our human thanks can never equal even the good gifts we receive from other human beings, such as our birth, our education and nourishment, all the advantages of life in society that we need in order to flourish and not perish, friendship and help of all kinds. When we realize that everything we are and have is a pure gift of God, who needs nothing from us, we are confronted with a fact that such a gift can have no equal return. Yet Jesus in the holy Mass has given us his own infinite, endless, overwhelmingly-more-than-sufficient thanks—the thanks that God gives to God, echoed in the perfectly thankful soul of the man who is the Son of God. And he places this offering in our hands, to be given not only in his name but ours.

Surpassing reparation: Could there be a gift that goes further than all God's gifts in the order of creation and of grace? Something that is more than a gift? Yes, the forgiveness of sins and the canceling of their debts. Due to sin, we have a need that is very great, since sin is the misuse of God's gifts to us in soul and body. How could we make up for that? There is nothing we can do to restore what our sins have corrupted. But there is One who is sinless, and almighty, and who can represent us, since he shares our human nature. The offering of the body and blood of the spotless Lamb of God, slain "since the foundation of the world" by human sin (Rev. 13:8), makes super-sufficient atonement by its infinite merit of love. Its only limits could be those we place on it by not turning completely from our sins. In Christ, the reparation is potentially infinite, more than enough for every soul, and this reparation is made in the offering of the sacrifice that "takes away the sins of the world."

Efficacious impetration: We offer the holy sacrifice for all sorts of "intentions," things for which we pray. Surely the most effective prayer is the one offered for us by Christ crucified. This prayer in his sacrifice obtains our triumph over death and all the gifts of nature and grace that are needed for us to gain heaven. It can even obtain temporal gifts, such as health and financial means. The things that are surely God's will for us—faith, hope, charity, contrition—we infallibly obtain by the Mass; the lesser things we obtain in accordance with the Father's will, knowing that the Lord Christ is interceding for us regardless, and if what we want is not in accordance with the will of God, then Jesus surely asks for what *would* be.

The Mass in any case is the source of every good thing that we receive from God, since Jesus has told us that when he is "lifted up from the earth" he will

“draw all things” to himself. He is lifted up in the Mass just as was lifted up on the cross.

3. Are the Eucharist, the Mass, the liturgy, Holy Communion, the Blessed Sacrament, the breaking of the bread, and the Lord’s Supper all the same thing?

All these words generally refer to the same reality: the body and blood of the Lord offered in sacrifice under the appearances of bread and wine in an act of public worship that glorifies God and obtains graces, and whose presence remains after the sacrifice is completed as spiritual food for the faithful who adore. But they differ slightly according to the aspects of the mystery they refer to.

Eucharist, which is the most inclusive word, implies all the aspects and effects of this mystery by naming its principal effect—the glorification of God. It comes from a Greek word that means “giving thanks,” or more precisely, the recognition of a good gift. It alludes to the prayer of Our Lord, who, lifting his eyes to heaven, gave thanks and broke the bread as he spoke the words of consecration: “This is my body . . . this is the chalice of my blood.”

Mass refers to the absolute essence of the Eucharist as a sacrifice, that is, the consecration of the body and blood of Christ and the completion of the sacrifice by the priest who accomplishes the consecration. The word comes from the Latin word *missa*, which refers to a thing being sent or offered up. The term developed from the people hearing the final admonition of the service, “Go, it has been sent up”—*Ite, missa est*. These are still the words used when the Mass is celebrated in Latin. The churches of the Syriac tradition in the Middle East and southern India have a similar expression. They call the Mass the *Qrbana*, or “what is offered up.”

Liturgy refers to the public and communally celebrated aspect of the Eucharist as worship. It comes from an ancient Greek word meaning public service, and so came to refer to the principal public and communal duty of the priests and people of the Church: the worship of God. Many of the Eastern churches use this term as their most common name for their rite of the Mass, calling it the “Divine Liturgy.”

Holy Communion refers to the sharing in the sacrifice of the body and blood of the Lord by eating and drinking the outward appearances of bread or wine

that convey the real presence of his same body and blood. This name refers to the purpose of the mystery as an individually received reality: union with God by charity, which is the truest nourishment of the soul, and a token of future resurrection after death. This is what the Lord promises in the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel: "He who eats me will live because of me" (6:57).

Blessed Sacrament refers to this reality as the greatest and most perfect of the seven sacraments of the New Law, and as the fulfillment of the sacraments of the Old Law. *Sacrament* comes from a Latin word that referred to the oath of allegiance imposed on soldiers in the Roman army. These obligations were indicated by words and even by a small branding of the flesh by a mark. The term was extended to mean other obligations, some secret or mysterious, and so was adopted by ancient Christians to refer to the sacred rites instituted by Christ. Thus, *sacrament* refers to the most universal aspect of the Mass: the way it *conveys divine realities by an outward sign and sacred words*. The Eastern churches do not use this word in their original languages, preferring to use the word *mystery*, taken from the rites of initiation of ancient religion. The idea behind the term, however, is the same.

The *Lord's Supper* refers to the first time the Mass was offered, by Christ himself in the Upper Room with his disciples on the night before he suffered. He gave his body and blood in sacrifice under the appearances of bread and wine, just as he was to offer them on the altar of the cross the next day. The Lord is said to have "instituted" the Eucharist by showing the essential elements of celebrating it, by commanding us to do so in the future, and in this way by instituting the Christian priesthood among the apostles whose highest duty would be the offering of the holy Mass. It is important to recognize that our Mass is *not* a commemoration of the Last Supper except, in a sense, on Holy Thursday when that event is recalled. Rather it is a commemoration of the sacrifice of Calvary offered the next day.

The *breaking of the bread* is perhaps the oldest Christian name for the Mass. It is especially beloved to St. Luke, who uses it in his Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles. This expression refers to the gesture of sharing the sacred species (the body and blood under the appearance of bread and wine) in Holy Communion, a time when the unity of the Church is especially evoked: our union with him as the head of his body, and our unity with one another in him. It is in this sense that St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that ecclesiastical

unity is the principal effect of the holy Mass.

4. What is the most basic structure of the Mass that all Catholic rites have in common?

The order of the celebration of the Mass has been composed of certain elements since the time of the apostles, indeed, since Our Lord himself provided the model of the liturgy in the twenty-fifth chapter of Luke's Gospel. He approaches two disciples who are on their way, corrects their faults, explains the scriptures to them, and then reveals himself to them in the breaking of the bread—after which they go out, rejoicing, to tell the others of him. This leads to another appearance of the Lord, who instructs and feeds those present in the same manner.

Throughout Christian history, no matter what the time, place, or language, the Mass has always contained the elements we find in the Gospels. In varying styles and forms over the centuries, the Church has modeled its liturgy after this example.

Every Mass, for example, has a plea for God's mercy on our faults as a preparation, then readings from the Old and New Testaments, with psalm verses and an explanation of the readings given by the priest who stands in the place of Christ. Then the presentation and consecration of the gifts of bread and wine in which, by the consecration, Christ is revealed in his body and blood and given to the faithful who have been prepared and purified by repentance, forgiveness, and instruction. Then they go out to declare their experience to others so that there may be more Masses throughout the world.

All this takes place in two parts, broadly called the *Liturgy of the Word* and the *Liturgy of the Eucharist*. Together they make up one single act of worship, culminating in the sacramental sacrifice by the priest's pronouncing of the Lord's words over the bread and the wine.

