

These words and actions of Our Lord constitutes the very essence of the Mass; but around them the Church has built up, during the centuries, a most inspiring liturgy that is now enshrined in the Missal.

The Mass consists of varying and unvarying parts. The part that does not vary is known as the Canon (Rule) of the Mass. That which varies is made up of the Introit, the Collect, the Epistle, the Gradual and Gospel, the Offertory, the Secret, the Preface, the Communion (prayer) and the Post-Communion.

The first part of the Mass is known as the Mass of the Catechumens, while the second part is called the Mass of the Faithful. The origin of these distinguishing names is to be found in the discipline of the Early Church with regard to Catechumens, that is, those who were preparing to receive Baptism. They were allowed to assist only at the first part of the Mass and were obliged to leave after the Gospel. Only those who have been baptized into the Faith – the Faithful – were allowed to remain for the second part of the Mass, which is the actual Sacrifice.



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Explanation of the Holy Mass



Explanation of the Mass

It was that distinguished publicist and man of letters, Augustine Birrell, himself a non-Catholic, who spoke volumes when he stated: "It is the Mass that matters." For the Mass is the unique possession of the Catholic Church, it is the very core of her worship, and differentiates Her from all those non-Catholic religious bodies which called themselves by various Christian names.

Without the Mass our churches would be barren places indeed. We should have in them the poverty-stricken worship of the non-Catholic churches – a few prayers, a bit of music and the faltering accents of a preacher's voice.

Having the Mass, we have the abiding Presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ in our midst as our Friend, our Food, and our Sacrifice: our Friend Whom we can visit on our altars; our Food to nourish us in Holy Communion; our Sacrifice to be offered to God the Father, and through which the merits of Our Redeemer's blessed Passion and Death are applied to ourselves and our dead.

A striking witness to the vitality of our people's faith is their personal devotion to the Mass and their evident desire to know more about it and to assist at it more intelligently.

The Meaning of the Mass

The Holy Mass is the One and Only Sacrifice of the New Testament. In the Mass Our Lord Jesus Christ, through the ministry of the priest, offers himself – His Body and Blood – to God the Father. This offering is made under the appearance of bread and wine. It is a mystical immolation made in an un-bloody manner.

By a sacrifice is meant an oblation of something in which a notable change is wrought and offered to God alone in witness of the supreme honor and reverence that man owes Him as his Creator, Master, Beginning and End.

This Sacrifice of the Mass was instituted by Our Lord Himself. In instituting it He left His Church a Sacrifice by which the bloody Sacrifice offered on Calvary should be renewed to the end of time, and the merits of that Sacrifice might be applied in behalf of the living and the dead for the remission of sins.

The separate consecration of the bread and the wine in the Mass represents the actual separation of the Body and Blood of Our Lord in His Death on the Cross.



The Mass is not, however, a mere representation of the Sacrifice of the Cross. It is, in all truth, the actual Sacrifice of the Cross that is renewed on the altar; for the Victim offered is the same – Christ on the altar offering Himself through the ministry of the priest, even as on the Cross He offered Himself. The only difference consists in the manner of offering.

Through the Sacrifice of the Mass God bestows on us the graces that were merited for us by Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross.

The Mass is offered for four purposes:

- (a) To adore God. That is why it is called the "Sacrifice of Praise."
- (b) To thank God. That is why it is called the "Eucharistic Sacrifice."
- (c) To obtain grace and benefits. That is why it is called an "Impetratory Sacrifice."
- (d) To obtain God's mercy for the living and the dead. That is why it is called a "Propitiatory Sacrifice."

Although the Mass may be offered in honor of Our Lady, the Angels and the Saints, it is offered to God alone, since supreme dominion, which is the Sacrifice of the Mass implies, belongs to God alone.

Since the Mass is the heart and soul of the Church's worship, it is not offered for the benefit of the celebrant only, but for all the faithful, both living and dead, and in an especial manner for those whom the celebrant commemorates in the Mass.

The Mass may be offered for some particular person, either living or dead, and also for some particular intention.

The best way of assisting at Mass is to unite with the celebrant in offering the Divine Victim to God, vividly recalling Our Lord's Sacred Passion and Death on the Cross, and uniting ourselves to Jesus by sacramental or, at least, spiritual Communion.

The Parts of the Mass

According to the Gospel narrative, "whilst they were at supper, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke: and gave to His disciples, and said: Take ye, and eat. This is My body. And taken the chalice, He gave thanks, and gave to them, saying: Drink ye all of this. For this is my Blood of the New Testament which shall be shed for many unto the remission of sins." (St. Matthew, 26 :26 – 28)