

# I

## UNDERSTANDING THE MASS

1. The biblical accounts of the last supper use the verbs took, blessed, broke, gave. Discuss how these apply to the Mass as celebrated in your parish today.

He took the bread... Presentation of the Gifts (Why is the presentation important?)

Blessed it.... Eucharistic prayer (The highpoint...what happens?)

Broke it... Breaking of the Bread (How does this symbolize our unity?)

Gave it to them... Holy Communion (How do we receive Holy Communion?)

2. What might the Mass have meant to Christians in the time of the persecutions in the early Church? Discuss what life must have been personally for those who friends and relatives were martyred and how this might have effected how they celebrated the Mass. Reflect on the following from Saint Ignatius of Antioch, an early Christian Martyr:

I want the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ...and for drink I want his blood, the sign of his imperishable love...I am his wheat and I shall be ground by the teeth of beasts that I may become Christ's pure bread.

3. How were the "house church" Masses different from the Masses celebrated in basilicas?

4. How did participation in the Mass differ in different ages of the Church?

5. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council mandated a reform and renewal of the Mass, including the following. Reflect on how we have (and haven't) fulfilled the conciliar dream!

...the revised rites express more clearly the holy things they signify;<sup>1</sup>

...the active participation of the people in the Order of Mass be facilitated;<sup>2</sup>

...the treasures of the bible be made more widely available;<sup>3</sup>

... a new rite of concelebration be devised;<sup>4</sup>

...in all this, the full, conscious, and active participation of the people be considered before all else.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> SC, no. 21.

<sup>2</sup> SC, no. 50.

<sup>3</sup> SC, no. 51.

<sup>4</sup> SC, no. 58.

<sup>5</sup> SC, no. 11.



6. Why do we:

Stand during the Entrance Procession?

Stand at the Gospel?

Kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer?

7. Why is silence important at Mass? Discuss the following:

There is no word as powerful as silence. It cannot be done in haste. Only silence can enable us to embrace with our hearts which is being prayed sung or said. Silence must come before action and the only reaction worthy to follow a meeting with God, is kneeling in silence, humility, and joy.<sup>6</sup>

8. Why is song important to the Sacred liturgy? Discuss the following:

Music is therefore a sign of God's love for us and of our love for him. In this sense, it is very personal. But unless music sounds, it is not music, and whenever it sounds, it is accessible to others. By its very nature song has both an individual and a communal dimension. Thus, it is no wonder that singing together in church expresses so well the sacramental presence of God to his people.<sup>7</sup>

9. Discuss what it means to be reverent at Mass.

10. Discuss how we should prepare for Mass, both before we get to Church and once we get there.



<sup>6</sup> The Mass Explained, page 00.

<sup>7</sup> STL, no. 2.

## II INTRODUCTION AND WORD

1. Discuss the following:

The procession is not just a way of getting the main players to their places! It is designed to help us to be aware that Christ has formed us into a Holy Priesthood. This is why the Priest and the ministers pass through the gathered faithful and why we sing with one voice the entrance chant or song. The entrance procession and its song are both designed to weave us together so that we can recognize ourselves as one people, One Body in Christ.<sup>8</sup>

2. What is the meaning of the Sign of the Cross? When are all the times we make this sign in life?

3. Discuss the greeting of the people and the altar. How do these differ and how are they the same?

3. How do the Acts of Penitence center on the mercy of Christ? What do they do beyond asking for God to forgive our sins?

4. In the Collect, why do we pause after the Priest says “Let us pray”?

5. Discuss the three parts of the Collect while studying this one from the Night Before Christmas:

**O God,  
who gladden us year by year  
as we wait in hope for our redemption,  
grant that, just as we joyfully welcome  
your only Begotten son as our Redeemer,  
we may also merit to face him confidently  
when he comes again as our Judge.  
Who lives and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.**

6. The “Amen” is the most popular response of the people during Mass. Why does it mean and why is it used so often?



---

<sup>8</sup> ME

THE MASS EXPLAINED: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW ROMAN MISSAL

7. At the end of the first readings, the Lector declares: “The Word of the Lord.” Reflect on this acclamation in the light of the following:

In the celebration of the liturgy the word of God is not voiced in only one way nor does it always stir the hearts of the hearers with the same power. Always, however, Christ is present in his word; as he carries out the mystery of salvation, he sanctifies humanity and offers the Father perfect worship.<sup>9</sup>

8. What does it mean that the New Testament can help us to understand the Old Testament?

9. How is the ministry of the Lector today like what Jesus did when he read from the scrolls in the synagogue in Capernaum?

10. What does it mean that the Altar and the Ambo are two tables?

11. What is done at the proclamation of the Gospel that is not done for the other readings? Why?

12. Saint Augustine tells us in the following passage from his Confessions about what his mother did when she went to Mass. What does it say about the homily and how it can always be improved?