To the readings in the Liturgy of the Word are added some act of repentance and forgiveness, intercessions for the needs of the faithful, and then usually a homily on the readings and a profession of faith.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist always contains some offertory rite whereby the gifts to be consecrated are brought to the altar to be presented to God. Then there are prayers of thanks and glory, remembrances of the living and the dead, the recollection of Christ's own death and resurrection and all his

mighty deeds, the consecration itself, the Lord's Prayer, the communion of the holy sacrament, and then a blessing and a dismissal.

Because we follow the liturgy of the Gospels and the tradition of the Church, our Mass will always be the same as that intended by the Lord. Any Christian of the first century attending Mass in a Catholic church of any rite in our own time would surely recognize it. If he did not, then we would have a different religion!

5. What are the different rites of the Mass celebrated in the Church and how did they develop?

The liturgy of the Mass, though the same everywhere in its principal elements, still developed differently from place to place in the early ages of the Church. This development was based on the different languages and cultures of the first Christian communities. It followed the spread of the Faith throughout the Roman Empire, East and West, to those places throughout the whole world that received the gospel from there. These original rites constitute the Church's liturgical practice today wherever the liturgy is celebrated.

An easy way to understand how this came about is to follow the major cities of the regions of the Roman Empire in which the gospel was first spread. Broadly, these are Rome (capital of the empire), Antioch in Syria, and Alexandria in Egypt—the principal cities of the Roman Empire before Constantine founded Constantinople at Byzantium to be an Eastern capital at the border between Europe and Asia Minor. These four cities are the most influential in the development of the different rites.

“It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians,” Luke tells us in the Acts of the Apostles (11:26). Antioch was the capital of the Roman province of Syria, which technically included the Holy Land of Palestine where the mysteries we celebrate in the Mass took place. The rite of the Mass that developed in the Syrian world is arguably the most ancient, and it influenced the other rites as they developed. It certainly had the largest reach, thanks to the Syrian missionaries who brought the Faith to India and to China.

The present churches that use some version of this *Syriac Antiochian* tradition are the Maronites, the Chaldeans, the Syrians, the Syro-Malabar,

and the Syro-Malankara. The original liturgical language of these churches is in each case some form of Aramaic or Syriac, although in addition to their proper liturgical language they also use the local vernacular languages that came later, such as Arabic or Malayalam, and now English. *Aramaic* is the closest to the speech of Our Lord and the apostles. It was the language spoken at the Last Supper when the Mass was instituted. Hearing the words of consecration or the Lord's Prayer sung in Aramaic takes the Christian worshiper right back to the beginning.

The Roman church founded by St. Peter and his converts, as well as St. Paul, has its own tradition, markedly different from those of the Eastern churches. In its earliest use, it was celebrated in Greek, but this was gradually replaced by Latin. The liturgy of the Latin-speaking Christians of North Africa was perhaps its earliest fully attested example. The worship of the Roman church spread up to northern Italy and into the Roman territories beyond the Alps and to Spain.

Thus the Roman liturgy gradually replaced the ancient usages of the Celtic rite in the British isles and the Visigothic and Gallican rites in Spain and France, although these latter two continue to this day in the Mozarabic rite of Toledo in Spain and the rite of Lyons in France. In northern Italy, an offshoot of the Roman liturgy used at Milan survives and thrives in the Ambrosian rite, and in Portugal there was the rite of Braga, which survives today although it is much reduced. The Roman rite spread also to some of the Slav lands, notably Bohemia, Moravia, Poland, and Croatia, as well as the kingdom of Hungary.

Since the Roman rite was the rite of the vast majority of missionaries from Western Europe to North and South America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania, it is by far the largest and most widespread among Catholics. Even so, millions of Christians around the world worship according to Eastern rites of the liturgy.

The rite of Constantinople, usually called the *Byzantine* or *Greek* rite developed in the city there on account of its great importance as the "New Rome," was founded already in the Christian era by Constantine (*St. Constantine* in the Eastern liturgies). The form of the liturgy comes from the Syrian tradition, but much amplified and ordered by the bishops of the city under the influence of the usages of Jerusalem and, to a lesser extent, "Old" Rome, and with a strong influence of the liturgy used in the imperial city and

court.

This Byzantine rite spread throughout the eastern Roman Empire and gradually replaced many of the local usages in the East, as the Roman rite did in the West. It was adopted for the evangelization of the Slavic peoples, as well as the Latin-speaking Romanian peoples of the East. The adoption of this Byzantine rite by the Rus of Kiev made the Byzantine rite spread through Russia and even into central and Eastern Asia, as it already had done in Asia Minor, Greece, the Balkans, and southern Italy and Sicily. This rite is by far the largest of the Eastern rites, counting hundreds of millions of faithful, and is found throughout the world as the Roman rite is, though with smaller numbers.

Alexandria was intended to be the capital of the empire drawn together by Alexander the Great in the third century before Christ, though it became the capital of just a part of that empire once it split up, and then was the capital of Egypt. The church there was founded out of Rome by St. Mark the Evangelist, yet the early liturgy of Constantinople was its major influence. Following the practice of the monasteries of the Egyptian desert, the language of the liturgy moved from Greek to Coptic, the native Egyptian language. In recent centuries, the Arabic language has been adopted for preaching and some parts of the liturgy. Under the sole authority of the patriarch of Alexandria, the Coptic rite was the most uniform of the Eastern rites.

This Coptic liturgy was brought down to Ethiopia when the gospel was preached there, and so it has an Ethiopian offshoot called the *Ge'ez* rite, after its ancient liturgical language. This rite is observed by Christians in Ethiopia and neighboring Eritrea, and throughout the world where they have immigrated.

These are the rites based on the customs of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, and Alexandria. There is one rite that is a composite of them all, however, which did not derive from one of the ancient capitals but rather from the nation that was the first to adopt Christianity as its national worship, even before the Roman Empire did. This is the *Armenian* rite. This beautiful rite combines the Syrian, Byzantine, and Roman traditions, textually and visually, but is unique enough that it forms its own tradition. The language of the rite is classical Armenian, but the various vernacular languages of the diaspora are also used in part. The Armenian rite is found in Armenia and the Middle

East, as well as in Europe and the Americas in thriving communities.

Wherever the Mass is celebrated in the whole world it is celebrated following one of these six traditions: Roman, Byzantine, East and West Syrian, Coptic, Ge'ez, and Armenian. In each case, though, it is the one Mass with the same essential elements of word, sacrament, and sacrifice.

6. Was there anything like the Mass in the Old Testament?

Turning the question around once more, we might rather ask, “Was there anything in the Old Testament that does *not* refer to the Mass?”

The Mass contains the completed work of the Savior in his sacrifice on the cross. All the worship of the true God in the Old Testament is summed up and fulfilled in this supreme act of worship. Further, all the events and teachings and laws of the Old Testament were to have their perfection in Christ’s saving work, which the Mass presents by an efficacious sign. That is why the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus gave the disciples the example of how to celebrate the Mass by explaining all that referred to him in the writings of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms. As the cycle of readings heard throughout the liturgical year reminds us, the Mass is the fulfillment of all these things accomplished in Christ’s passion and in the sacrifice of his body and blood.

From the sacrifice of Abel, the one unjustly slain, to the offering of bread and wine by Melchizedek, the immortal high priest, to Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his only son, to the Passover lamb, to all the offerings of the temple, bloody and unbloody—all the worship of the ancient law given to Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses is summed up in the Mass. This is why Our Lord said, “With a desire I have desired to eat this supper with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15). The Mass contains, under concise symbols, the essence of the whole story of our salvation: brought to completion in the body and blood that were born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, were raised in glory, and are coming again.

Not only are there things in the Old Testament that remind us of the Mass, the very substance of the whole of it is found in the eucharistic worship instituted by Christ.

