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# The Mass

A Brief Explanation

The Mass has been the center of Christian life since the time of the apostles. It is made up of two parts, the Liturgy of the Word, wherein the congregation learn of Christ, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, wherein Christ becomes physically present and presents Himself to the Father as the sacrifice for our sins (see p. 6). Justin Martyr described it just as it is offered today in his *First Apology* in 110 A.D.:

“And on the day called of the Sun, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray for ourselves... and for all others in every place, that we may be counted worthy, now that we have learned the truth, by our works also to be found good citizens and keepers of the commandments, so that we may be saved with an everlasting salvation. Having ended the prayers, we salute one another with a kiss. There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at his hands. And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying Amen. And when the president has given thanks, and all the people have expressed their assent, those who are called by us deacons give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine mixed with water over which the thanksgiving was pronounced, and to those who are absent they carry away a portion.”

## Introductory Rites

### Sign of the Cross

All gathered make the sign of the cross, opening the prayer of the Mass by dedicating the prayer and themselves “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

### Greeting

The priest greets the people, who respond, “and also with you,” signifying the unity of God’s people.

Matthew 28:19.

“In all our travels and movements, in all our coming in and going out, in putting on our shoes, at the bath, at the table, in lighting our candles, in lying down, in sitting down, whatever employment occupies us, we mark our forehead with the sign of the cross.” - Tertullian, A.D. 250

#### 3 Options:

- “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ...” - 1 Cor. 13:14
- “The grace and peace of God...” - Ephesians 1:2
- “The Lord be with you.” - 2 Timothy 4:22, Matthew 28:20

## Concluding Rite

### Greeting

The priest and faithful exchange greetings as they return from the eternal and heavenly altar.

- V: “The Lord be with you.” (2 Tim 4:22)
- R: “And also with you.”

### Blessing

The priest performs a final blessing of the faithful as they prepare to depart into the world.

- Priest: “May Almighty God Bless you, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”
- All: “Amen.” (cf. Gen 28:3; Deut 14:29; Num 6:23-27; Ps 29:11)

### Dismissal

The priest dismisses the faithful and instructs them to go into the world to serve the Lord.

- V: “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord” (cf. Deut 10:11-13; Jdg18:6; Luke 7:50)
- R: Thanks be to God.

## Revelation - The Mass in Heaven - Examples

- |                               |                                |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Lampstands and Menorahs     | • 1:12, 2:5                    |
| • Vestments                   | • 1:13, 15:6, 19:13            |
| • Penitential Rite            | • 2:5, 16, 21; 3:3             |
| • Priests                     | • 4:4, 15:4, 11:16, 14:3, 19:4 |
| • Liturgy of the Word         | • 2:1-3:22, 5:1                |
| • Incense                     | • 5:8, 8:3-4                   |
| • The Altar                   | • 6:9, 8:3, 11:1, 14:18, 16:7  |
| • Relics of Saints            | • 6:9                          |
| • Under the Altar             |                                |
| • Marriage Supper of the Lamb | • 17, 19:9                     |
| • The Sanctus                 | • 4:8                          |
| • Intercession of the Saints  | • 5:8, 6:9-11, 8:3-4           |

## Communion

The faithful pray to Christ for healing, then receive His body, blood, soul, and divinity, entering into communion with Christ, and joining themselves to Him to become “one flesh” (Gen 2:24) in the “marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9) in a far more real and profound way than a husband and wife do in their marriage.

Just as those who were not a member of Israel and/or circumcised were not to eat of the Passover lamb (Ex 12:43-45), members of those religious communities with which the Catholic Church is not yet fully united and those who have not been baptized are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion. This is because Holy Communion is a sign of true oneness of faith, life, and worship. It is also because reception of the Eucharist by one who does not recognize it to be the true body of Christ may be very dangerous. As Paul explained in 1 Cor 11:28-30, “let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.”

### Is the Eucharist Truly the Body of Christ?

Catholics do believe that the Eucharist is the true body and blood of Christ. Jesus said, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (John 6:51) Jesus was not speaking symbolically. In John, Christ first tells his audience that He is the bread of life that they will eat. (John 6:35-51). This bothers them, and believing that He is speaking literally, they ask, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (52) Christ does not clarify and say that He is speaking symbolically, but instead switches to even stronger language, saying, “Truly truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink of His blood, you have no life in you.” (53) In this and all following verses, Christ switches from the regular verb for “to eat,” *phago*, and begins using the stronger, more literal verb *trogo*, which means “to chew or gnaw.” After this, the audience again questions Christ’s teaching, calling it “a hard saying.” Christ presses again, asking if His words offend them and declaring that they must stop thinking with their fallen flesh and instead think in the spirit. (63) Finally, many people leave Jesus and stop following Him (66). If Christ was speaking symbolically, then He allowed people to walk away from Him over a misunderstanding after having two chances to correct it Himself.