My mother went to Church twice a day; she went in the morning and the evening without ever allowing anything to keep her away, and she went not to hear idle tales and the gossip of old women, but that she might hear you, O Lord, in your homilies, and that you might hear her in her prayers.<sup>10</sup>

13. How is the Prayer of the Faithful a “universal prayer?”



<sup>9</sup> LFM, no. 4.

<sup>10</sup>Augustine, Confessions. LCL I. 240

### III EUCHARIST AND SENDING

1. Why is the presentation of the gifts such an important rite? Reflect on this in the light of these words from the Poet Paul Claudel:

Your prayers, and your faith, and your blood, with His in the chalice,  
These, like the water and wine, form the matter of his sacrifice.<sup>11</sup>

2. The only time the people pray for the Priest at Mass (and he remains silent!) is in the following prayer. When is it prayed and what does it ask God to do?

May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands

for the praise and glory of his name,  
for our good and the good of all his holy Church.

3. In the introductory dialogue to the Eucharistic Prayer, what does the Priest mean when he says “Lift up your hearts!”?

4. The Eucharistic Prayer has four major parts: Epiclesis, Consecration, Memorial, and Intercessions. Discuss and describe them.

5. We always pray for the dead at Mass. Discuss the importance of praying for the dead in the light of the following paragraph from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead: Let us help and commemorate them...<sup>12</sup>

6. Why are the phrases “our daily bread” and “deliver us from evil” from the “Our Father” so appropriate to the Mass?

7. What is the meaning of the “Breaking of the Bread” in the light of the following reflection from the first days of the Church:

As grain once scattered on the hillsides,

---

<sup>11</sup> Paul Claudel, “La Messe la’bas,” in *The Mass: Christians Around the Altar*; by the community of Saint-Severin. (Geoffrey Chapman, London: 1958), page 33.

<sup>12</sup> CCC, no. 1032.



THE MASS EXPLAINED: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW ROMAN MISSAL

was in this broken bread made one,  
So from all lands thy Church be gathered  
into thy kingdom by thy Son.

8. Discuss the story of the Centurion and our response to the “Behold the Lamb of God!”

9. There are four dismissal formulas from which the Priest can choose. Discuss each one:

Go forth, the Mass is ended.

Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.

Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.

Go in peace.

3. How, practically speaking, can we give thanks after Mass?



## IV WHO WE ARE AT MASS

1. What lesson is Saint Ignatius of Antioch still teaching us when he writes:

At worship, he says, you must be like the string of a lyre, each in harmony with the bishops. Hence it is that in the harmony of your minds and hearts Jesus Christ is hymned. Make of yourselves a choir, so that with one voice and one mind, taking the keynote of God, you may sing in unison with one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father, and He may hear you and recognize you...as members of his Son.

2. When Pope Pius XII wrote the following, what did he mean? What does this fifty year old text have to say to us?

The priest is the same, Jesus Christ, whose sacred Person His minister represents. Now the minister, by reason of the sacerdotal consecration that he has received, is made like to the High Priest and possesses the power of performing actions in virtue of Christ's very person. Wherefore in his priestly activity he in a certain manner lends his tongue, and gives his hand" to Christ."<sup>13</sup>

3. Discuss who the Deacon is in the light of the titles: Proclaimer of the Gospel, Voice of the needy, and Bearer of the Cup of Salvation.
4. Pope Benedict XVI once said: "the texts of the Holy Mass are not theatrical lines or some such - they are prayers, thanks to which, together with the congregation, I as priest talk to God." What does this have to teach us about the way we celebrate the Mass?
5. Reflect on these words of Pope Paul VI. How can we bring his description of the liturgical reform more to life?

The Council has taken the fundamental position that the faithful have to understand what the priest is saying and to share in the liturgy; to be not just passive spectators at Mass but souls alive; to the people of God responsive to him and forming a community gathered as one around the celebrant.

Look at the altar, placed now for dialogue with the assembly...The repository has been opened up, as the peoples' own spoken language now becomes part of their prayer. Lips that had once been still, sealed as it were, now at last begin to move, as the whole assembly can speak its part in the dialogue with the priest....No longer do we have the sad phenomenon of people being conversant and vocal about every human



<sup>13</sup> Mediator Dei, no. 69.

THE MASS EXPLAINED: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW ROMAN MISSAL

subject yet silent and apathetic in the house of God,. How sublime it is to hear during Mass the communal recitation of the our Father!

Be then, fervent at the Sunday Mass; hold on to it jealously; endeavor to fill every corner of your parish church, to be part of a host of people surrounding the altar. Say to your priests: make us understand; open the book to us. And learn to sing. A Mass celebrated with the song of the people makes for the full raising up of the spirit. Saint Ambrose--one of the first bishops to introduce sacred singing into the Christian community--expressed this striking thought; when I hear an entire assembly sing *Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God* my spirit is flooded with happiness; nothing in the world can possess such grandeur and majesty.<sup>14</sup>



---

<sup>14</sup> Paul VI: Homily at the Parish of Mary Immaculate, Rome (March 27, 1966) DOL 430ff.