7. What explains how the parts of the Mass are organized?

The order of the parts of the Mass is not alphabetical or numerical, nor is it chronological or proportional. No, the Mass is not organized by time or space or by letters or numbers; rather, it is in accordance with the ordering of all things under God. This is not surprising, since the Mass contains the fulfillment of our Savior and Creator's promise, "When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all things to myself" (John 12:32).

A fifth/sixth-century saint named Denis the Areopagite wrote a treatise on the worship of the Church that stands as the oldest, most authoritative, and influential one in both East and West. Known as *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchies*, it provides the standard for understanding the sacred mysteries of common, public prayer of the sacraments, and throughout the Church's history, the Doctors of the Church (in particular St. Thomas Aquinas) have made deep use of its teaching.

It uses a threefold division to express the nature of things, especially spiritual progress and activity, and this division explains why the liturgy of the Church is ordered in the way it is. The first stage of spiritual progress is purification or purgation, the second stage is illumination, and the third stage is union. In the different parts of the Mass, as in the life of the soul, all three of these movements are at work at all times, yet one of them predominates according to the sacred rite being accomplished.

In order to come into union with God, Christians must first be *purified* of any obstacle to the divine life in them; that is, from sin and from any disorder in their imagination and emotions. To this stage of progress belong the things we associate with the first part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word. The initial acts, the censing of the altar, the Sunday sprinkling of holy water, the prayers of repentance and of petition for the needs of the whole Church—these clarify and cleanse our intentions, separating them from the atmosphere of the world and centering them on the Lord.

The readings, too, have this purifying effect, as their holy words and considerations replace our wandering and vain imaginations and stir up our desire for heavenly things. And the homily is not just an instruction—it is a freeing of our minds from obsessive thoughts, distractions, and useless or unwholesome memories.

Being purged of sin and defects, the light of Christ can shine more brightly in our minds, and so we come to the second movement, that of *illumination*.

We are now vigilant, with our lamps lit, on the watch for the return of the Bridegroom (Matt. 25:1–13). Here we intentionally undertake to offer up the gifts of bread and wine that will become our sacrifice.

Moses and the prophets and the Psalms have been explained to us by Christ in the Gospel lesson and in the words of the one who has preached to us in his person. We are no longer wandering or walking along without a goal. We know in what direction to go: to the altar of God, to his perfect sacrifice. We have been enlightened. We are ready to go in for the banquet.

This illumination of our hearts moves into *union* with the One we have come to know in his word, as we recognize his presence in the “breaking of the bread,” that is, in the consecration and elevation of the body and blood of the Lord and in Holy Communion. The same faithful who a moment before were united in a greeting of peace, Christ the high priest now draws by faith and love to the whole reality of his body and blood and so produces our perfect union with him—the restful, happy, divine goal of our previous purification and enlightenment. God has taken our sacrifice, which is Christ, up to himself and us with it, so we are one in him, along with all the powers of heaven. Heaven and earth are united.

As we noted, these three stages are not ever completely separated from one another. All the parts of the Mass contain words and rites that express purgation, illumination, and union. So even though a certain stage is more evident in one part of the liturgical order, the other two are always present. For example, the words of Sacred Scripture are found in all the parts of the Mass. There are prayers of purification at the offertory, along with the purifying smoke of incense. And before we are united intimately with the Lord’s body and blood, we cry out for mercy and declare our unworthiness.

When we become aware of these three movements in the liturgy, we begin to see them also in our daily lives, viewing all things as purgative, enlightening, or perfecting in love. This is the great tradition of the “three ages” of the spiritual life, and in our work and prayer it will make the order of our lives like the order of the Mass we celebrate. And our dismissal with the priest’s blessing will usher us in to a life modeled on the Mass.

8. Do priests have an obligation to celebrate Mass every day?

The Church earnestly encourages priests to celebrate daily. The discipline of

the Church regarding the frequency of a priest's celebration of the holy Mass is based, as every discipline should be, on its doctrine. The Church teaches explicitly, for example in the decree of the Second Vatican Council on the priesthood, in the Code of Canon Law, and in St. John Paul II's Holy Thursday exhortations to priests, that priests should celebrate daily. And yet it does not make this a strict obligation, unless the priest's assignment concerns the care of souls—for example, if a parish or a house of religious sisters require it.

A priest's *first* duty is to preach the gospel. Without believers whose faith draws them to the altar, the Mass would not have worshipers. There need to be believers to share in the mystery of faith! But a priest's *highest* duty is to offer the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Indeed, all the preaching and other sacramental work of priests is ordered to the people's fruitful participation in the holy mysteries of the Mass, which Vatican II calls the "source and summit" of the Christian life.

There is infinite dignity in offering the body and blood of the Lord. It is the priestliest of priestly actions. There is nothing that the Church has that is more precious or holy or powerful. This offering, in the words of an ancient prayer over the gifts from the Roman Missal, often quoted in the documents of the Church, is an offering of which it is said, "Each time the commemoration of this victim is celebrated, the work of our redemption is accomplished."

Thus the Code of Canon Law states that priests, "mindful" that in the Mass the work of salvation is accomplished, *should* celebrate daily. The law goes on to say that a priest may celebrate even if none of the faithful can be present. Granted, it is presumed that the priest should celebrate with at least one of the faithful present, but the clear concession for even a solitary Mass shows how much the Church values each and every celebration of the eucharistic sacrifice. The "just cause" required for a priest to celebrate alone is understood by canonists to be satisfied by his desire to celebrate daily. Even so, he evidently prefers to have others present, since the Mass is not only for his devotion but for the whole Church.

The number of people present does not affect the essential and infinite value of the Mass. It is the same sacrifice whether it is a solemn celebration in a cathedral with a crowd of people or celebrated at a side altar in a monastery.

Granted, the Mass with a congregation is more liturgically complete, but it is still a true liturgy if celebrated by a hermit priest in his hermitage, or a retired priest in a chapel, or a priest on holiday away from his parish duties.

Each Mass is an infinite storehouse of Christ's power, applying to the whole world the merits of his passion and death so that we may all share in the glory of his resurrection. And so it is the Church demands the multiplication of daily celebrations of the Mass. Communion services and adoration are good, but they are in no way equivalent to the actual offering of the body and blood of the Lord that is the cause of all the other ways the faithful may enjoy the fruits of his merciful love in the Blessed Sacrament.

The Mass is the action of Christ the high priest; what can compare with that? What other activity of a priest can compare with it? The Church cries out to priests as to God himself, "Give us this day our daily bread!"

9. Can more than one priest celebrate the same Mass at the same time?

Yes. One priest is always the principal celebrant of a Mass, but several may celebrate together with him. This is called *concelebration*. In order for the concelebrants to be truly celebrating the Mass, they all must recite the consecratory words of Our Lord, the "words of institution," together with the principal celebrant, and intend to consecrate all the bread and wine that he intends to consecrate. They also must consume the eucharistic species they have consecrated at that Mass—they may not receive hosts from the tabernacle—or else they have not concelebrated Mass.

The practice of concelebration is widely diffused in communities of priests and at gatherings of priests. However, this form of celebration is not meant to be a convenient, time-saving way for many priests to celebrate rather than saying their own Masses. The concelebrated Mass is one Mass, not many, and the number of celebrants does not affect this. Each of them may have his own Mass intention, however, since the power of the Mass applied for intentions is potentially unlimited.

Ideally, concelebration is practiced when there is a reason related to the priesthood. The unity of the priesthood is exercised in concelebration in any case, but it is clearly symbolized when the priests concelebrate with their bishop or prelate, as at an ordination (the newly ordained priest's real "first Mass" is concelebrated by him at the Mass of ordination), or at the Chrism

Mass, or parish visitation, or on an occasion underlining the priesthood, as at the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday or at a jubilee Mass.