This does not violate the Levitical prohibition against drinking blood, because the Levitical law was annulled when Christ became High Priest (Heb 7:12) More deeply, the law against drinking blood was given because “the life of every creature is its blood: its blood is its life.” (Lev 17:11,14) God did not want men to share in the life that is within animals. He does want them to share in the divine life that is within Christ.

## Penitential Rite

The priest invites the people to recall and repent of their sins, after which the congregation confesses and/or ask the Lord’s forgiveness.

- “I confess to almighty God, and to you my brothers and sisters, that I have sinned through my own fault. (Jam. 5:16) In my thoughts and in my words, (Jam. 3:6) In what I have done and in what I have failed to do; (Matt. 25:31-46) and I ask the Blessed Mary, ever-virgin, all the angels and saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God. (1 Thes. 5:25, Rev 8:3-4)”
- “Lord Have Mercy” - (Matt 15:22; 17:15; 20:30-31)

## Gloria

In prayer, the Father and the Son are praised.

“Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth. (Luke 2:14) Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, (Rev 19:6) we worship you, we give you thanks, (Eph. 5:20) we praise you for your glory. Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, (2 John 3, John 3:16) Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; (John 1:29) You are seated at the right hand of the Father, receive our prayer. (Rom 8:34) For you alone are the Holy One, (Luke 4:34) You alone are Lord, You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ. With the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. (John 14:26)”

Nehemiah 8:6; Psalm 41:13

## Opening Prayer

The priest offers a prayer to God which concerns and illustrates the theme of the Liturgy for that day. All gathered respond, “Amen,” making the prayer their own.

## Liturgy of the Word

Here four selections from Scripture are read from the lectionary, which presents them corresponding to what the faithful's minds ought to or will be focused on at the current season of the year.

- A reading from the Old Testament is read, recalling the Jewish roots of the faith and the preparation for Christ's coming. It prepares the congregation for His coming in the Eucharist even now.
- A Psalm is sung or spoken to praise God and to raise the hearts of the congregation up to Him.
- A New Testament epistle is read, bringing the words and exhortations of the apostles to the congregation as they were in their own time.

The congregation stands to sing thanks for the gospel and sings "Alleluia" (Psalms 146-150; Rev 19:1-6). During Lent, the "Alleluia" is replaced by another phrase to signify the season's tone of repentance and sacrifice. The faithful next makes the sign of the cross on their foreheads, lips, and hearts, asking God to bless their minds that they may understand the gospel, their lips that they may preach it, and their hearts that they may live it out in love. All stand while the bishop, priest, or deacon reads from the gospel. The reading will usually have the same theme as the Old Testament reading and the Psalm. After the gospel reading, the faithful sit while a bishop, priest, or deacon presents a homily, in which he exhorts them to live out the teachings of the gospel and helps to make it applicable to their lives.



## Agnus Dei

The congregation praises Christ, proclaims that He is the Lamb of God, and asks for His mercy and peace.

- All: "Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace." - (John 1:29, 36; cf. Rev 5:6-13; 22:1-3)
- Priest: Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. (John 1:29) Happy are those who are called to his supper. (Rev. 19:9)

### The Passover Lamb of God

Jesus is called the Lamb of God because He is the Passover lamb that was sacrificed to save the firstborn from death. When a person enters into Christ through baptism, he or she becomes a child of God (Mat. 5:9, 5:45, Luk 6:35, 20:36, John 12:36, Rom. 8:14-15, 8:23, 9:26, 2 Cor 6:18, Gal. 3:26, 4:5-6, Heb. 12:7-8) The paschal sacrifice of the lamb saved the lives of the firstborn of the people of God during the first Passover, and now the sacrifice of the Lamb of God saves the lives of all children of God.