In some of the Eastern churches there is the practice of *ceremonial concelebration* wherein the priests are vested in Mass vestments and participate, but do not recite the words of the Lord or the invocation of the Holy Spirit. In this case, they do not celebrate the liturgy in the strictest dogmatic sense, but simply by way of a more solemn participation at the liturgy celebrated by one of them. This is another way of showing the unity of the priesthood liturgically.

A priest may usually choose freely whether to celebrate individually or concelebrate. Vatican II's *Constitution on the Liturgy* and the current Code of Canon Law make it clear that in practically all circumstances priests are free to celebrate individually. Individual celebration has always been the norm in history; concelebration the exception.

10. What does it mean to have a Mass offered for a special intention?

The purpose of the holy Mass is to apply the effects of the Lord's saving passion, which took place at one moment in time, to souls throughout all time. In sacrificing his body and blood under the appearances of bread and wine *before* he offered them up in their natural forms on the cross, the Savior made it clear that he shed his precious blood and underwent death in his body only in order to give the fruits of that sacrifice to souls through the sacramental sacrifice he instituted on Holy Thursday.

Naturally then, the Church and the Christian faithful have instinctively understood that their own intentions, whatever they may be, are to be taken up in Our Lord's prayer in this sacrifice. Adoration, thanksgiving, reparation, petition—these are the ends intended by Christ's sacrifice, and the whole Church and individual believers have these intentions as well.

The priest who offers the sacrifice gives the faithful access to its essential act from which the desired fruitful intentions are obtained. As the proper and only minister of the sacrifice of the Mass, he can offer a Mass for a requested intention—for health of body, peace in the family, success in studies, financial stability, finding a spouse, finding employment, conversion of heart, protection from evils, discernment of a vocation, thanksgiving for a blessing received, reparation for sins, and so on—giving it a special share in the fruits

of the Mass.

Traditionally, the fruits of the eucharistic sacrifice are understood in three ways. First, there is the *general* fruit of the Mass. This is the fruit of the Mass intended for the whole Church in all its parts. All the ends of the Mass form this universal fruit, distributed according to the needs and dispositions of the Church at the actual moment of the offering. This is the most important aspect of the Mass: its fruitfulness for the Church each day until Christ comes again. Since all worship and preaching and all the other sacraments, and indeed all the good actions and works of the faithful, are ordered to Christ who is contained in this sacrament, we can truly say that there is *not a grace given among the living or the dead that in some way does not come from the daily celebration of the Mass*. This general fruit is why the Church wants the Mass to be celebrated as many times as reverence will allow.

Secondly, there is the *ministerial* fruit of the Mass. This is the object of the individual intention for which the priest, as the minister of the sacrament, offers the sacrifice. As the minister, he has a right to the fruits of the Mass as his own prayer and the power to determine them, offering sacrifice for a particular end; and the faithful ask him to give them this fruit for their own intentions. Thus the priest makes their intention his own.

Often this is done because of the priest's gratitude for the material support the faithful have given him for his daily sustenance. If the faithful have given an offering, a *stipend*, precisely so that the priest may offer Masses for them, he is gravely bound to fulfill their intention by celebrating for them as soon as he can. Canon law, however, exhorts priests to accept these personal intentions of the faithful even when no offering can be given. The sacrifice of the Savior's body and blood is for all, and the poor, especially, have many urgent intentions.

Thirdly, there is the *personal* fruit of the Mass. This fruit is just for the priest himself, and not even he can change it. This comes to him as a gift from the Lord for being the minister of his sacrifice that he so ardently desires to be offered by his priest. The priest cannot give this fruit to another person; it is needed for his sanctification and perseverance in his vocation. In a certain sense, this fruit is the greatest grace of being a priest, but too few priests pay attention to this fact. Each priest's Mass is also in a permanent and unchangeable way just for him, as it is also for the faithful and for the Church

universal.

All the fruits of the Mass are potentially infinite, but they vary according to the disposition of the souls toward whom they are directed. They are spiritual and are dispensed according to the knowledge and power of Christ the high priest. When we speak of them as being “more” or “less,” or of being “divided” in various ways, it is just a way of making spiritual things understandable to us who live in the body, as we offer up the Body of the Savior for the salvation of the whole world under God, “for the praise and glory of his name, and for our good and the good of all his holy Church.”

11. What does it mean to have Mass offered for people who have died?

The first thing our Savior did after he had breathed forth his spirit on the cross was to descend among the dead. He gave the vision of his blessed face, indeed, the vision of the Holy Trinity, to all those just who had died before his passion and who were ready for heaven. This was very much on his mind, as these would have been the greater part of the human race he had come to save. The descent of Jesus among the dead is an essential part of his saving passion, and it is indeed the context of his resurrection. We read of this in chapter 27 of Matthew’s Gospel, where it says that at his resurrection many of those who were in the tombs rose and appeared in the holy city of Jerusalem.

We see, then, that the mystical separation of the Lord’s body and blood by the two separate consecrations signifies his state of death and so requires the commemoration of the descent of his soul among the dead. The Roman Canon, as well as the fourth eucharistic prayer, indicates this fact. The Mass means Calvary, but it also means the tomb, as we are reminded in the *Catechism*, which tells us that the altar of sacrifice symbolizes the Lord’s tomb (1182). It is from there that the power of his resurrection bursts forth; it is from there that the souls of the faithful departed are hastened on their way to heaven and made happy.

And so, in an altogether special way, *each and every* Mass is celebrated for the faithful departed, not only for the living. Furthermore, before any other prayers, penances, and works of mercy that we undertake for the dead, there comes the offering of holy Mass. It is the most effective way to assist those who are being purified on their way to heaven.

Following on our answer immediately before this one, then, we can say that

the general fruit of the Mass always includes the departed, as amply as possible, in the intention of the Church. However, at the determination of the priest celebrant, the ministerial fruit may be *exclusively* for the departed. It is this fruit to which the faithful have a right when they have made an offering for the repose of the soul of one, or several, or all of the departed.

The practice of assisting the dead in this way is very ancient indeed. In fact, it is the first example, going back to the early Church, of having the eucharistic sacrifice celebrated for a specific intention. Already in the Old Testament, in the second book of Maccabees, we read of the expiatory sacrifice that Judas Maccabaeus caused to be offered for the slain in battle. The inspired writer tells us, "It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins" (12:46). If this was helpful using the Old Testament sacrifices of the temple, how much more powerful is the precious blood of Jesus lifted up on our altars!

The dead are most willing to receive the spiritual healing they need from the Mass. Unlike the living, who can resist the graces given in the Masses offered for them, the departed have perfect dispositions and so benefit greatly from this offering. They place no obstacle.

St. Padre Pio used to celebrate holy Mass regularly for his parents. Once he was heard to say that his father and mother were in heaven. One of his brother friars asked him why, if his parents were already in heaven, he continued to say Mass for them. The saint responded that they were already in heaven because God took into account that he was going to pray and celebrate for them his whole life long!

Often a priest finds at funeral Masses that everyone speaks as though the departed were in heaven already. Yet this is not because everyone is praying for them, but rather because most people have forgotten that the dead need our prayers, and sentimentally assume that they go straight to heaven. But we hardly show our love for them when we neglect to pray for their speedy purification and entry into heaven. How much merit and deep faith there is in the practice of offering up the body and blood of Jesus for our dear dead! In doing this, we join Our Lord in his great desire as he died on the cross to go and free them quickly. We become like Jesus the crucified Savior.

If we could see the power of the Mass to assist the departed and their happiness at receiving our gift, we would be very eager indeed to help those

who have died.

Thomas Aquinas tells us that those souls who were devoted to the departed while living receive the greatest effects from the Church's prayer and from the sacrament of the altar. Let's pick up this practice for our own good and for the good of our departed neighbors. We will not regret it when our time comes.

12. What does it mean for Mass to be offered in honor of the saints?

We do offer the Mass in honor of the saints, but one thing must be made clear in order to understand this happy fact: each eucharistic sacrifice is offered to God alone. The Mass is offered to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit: "Through him and with him and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, Almighty Father, forever and ever. Amen!" In some of the prayers of the Roman rite, ancient and new, under the influence of the Eastern rites, the Mass is also said to be offered to the three persons of the Holy Trinity all together: "Receive O Holy Trinity this oblation." Both formulations are perfectly true, since the divine persons are together one God, even though we recognize the distinctions between the persons and their missions.

Even so, it is correct to say that the Mass may be offered in honor of the saints. How so? Because the Mass is not offered *to* the saints; rather, their membership in the mystical body of Christ, which is the Church, makes it so the sacrifice of the Mass is *their* sacrifice, just as is for those still living on earth—or, as we have just seen, waiting in purgatory. All the members of the Church participate in their different ways in the sacrifice of the Mass. It is an action entrusted to the faithful on earth, but the elect in heaven and in purgatory all share in its power and effects.

What does the Mass do for the saints in heaven? According to the teaching of St. Thomas and other Doctors and theologians, and, indeed, according to the texts of the liturgy itself, the Mass *increases their glory*, intensifying the joys and effective actions that flow from their vision of God. When we honor them by commemorating them in Mass, the saints receive some additional splendor of knowledge and love from our celebrations of their merits, and from our asking for their prayers along with the prayer of Christ the great high priest and king of saints.

The sacrifice of the cross is the reason that the souls of the dead can be given

the vision of God's face, and so it is that the Mass, although it obtains no increase in that essential reward of the vision of the uncreated God, can and does extend the subsidiary or complementary joys of the saints as they regard the sharing of created goods, relationships, and common works for the living and the dead in which they share as part of the communion of saints.

This is what we mean by the honor given the saints, and it is our joy as wayfarers on earth thereby, day by day, to be finishing up with Christ the work of the glory of the human race. When he comes in glory and completes his kingdom, these fruits of his redemption revealed and obtained in the holy sacrifice will be shared to the fullest and eternal joy of all. Then we will experience the marvelous "excess" or overflowing of the graces of every Mass ever celebrated for the ages of eternity, as their honor becomes our own, and ours theirs.

13. Does the Church have a preferred form of music for the Mass?

Insofar as the Church has any default form of music, it is *chant*. This is clear in the liturgical books, which offer only chant forms, whether in the liturgical language or in the vernacular, in the formal order of the Mass and other celebrations.

The Church's liturgy in its full form involves a great deal of singing or chanting. The liturgy is overwhelmingly a thing of the human voice. Visual images, odors, bodily gestures, sounds, and material objects are all at some point necessary parts of the liturgy, but these are always coordinated with the words or texts of the Mass, which for the most part are conveyed out loud. In the most solemn forms of every one of the ritual traditions of the Church, practically every word that is heard is sung, whether by the priest, the people, or the choir.

All the rites of the Church have a form of ancient chant proper to their original language and tradition. There is Byzantine or Greek chant, there is Znameny or Slavonic chant, there are the ancient chant traditions of the Syriac churches, the Copts, the Ethiopians, and the Armenians. All chant was initially without the addition of musical instruments, and some of the rites of the Church still do not use instrumental music at all.

In the Latin church that uses the Roman rite, the Council of Trent, St. Pius X, Pius XII, and the Second Vatican Council all give explicit decrees and

teachings on the music to be used at Mass. Simply put, according to all these documents, the singing that is always appropriate is chant, which should be given “pride of place,” and *polyphony* (singing with multiple melodic voices), either without instruments or with a pipe organ. This music and any other church music must exist for the texts it supports, and not obscure or change the texts of the liturgy. It must also foster the participation of the faithful, although this does not necessarily mean that they need to be able to share in all the singing.

Now, it is obvious to everyone today that this kind of musical standard is largely not observed in the Latin rite. And is true that the Church also permits the use of a wide variety of musical styles in the liturgy. But it is also true that the popes and councils never intended that the always-appropriate music proper to the Latin rite would be almost completely neglected. Rather, they taught that it should be cultivated and encouraged. And the use of compositions in a popular style that is little discernable from popular secular music is a great misfortune and has nothing to support it in official Church documents. In many places today, however, this is the prevailing state of affairs.

Some musical styles that go beyond chant, polyphony, and organ, though, have long use and a stunning richness that it would be foolish to set aside in an excessive purism or silly faddism. This variety that goes beyond chant is chiefly a custom of the Latin church, but it also is found in the later music of the Russian and Armenian traditions. A variety of instruments is also allowed in addition to the organ and depending on the rite, as the many concerted Masses composed over the centuries indicate.

Pope Benedict XVI, who was from a family that treasured sacred music and instrumentation, has written very well about the role of music in the liturgy, especially the orchestral and choral. Those who are particularly interested in the Church’s music would do well to study his perceptive words and cooperate with the initiatives of various bishops to improve the practice of liturgical music in our churches.

Let this basic principle be kept in mind, however, in all forms of singing and playing in church: the best music for the Church’s worship is that which is most in harmony with the sacred texts that are being sung. This is why chant is so fitting. The music should support the sense of the texts and lend warmth

and intensity to their use in common prayer.

14. Does the Church require sacred images to be used at Mass?

In the Second Council of Nicaea (787) and in the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the Church formally defined the necessity of the use and veneration of sacred images in worship, and in so doing defeated the movement of *iconoclasts* who opposed such use. In the Byzantine rite, there is even a feast day on the first Sunday of Lent dedicated to the victory over iconoclasm. The Catholic Church in both East and West is known for its use of sacred images, and indeed for their abundance and profusion, and most of all, for giving them honor or *veneration*. So broadly speaking, possessing an orthodox, Catholic faith necessarily involves the veneration of icons and other sacred images.

This being so, it is still true that the strict requirements of the Church's liturgy are very few when it comes to determining what image or images are needed in the celebration of the Mass.

The most proper image, always required in liturgical law, is the *crucifix*. Typically, in all the rites of the Church, this is a standing cross with an image painted, engraved, carved, or cast of the Savior on the cross. It is always found on, over, or near the altar, depending on what is permitted in the various rites. This is the only image specifically required in the Roman rite, although the rubrics or directions of the rite refer to other images and how they are to be honored—for example, with incense during the Mass or the hours of the Divine Office—and how they are to be placed in churches.

In the other rites of the Church, the norms differ, especially as they often require more images than the crucifix alone. In the Byzantine rite and some other Eastern rites there must be at least an *icon* of the Savior and an icon of the mother of God before the altar on either side, as well as other icons customarily placed in order: for example, of the patron of that church, of St. John the Baptist, the angels, and so on. Byzantine churches are often covered with a rich cycle of images depicting the saints and the events of our salvation. Even so, in necessity, in travel, or at a small side altar—say, in a cemetery chapel—there may be found only the altar cross.

The altar cross, always required, reminds us of the nature of the Mass as the sacramental renewal of the sacrifice of the Lord on Calvary. Other images

underline that in the Mass heaven and earth are united in a common worship, the saints and angels sharing in ours and we sharing in theirs, to God, one in the Holy Trinity.