Like the Passover lamb, Christ was to be without blemish (Ex 12:5 / Heb 9:14) The Passover lamb was examined on the 14th day of Nisan to ensure that it was unblemished, and Christ was examined on the 14th day of Nisan; no fault was found in Him (Luke 23:4, 14; John 18:38; 19:4,6) The Passover lamb's bones were not to be broken, just as Christ's bones were not broken (Ex 12:46, Num. 9:12 / John 19:36) The blood of the Passover lamb was put on the posts of the Israelite's doors, and the blood of Christ was put on the post of the cross. (Ex 12:7) The temple priests began to slaughter the Passover lambs at noon, and Jesus was sentenced to death at noon (John 19:14) There are many other parallels beyond this, and many other connections that are not strictly parallel. For instance, it was a hyssop branch that was to be used to spread the blood of the Passover lamb, and it was a hyssop branch that was used to give Jesus a drink of wine on the cross (Ex 12:22 / John 19:29).

Other aspects of the Passover are also incorporated into the sacrifice and the Mass. One example is the breaking of the *Afikoman*, the second of three cakes of unleavened bread: the cake which represents Isaac during the Passover celebration. While God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son Isaac, (Gen 22:10-12) God Himself did allow His son to be sacrificed. Just as the *Afikoman* is broken during the Passover celebration, the Eucharist is broken during Mass in remembrance of Christ's broken body. It is the *Afikoman* that Christ probably broke during the last supper. Just as the *Afikoman* is broken and all eat a piece, so too is the Eucharist, the body of Christ, broken and given to all to eat. Just as the Passover lamb was required to be eaten by all after its sacrifice and no part left over, (Ex 12:8-10, 34:25, Num. 9:12), the Eucharist, the Lamb of God, must be eaten and no part left over. Therefore Paul writes, "Christ our Passover lamb is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast..." (1 Cor 5:7-8)

## Memorial Acclamation

Using one of four acclamations, the congregation proclaims a mystery of faith. A mystery is not something that is not understood at all, but a truth that is so profound that it can never be understood *completely* in this life.

## The Our Father

The congregation, in the presence of Jesus, pray to the Father in the words Jesus taught his disciples.

## Doxology

Turning attention to Christ, the priest asks Him to help the congregation in their daily walk, then the congregation praises Christ.

## The Sign of Peace

The priest offers peace to the Faithful, and they return it. Then, in the presence of Christ, all live out their faith by offering one another peace.

- “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again” (cf. 1 Thess 4:14-15; 1 Cor 15:3-23)
- “Dying you destroyed our death...” (1 Cor 16:22)
- “When we eat this bread...” (1 Cor 11:26)
- “Lord, by your cross and resurrection...” (Luke 4:42)

“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (Mat 6:9-13)

- V: “Deliver us, Lord, from every evil and grant us peace in our day. In your mercy keep us from sin and protect us from all anxiety as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.” (John 17:15)
- R: “For the kingdom, and the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever.” (Rev 4:11)
- V: “Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles; I leave you peace, my peace I give to you. Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom where you live forever and ever. The peace of the Lord be with you always!”
- R: And also with you!
- V: “Let us offer each other a sign of Christ’s peace.  
(John 14:27; 16:33; 20:19-20; 20:26)

## Profession of Faith

The faithful recite the Nicene Creed, formulated at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 to, to express their acceptance of the Scriptures and the Gospel:

“We believe in one God (Deu 6:4, Eph 4:6) the Father (Matthew 6: 9) Almighty, (Exo 6:3) Maker of heaven and earth, (Gen 1:1, 14:19) of all that is seen and unseen. (Col 1:15-16) We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, (Acts 11:17) the only Son of God (John 1:14) eternally begotten of the Father (John 1:2, 1:18; 3:26, 17:1-5), God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten not made, one in being with the Father, (John 10:30, Heb1:3) through Whom all things were made. (Heb1:1-2, John 1:1-2) For us men and for our salvation (1 Tim 2:4-5) He came down from heaven: (John 3:13, 6:33-35) by the power of the Holy Spirit He was born of the Virgin Mary (Luke 1: 35) and became man. (John 1:14) For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; (John 19:16) He suffered, (Mark 8:31), died, and was buried (Luke 23:53; I Cor 15:3-4) On the third day He rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures; (Luke 24:1; 1 Cor. 15:4) He ascended into Heaven (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:10) and is seated at the right hand of the Father. (Col 3:1) He will come again in Glory (Matt 24:27) to judge the living and dead, (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim 4:1) and His kingdom will have no end; (2 Pet 1:11, Luke 1:33) We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord (Acts 5:3-4), the giver of life, (John 14:26, Gen 1:2, 2:7) Who proceeds from the Father and the Son. (John 14:16, 15:26) With the Father and the Son, He is worshipped and glorified. (Matthew 3:16-17) He has spoken through the prophets. (Eze 11:5, 1 Peter 1:10-11) We believe in one (Matt 16:18, Rom 12:13) holy (Eph 5:25-27, Rev 19:7-8) catholic (Matt 28:19-20, Rev 5:9-10) and apostolic Church (Eph 2:19-21) We acknowledge one baptism (Eph 4:5) for the forgiveness of sins. (Acts 2:38) We look for the resurrection of the dead, (John 11: 24; 1 Cor 15:12-49) and the life of the world to come. (Mark 10:29-30) Amen. (Psalm 106:48)”

## Liturgy of the Eucharist

### Preparation of the Gifts

The gifts of bread and wine are brought to the Altar, and the priest prays quietly over them.