It is well to add here that from the very beginnings of the ancient Church the Mass was celebrated preferentially over the *relics of the martyrs*. These relics are something more than a simple icon, for they will rise with the blessed in the resurrection. Relics under the altar table or in an altar stone gradually became a requirement in the Latin rite, and in the Byzantine and some other Eastern rites relics are usually included in a corporal representing the burial of the Lord, as well as in the altar. Thus, the Church on earth shows forth how the holy martyrs imitated the sacrifice of the cross because they were deeply conformed to it in the Mass, dying and being buried and rising with Christ.

This practice is warmly encouraged in the post-conciliar liturgy in the Latin rite and has recently been widely revived in the dedication of new altars. Now, however, at least in the Roman rite, the relics may be also of saints who were not martyrs.

15. Does the Mass repeat Christ's sacrifice offered on Calvary?

The sacrifice of the Savior on the holy cross is, in the natural and historical sense, a unique and unrepeatable act. So, an absolute answer to this question would be "no." As the epistle to the Hebrews teaches us, Christ offered himself "once and for all" (10:10) on the cross as our great high priest, and he has brought the power of that sacrifice "through the veil" into the worship of heaven, where he "ever lives to make intercession for us."

Yet "on the night before he suffered" on the cross, he instituted an unbloody, sacramental memorial of that bloody sacrifice. He did this so that the power of his one offering could be applied daily until he comes again on the last day. The Mass begun at the Last Supper really is an immolation of the body and blood of the Lord because it commemorates his offering in the full sense of the term. The same, identical offering lifted up on Calvary is offered under the appearances of bread and wine at holy Mass. The very same victim, the very same high priest, the effects of the very same passion poured out on the whole world. He is not made to suffer again and re-crucified at every Mass.

Yet each Mass is also a new event, a new sacramental offering of the one eternal covenant established in Christ's blood. The Lord intended it be the instrument whereby the fruits of the passion are bestowed afresh on the living and the dead every day until Christ ushers in his everlasting kingdom. Far from taking away from Christ's one sacrifice, then, the Mass renders it present and powerful in the here and now. "From the rising of the sun to its setting" as the prophet Malachi foretold, "a pure offering is made to the glory" of God's name (1:11).

Indeed, would Christ, at so solemn a moment, have commanded us to perform a merely external, merely symbolic memorial of his death, as though it were like the rites of the Old Covenant, not containing but only symbolizing his sacrifice? No, he commanded us to do these things in memory of him, because his memorial *actually conveys the reality* of his sacrifice, bringing glory to God and innumerable benefits to the living and the dead.

Christ did not establish sacraments that do not give life, and so the holy Mass is truly a living sacrifice that also bestows life. The Mass re-presents the cross. The two things are essentially and numerically identical as a sacrifice; only the manner of the offering is different.

16. Why does Mass have to be a requirement? Can't I just worship God in my own way?

The Church's insistence on regular worship at Mass in a church is not an arbitrary rule; nor does it deny that there are many ways to pray to God.

From its earliest days, Christianity introduced a profound change in the way that worship, and especially sacrifice, was to be offered to God. Pre-Christian worship, whether pagan or Jewish, offered sacrifice under the open air in front of a sanctuary in which sacred images and other sacred things were reserved and into which only priests might enter. The gathered assembly stood outside the sanctuary assisting at the sacrifice that was accomplished "under heaven," that is, under the sky on an outdoor altar.

This arrangement asserted a great distance between God and his people, both by having a "holy of holies" that was inaccessible and making the heavens, far above the earth, the direction of the offering.

Now, there is a sense in which Christian worship preserves traces of that

original arrangement, since it rises out of natural human sensibilities. Yet our worship in the holy Mass did something new: placing the whole act of sacrifice within a defined space with walls and roof, containing both the sacred things of the sanctuary and the priests along with the community that offered the sacrifice. God is for us the *Emmanuel*, the God-with-us who dwells in the midst of his people.

The sacrifice includes the community, the whole Church together with the divine victim and his ministers. God descends to make us capable of offering the sacrifice; we do not have to wait for him to find it acceptable. His coming-down to us and his accepting our offering are a single movement. The *whole living assembly* is sacred, and God dwells among them by the power of the worship he has taught them to offer.

He has literally, as the prologue to John's Gospel tells us, "pitched his tent"—erected a holy tabernacle among us. He is at home with the human race; he has become one of us. The place of sacrifice is the human soul and body, first of Christ the Lord, and then each one of his members, all at the same altar of sacrifice.

So it is that Christian worship was offered from the beginning in houses adapted to the purpose; the *domus ecclesiae*, literally, the "house of the community or church" (*church* means an assembly for worship) from which come the modern words for a cathedral in some languages: the *dom* or *duomo*. Then, as the size of congregations increased, the Church set aside the form of the temple and adopted the royal audience hall, the *basilica*, into which the priests and faithful enter and gather together to become themselves a living sacrifice by the living body and blood of Christ, and from which they go forth to serve God in the world.

So, although it is true that we can pray anywhere, and indeed that we *should* pray and worship "at all times and in all places," it also makes sense for the Church to say that the sacred building and the celebration of the holy Mass are the privileged place and form of our meeting with God.

If our temple were only the natural world, or our worship only our own private practices, that might be some kind of religion, but it would not be Christian worship or Christian religion.

Of course, on the battlefield, or a camping trip, during persecution, and so on, the holy Mass can be offered anywhere, for there is also a sense in which

Christ has made the sacrifice of his cross, set up in Jerusalem, the true “pole of the earth.” And that earth itself can become an altar when the Mass is offered upon it anywhere. Our religion is not either/or, it is both/and.

Yet, though we pray as we will and commune with God in every circumstance, for the sacrifice that we offer together, the Mass, whose principal effect is the unity of the faithful in the Church, it is essential that we a) *come together*, b) *regularly*, c) in the *sacred place*.

17. Isn't it confusing to celebrate Mass in dead languages like Latin?

The Mass may be celebrated in any language in which there is a translation available approved by Church authority. Notice that we said “translation.” This is because every rite in the Church in East and West has its own classical liturgical language from which all the various vernacular versions of the rite are taken.

The original language of the Roman Missal is Latin; thus we say “Latin rite” even when the Mass is in the vernacular. (The Anglican ordinariate liturgy, for another example, uses Tudor English but is part of the Latin rite.) The Byzantine rite is originally in Greek, and then translations have been made into Slavonic, which has itself become a non-vernacular liturgical language. The Armenian rite uses classical Armenian, the Coptic rite uses ancient Coptic, the Maronite rite uses Aramaic Syriac, the Syrian rite uses Syriac, the Ethiopian rite uses G'eez, the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankar rites likewise use Syriac. All of these rites also use the modern vernacular of their flocks in addition to using their classical liturgical language, some more, and some less.

Now, it stands to reason that if every single rite of the Church has, along with the spoken tongue, a classical language for its liturgy and especially its chants, then it cannot be a bad thing to use a liturgical language, even if it is not the language spoken by the people.

For this we have the example of Jesus, and his earthly father St. Joseph, and also of the apostles from the first times after Pentecost when they still went to the temple in Jerusalem to pray. The worship of the Jewish people was in Hebrew, which by the time of Our Lord was exclusively a liturgical language (the people's spoken tongue was either Aramaic or Greek). Jesus, Mary, and Joseph said many prayers in purely liturgical Hebrew. If praying in a language no longer spoken by the people were wrong, if it were an anti-evangelical

thing to do, then surely the Holy Family would not have left us this example! The Last Supper itself was a combination of Hebrew blessings and Aramaic instructions.