### Prayer for the Sacrifice

The faithful ask God to accept the coming sacrifice.

Hebrews 12:28

Psalms 50:23

### Is Christ Sacrificed Again?

Many people are confused at the sacrificial nature of the Mass because they believe that it contradicts Hebrews, which says that Christ was sacrificed "once for all." However, the Catholic Church affirms that "[Christ], our Lord and God, was once and for all to offer himself to God the Father by His death on the altar of the cross, to accomplish everlasting redemption." (Council of Trent)

The Mass is not another sacrifice of Christ, but that very same one that occurred centuries ago. At the Mass, time and space collapse and heaven and earth touch, so that the one, eternal, heavenly sacrifice of Christ who was "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev 13:8) becomes present to us. This fulfills the prophecy that "from the rising of the sun to its setting... in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering." (Mal 1:11) It is why Paul wrote that those who participate in the Eucharist "proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." (1 Cor 11:26) It is a beautiful opportunity for us, while still on our earthly journey, to participate in the worship of Heaven with the angels and the already departed saints.

In fact, the sacrifice of Christ began at the last supper, and was only finished on the cross. During the last supper, Christ drank the first three out of the four cups of wine used for the Passover sacrifice. He refused to drink the fourth, then asked the Father in Gethsemane to take the cup away from Him. When captured, Jesus said He must go with the soldiers to "drink from the cup my Father has given me." (John 18:11) Once on the cross, He drank wine, the fourth cup, said "it is finished" (John 19:30), and died. This completed the Passover sacrifice, the sacrifice which atoned for our sins, that He started at the last supper.

There, Christ commanded the apostles to "do this in memory of me," (Luk 22:19) using the word for memory '*anamnēsis*,' which meant "memorial sacrifice," even though there were 9 non-sacrificial words for memory that could have been used. The word for "do," '*poiein*,' also had sacrificial meaning, and in fact was used 70 times in the Old Testament to read, "to offer." A Greek speaker would have heard "This is my body given for you; offer this as a memorial sacrifice of me." This is why Paul used sacrificial language to describe the Eucharist, writing that the bread is a "participation in the body of Christ," and that Christians partake of the "table of the Lord," (1 Cor 10:16-21) a term denoting the altar on which sacrifices were offered to God. (cf. Lev 24:6, Eze 44:16, Mal 1:7,12)

## The Preface

The priest says a prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God. The greek word for thanks, *eucharisteo*, is where the word Eucharist comes from.

V: The Lord be with you. (2 Tim 4:22)  
R: And also with you.  
V: Lift up your hearts. (Lam 3:41)  
R: We lift them up to the Lord.  
V: Let us give thanks (Greek "Eucharistesas") to the Lord our God (1 Cor 11:24)  
R: It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

## Sanctus

The congregation signifies the meeting of heaven and earth as it praises the Lord in the words sung by the angels in their eternal heavenly worship and proclaims the Lord's entrance for the sacrifice in the words that proclaimed His entrance into earthly Jerusalem.

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. (Is 6:3, Rev. 4:8) Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. (Mark 11:9-10)

## The Consecration

The priest says one of the Eucharistic prayers and, acting in the person of Christ, says the words Christ spoke at the last supper. The bread and wine change Substance, becoming the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ. All kneel in worship.

In the person of Christ - 2 Cor 2:10

- "Take this, all of you, and eat it: this is my body which will be given up for you."
- "Take this, all of you, and drink from it: this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. Do this (*poiein*) in memory (*anamnēsis*) of me."

(Mark 14:22-24; Matt 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20; 1Cor 11:23-25)

## The Cup of Blessing

The relationship between Christ's sacrifice and the Passover is expressed here as well. When speaking of the Eucharist, Paul refers to the cup as the "cup of blessing," (1 Cor 10:16) which is the third cup in the Passover meal. It was the third cup that Christ held when He said, "This is the cup of my blood." This is also the only time in the New Testament that Christ says "covenant," signifying the institution of the New Covenant.