So it is nonsense to criticize the very idea of Mass in a “dead” liturgical or sacred tongue. Indeed, no matter in what language the Mass is celebrated, in all the rites we proclaim in Hebrew *amen* and *alleluia*.

All the rites of the Church do well to preserve their ancient heritage. Here we speak more precisely of the Latin rites. In the *Constitution on the Liturgy* of the Second Vatican Council, it is explicitly stated that “the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites.” St. John XXIII promulgated an apostolic constitution mandating the preservation of Latin, and the use of Latin in the Mass was defended by St. Paul VI and St. John Paul II in very explicit terms.

Here is Paul VI: “The Latin language is assuredly worthy of being defended with great care instead of being scorned; for the Latin church it is the most abundant source of Christian civilization and the richest treasury of piety... we must not hold in low esteem these traditions of your fathers which were your glory for centuries” (*Sacrificium Laudis*).

Here is John Paul II: “The Roman church has special obligations toward Latin, the splendid language of ancient Rome, and she must manifest them whenever the occasion presents itself” (*Dominicae Cenaee* 10).

This latter pope published the current Code of Canon Law, which states in canon 928, “The eucharistic celebration is to be carried out in the Latin language or in another language provided that the liturgical texts have been legitimately approved.”

And finally Pope Benedict XVI: “I ask that future priests, from their time in the seminary, receive the preparation needed to understand and to celebrate Mass in Latin, and also to use Latin texts and execute Gregorian chant; nor should we forget that the faithful can be taught to recite the more common prayers in Latin, and also to sing parts of the liturgy to Gregorian chant” (*Sacramentum Caritatis* 62).

So the answer is no: we should not look down on or try to eliminate liturgical languages such as Latin as confusing or a hindrance to worship. In fact, according to the Church, the use of the liturgical language is *favoured* over the vernacular language. Of course, the locally spoken tongue is to be used as

well, and amply, but there are advantages in worship to be found in the particular power of a language that conveys the tradition of the Christian faithful down through the centuries.

We can take an example outside of the Church. In nineteenth-century Germany when the Reformed Jewish movement began, it modernized worship and customs and began to use German in place of Hebrew. Within fifty years, the leaders and congregations of this movement discovered that the abandonment of Hebrew had cut off the young from the sense of their origins and traditions, and so they began to introduce the liturgical language back into their observances.

The Church does not want us to worship in a contemporary vacuum, ignorant and uninterested in what our traditions are. If we were to do that, the effect would be lethal. The various rites of the Church cherish their origins as authoritative witnesses of faith handed down from the beginning. This is not an unimportant aspect of worship. It is a matter of docility, gratitude, and prudence, not merely of taste and education.

And, at a minimum, if none of this suffices to convince, then there is the solemn anathema or condemnation by the sixteenth-century Council of Trent of anyone who says that the Mass should be celebrated in the vernacular tongue only! It's fine and good to prefer to participate at Mass in your own language, but it's an old, false idea to say that liturgical languages are bad.

18. Why did the Church change the Roman rite from what is called the traditional Latin Mass, Tridentine Mass, or Extraordinary Form of the Mass to the current form of the Mass?

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) decreed that certain changes were to be made in the rite of the Mass and the missal that contains the prayers of the Mass. It requested some simplification of the rites and also, importantly, a wider selection of readings from Sacred Scripture. By 1964, using the traditional missal, and leaving it overwhelmingly the same, these changes were all accomplished. Only the cycle of readings had not been revised.

Pope Paul VI, however, following in the plans already developed by liturgists working under the Venerable Pius XII, was open to a much less limited revision of the Roman Missal, both as regards the rite of Mass and the proper prayers of the missal. Pius XII had already completely revised the Holy

Week portions of the traditional missal; under Paul VI's direction, a special committee was formed, and the rite of Mass we have now was promulgated to take effect on the first Sunday of Advent, 1970. This rite of the Mass went substantially beyond the modest revisions indicated by the council.

Even so, this new missal contained a clear assertion in its prefatory documents that the faith found in it was the same as that defined at the Council of Trent, the reforms of which had produced the traditional "Tridentine" Roman Missal. It is these documents that must be used in interpreting the intentions of those who developed the new missal.

The new rite's innovations included new offertory prayers written on the model of Hebrew blessings, called now "the presentation of the gifts" and, in addition to the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I), three newly composed eucharistic prayers, modeled on abbreviated forms of ancient Greek and Syrian prayers, were included. The cycle of readings was completely replaced with few exceptions, so as to go over the whole of Sacred Scripture in a three-year Sunday cycle and a two-year weekday cycle. The prefaces were enriched and greatly increased. Many changes were made in the collects and other prayers of the Mass. The calendar of saints was also greatly revised to move saints out of Lent and so to maintain the Lenten cycle as much as possible.

Additionally, the whole rite of the Mass, even the eucharistic prayer, was allowed in the vernacular language—not just in certain parts, as the council had presumed. Also, the Mass began to be celebrated, practically universally, with the priest facing the people (*versus populum*) rather than facing liturgical east (*ad orientem*), although the rubrics of the Mass did not require this.

Even though the Church continued to insist on the use of Latin and the Gregorian chant proper to the Roman rite, the adoption of the vernacular and the permission to use local musical styles, even popular contemporary ones, led to a radical change in the atmosphere of the Mass. This impression was intensified by the new use of lay readers, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, standing to receive communion, and finally, receiving communion in the hand. Although there were always places that celebrated the new rite in a way that was in continuity with tradition, their number was very few. The Holy See issued documents clarifying the liturgical practice of the Roman rite and forbidding abuses. These were often ignored, and the Mass was often celebrated with scant attention to the Church's directives.

Thus it is hardly surprising that there were many among the bishops, clergy, and faithful who began to express a desire to return to the traditional form of the Mass. (In some very few places and communities it was never abandoned.) There were also some who began to insist, erroneously, that the new rite was incompatible with Catholic teaching.

After he became pope, St. John Paul II listened to the opinions of those who, without rejecting the new rite, were asking for a return to the traditional rite. He appointed a committee of cardinals to study the question, and they came back to him with their conclusion that the traditional missal could still be used along with the new missal of Paul VI. Thus he published permission for the widespread celebration of the traditional Mass, loosening restrictions and also working to reconcile the Church with traditionalist movements. This all led to a flourishing of traditional Mass communities throughout the Church, especially in northern Europe and the United States.

His successor Pope Benedict XVI gave complete freedom, with barely any restrictions other than those of common sense and prudence, to all priests to use the traditional Roman Missal. The number of communities following the ancient rite continued to grow, and there was a renaissance of historical study of the new and the ancient rites along with great interest in the restoration and practice of sacred music.

Although there were always those who adopted excessive critiques of the new Mass and of the Second Vatican Council, on the whole the traditional Mass communities were not significantly influenced by this kind of thinking, thanks to the good sense of the clergy who guided them.

Recently, Pope Francis reinstated significant restrictions of the use of the ancient form of the Mass, in response to a number of bishops who expressed concern about erroneous trends among the faithful and younger clergy who use it. At present, however, it is still true to say that the missal of Pius V, that is, the Tridentine or ancient rite of the Mass, is not abrogated (canceled, done away with), and it still takes its place among the various liturgies of the Church. Meanwhile, many bishops, clergy, and members of the faithful are watching hopefully and vigilantly for a renewed loosening of restrictions.

19. How can I prepare myself to receive Holy Communion at Mass more fruitfully?

Preparation for the celebration of the holy Mass and reception of Holy Communion is an essential element of our share in this sacrament of sacraments. Here are five things we should do to make ourselves ready.

First of all, we *approach the sacrament of love with the right intention*. This means we come thoughtfully, intending to be united to Our Lord, not out of routine, or because we want to be well-thought of by others, but to be fed by him so as to have renewed strength to live the Christian life. St. Thomas tells us that any of the wholesome effects of food and drink on the natural level are given to us under the sign of the holy sacrament on the supernatural level: delight, union, nourishment, growth, strength, and healing.

Secondly, we should *examine our conscience* to determine if there is any grave sin we may have committed for which we must be truly sorry and which we must confess before coming forward to receive. This is the minimal preparation, without which we should never come to Holy Communion. The sacrament of penance is essentially a preparation for celebrating and receiving the Eucharist. It removes the one obstacle that would block our receiving at all the grace of the holy banquet. St. Paul tells us that we should examine ourselves before receiving, so as not to be guilty of receiving the body and blood of the Lord unworthily, and so eating and drinking condemnation to ourselves.

The number of those who communicate at holy Mass is much greater than the number of those who go to confession regularly. This means many do not examine themselves before receiving. They need priests to give the apostolic warning. The liturgy of the Church invites us to the altar, but at the same time warns us. We hear, “Blessed are those who are called to the supper of the Lamb,” but we hear also, “Lord I am not worthy to receive you!” This is to give us pause to repent and remember. Go to confession regularly and you will usually be ready on this score.

Thirdly, we *approach the divine mysteries after praying* to receive the graces we intentionally seek. The whole Mass is a preparation for this, and there are many beautiful forms of prayers of preparation for Holy Communion in prayer books. When have I considered the prayers and readings of the holy Mass as a preparation for my union with the Lord? The preparation can be long or short according to our situation, but it should be as careful and as intense as we can make it. A good preparation is to have the habit of making

in your own words frequent spiritual communions, expressing your desire to be united to Jesus in the gifts of his body and blood and to receive an increase in love and union with him.

Fourthly, we should prepare by *abstaining as much as we can in the hours before communion* from food and drink—water and medicine excepted. The minimum is for one hour, but in the past the fast was from midnight on, or at least for three hours before communion. Our body should share in our spirit's preparation as much as it can. Our Lord told us that we should seek not the bread that perishes, but rather the bread of eternal life.

Finally, preparation needs its *complimentary act of thanksgiving after we receive*. The Church does this in the prayer after communion at each Mass, and we should second this in our own hearts by pausing to thank the Lord before we leave the church.

Again, this thanksgiving can be brief or prolonged, but it must be done every time we receive. If someone treats you to a meal, do you get up without a word of thanks? With a smile, perhaps, and a compliment on the meal, and the thought that someday soon you would like to return the favor? Likewise, we tell our good Savior and Friend that we are so happy that he is so generous to us, and we praise his kindness, as we look forward to the next opportunity to be united to him.

St. Pius X, the saint of daily communion, teaches that Our Lord did not institute this great sacrament in order simply to be honored, as we do on this feast, but rather to feed and strengthen us in love. So, as we honor him on our altars and in our tabernacles, let us remember that most of all he wants our souls to be prepared to receive him fruitfully by an earnest preparation and thanksgiving.

May he find the Upper Room of our hearts ready for his supper as his true disciples!

20. If I am late to Mass or distracted during it, what parts of the liturgy are essential to fulfill my obligation?

“Is this Mass still good?” I was once asked this by some sweet Italian grandmothers in the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome. What they meant was, “Have we come in time not to miss the essential parts of the celebration?”

I knew that is what they meant, since it was only a weekday and they just wanted to attend Mass out of devotion. Well, the absolutely, sacramentally essential part of the Mass is the double consecration of the bread and wine, and the celebrant's likewise double communion. If you have been present at these events you have, in all theological strictness, been to a Mass.

The obligation of attending Sunday and holy day Masses is, however, not only that we attend the theological minimum, but that we participate in the liturgy from start to finish. If we deliberately are late or leave early, then we are giving short shrift to our duty, which is, after all, the worship of God in the community of the Church.

This being said, there are, often enough, legitimate reasons why we are late or have to go out for a while or leave early. In these cases, we should strive, if we can, at least to be present from the offering of the gifts of bread and wine through the consecration and priest's communion if we are not receiving communion ourselves. If we have attended these parts, even if our reasons for being late or leaving early are not serious, we have still fulfilled our obligation (but, let it be said, not *well*). Even if our duties make us miss a principal part of the Mass, say, when we have to take out a persistent crying infant during the consecration (which is not a bad idea!), we have done our part to attend Mass, and must not worry about it.

This is the classical answer, but there are plenty of good authors in the years after the Second Vatican Council who say that we must be present for the Gospel reading and homily also. This is understandable, since the Church never authorizes the celebration of the Eucharist without the readings. Even so, the older opinion seems more realistic, and there is no reason to be more strict than before, especially since parish Sunday Masses are generally fewer and longer than they were years ago. It is worthwhile to add as well that in Eastern rite communities, since their eucharistic liturgies are fuller than the Latin rite Mass (at least usually), there are also often different customs regarding what counts as late, or too late, or leaving early.

It is important for those who want to receive Holy Communion to know, however, that there is *no rule about having to be at the whole Mass for receiving the holy sacrament*, at least in the Latin rite. That is a different matter from the Sunday obligation. If you are late to a weekday Mass and desire Holy Communion, you may receive, even if you only arrived just in

time for it. Of course, you should be prepared by actively intending to receive in a prayerful spirit, and not make a habit of coming in and out. It can happen, however, that the weekday Mass in your parish is at a time when you can only just make it to Holy Communion, going to or coming from work or other duties.

Sometimes, priests and other extraordinary ministers may speak as though you must attend the whole Mass to receive, but frequent communion is a matter of freedom, not of obligation, and you are allowed to judge what is prudent and reasonable in your own case. Try, however, to be discrete and not disturb others when you have to come late. In any case the Lord Jesus will be happy to see you.

From what was just said, you can tell that Sunday obligation is about the Mass in the fullest sense, the liturgically and dogmatically complete celebration we have been discussing in all these answers. Reception of Holy Communion, however, can take place even outside of Mass. It is a sublime part of our participation in the rite of the Mass, but, unlike the communion of the celebrant, it is separable from it in certain cases.

Distractions are another matter. Unlike physically being absent from some part of the Mass, distraction is an unavoidable aspect of human nature. Tell yourself to say the Our Father once without any other thoughts, and it is very likely that you will not make it to the end without them. When we are at Mass, we fulfill our duty as long as we have a firm intention to follow the parts of the Mass. As long as this intention is not rejected in favor of other things, then we have intentionally assisted at holy Mass.

It is true that if you want the consolation and nourishment that you need, it is well to strive to be attentive, but *intention* is essential, and sometimes *attention* is hard to maintain. Take the holy names of Jesus and Mary, or the first half of the Glory Be, and say these words over and over in your heart, and that will fix your attention better and be an indication of your sincere effort. You do not have to be ecstatic, just aware that you are in the presence of heavenly things.

Even great mystics of the cloister, such as St. Teresa of Ávila, write of their overwhelming distractions at Mass—about work, health, relationships, entertainments, anything about which our minds can wander (for St. Teresa it was about remodeling the convent!). God is merciful to our weakness in this

matter, as long as we strive to be open to his gifts. He has so much to give us, so, as the Eastern liturgy admonishes before the reading, “Be attentive!”

The author earnestly prays that the reader of all these twenty answers, having considered the riches of the holy Mass, will be so informed as to be able to obey now more easily and eagerly this ancient command!

“It is the Mass that matters,” after all is said and done. We will rejoice to see this clearly when we see him coming in glory.

About the Author

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