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Understanding and Living the Mass

How can we take part fruitfully and base our whole life on the Holy Mass? A step by step explanation of the parts of the Mass.

04/12/2022

Below are extracts from various published works that explain the liturgical rites of the Mass, in order to better understand the sacrament of the Eucharist and take part in a "fully conscious and active" way (Second Vatican Council, Const.

Sacrosanctum Concilium, nos. 14 and 48).

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Entrance Antiphon

"The priest draws near to the altar of God, 'of God who gives joy to our youth.' The holy Mass begins with a song of joy, because God is here. It is the joy that is shown, together with love and gratitude, as the priest kisses the altar, symbol of Christ and reminder of the saints — a small surface, sanctified because this is where the sacrament of infinite worth is made present to us" (from "The Eucharist, Mystery of Faith and Love," Holy Thursday homily of St. Josemaria).

"We arrive at the church and get ready to celebrate the greatest mystery of our faith. Arriving on time is a sure sign of loving the Holy Mass" (*Para preparar, vivir y agradecer la Misa*), Cobel Editions).

Penitential Act

"The Confiteor makes us aware of our unworthiness; not an abstract reminder of guilt, but the actual presence of our sins and weaknesses. This is why we repeat: *Kyrie, eleison, Christe, eleison*: Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy. If the forgiveness we need had to be won by our own merits, we would only be capable of a bitter sadness. But, because of God's goodness, forgiveness comes from his mercy, and we praise him — *Gloria!*: 'for you alone are the holy one, you alone are Lord, you alone, O

Jesus Christ, are the most high, with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father" (from "The Eucharist, Mystery of Faith and Love," Holy Thursday homily of St. Josemaria).

The Gloria

"We praise God, recognizing His holiness, as well as our need for Him. The Gloria is like a shout of joy to God, to the whole Trinity" (*Para preparar, vivir y agradecer la Misa*, Cobel Editions).

"From the recognition of our nothingness -- indeed, of our being sinners, in need of forgiveness -- we move on to proclaim the greatness of the thrice-holy God. Our tongue is unable to find the right words to express the recognition due to God, and we raise up our praise for all the good things we have received"

(*Living the Holy Mass [Vivir la Santa Misa]*, Bishop Javier Echevarría, Rialp).

Opening Prayer

"The priest, in the name of all the people of God, prays this prayer to the Father. The priest provides a moment of silence here to remember our own intentions when offering this sacrifice of the Mass. We should take advantage of this moment to recall specific intentions. Don't forget that it is at Mass that all problems are solved, for God grants us whatever we ask when accompanying the sacrifice of his Son" (*Para preparar, vivir y agradecer la Misa*, Cobel Editions).

Readings and the Profession of Faith

"The Mass consists of two parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, so closely united that they constitute a single act of worship" (Roman Missal, General Institution, 28).

"We now listen to the word of Scripture, the epistle and the gospel — light from the Holy Spirit, who speaks through human voices so as to make our intellect come to know and contemplate, to strengthen our will and make our desire for action effective. And because we are one people, 'gathered together in the unity of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,' we recite the Creed, affirming the unity of our faith" (from "The Eucharist, Mystery of Faith and Love," Holy Thursday homily of St. Josemaria).

Prayer over the Offerings

"Then, the offering: the bread and wine of men. It is very little, but it is accompanied by prayer: 'Lord God, we ask you to receive us and be pleased with the sacrifice we offer you with humble and contrite hearts: and that the sacrifice which today we offer you, o God, our Lord, may be brought to your presence and be made acceptable.' Again, a reminder of our smallness and of the desire to cleanse and purify all that is offered to God: 'I will wash my hands... I have loved the beauty of your house...'

"A moment ago, just before the *Lavabo*, we invoked the Holy Spirit, asking him to bless the sacrifice offered to his holy name. After washing his hands, the priest, in the name of all those present, prays to

the Holy Trinity — *Suscipe, Sancta Trinitas* — to accept our offering in memory of the life of Christ and of his Passion, Resurrection and Ascension; and in honour of Mary, ever Virgin, and of all the saints" (from "The Eucharist, Mystery of Faith and Love," Holy Thursday homily of St. Josemaria).

The Eucharistic Prayer

"Thus we begin the canon, with the confidence of children of God, calling him our most loving Father: *clementissime*. We pray for the Church and for all those who are a part of the Church — the pope, our families, our friends and companions. And a Catholic, with his heart open to all men, will pray for all men, because no one can be excluded from his love. We ask God

to hear our prayers. We call on the memory of the glorious ever-Virgin Mary and of a handful of men who were among the first to follow Christ and to die for Him, and we recall our union with them" (from "The Eucharist, Mystery of Faith and Love," Holy Thursday homily of St. Josemaria).

The Consecration

"Quam oblationem... the moment of the consecration draws near. Now, in the Mass, it is Christ who acts again, through the priest: 'This is my body'... 'This is the cup of my blood.' Jesus is with us! The transubstantiation is a renewal of the miracle of God's infinite love. When that moment takes place again today, let us tell our Lord, without any need for words, that nothing will be able

to separate us from him; that, as he puts himself into our hands, defenceless, under the fragile appearances of bread and wine, he has made us his willing slaves. 'Make me live always through you, and taste the sweetness of your love.'

"More prayers, because we human beings almost always feel the need to ask for things — prayers for our deceased brothers, for ourselves. We have brought all our weaknesses, our lack of faithfulness. The weight is heavy, but he wants to bear it for us and with us. The canon ends with another invocation to the Blessed Trinity: *Per Ipsum, et cum Ipso, et in Ipso...*: Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ, who is all our love, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever" (from "The Eucharist, Mystery of Faith and Love," Holy Thursday homily of St. Josemaria).

The Lord's Prayer

"Jesus is the way, the Mediator. In him are all things; outside of him is nothing. In Christ, taught by him, we dare to call God our Father — he is the Almighty who created heaven and earth, and he is a loving Father who waits for us to come back to him again and again, as the story of the prodigal son repeats itself in our lives" (from "The Eucharist, Mystery of Faith and Love," Holy Thursday homily of St. Josemaria).

The Sign of Peace

"Strengthening the bonds of fraternity with all souls helps us to unite ourselves more closely with Jesus in the Eucharist; and thus we also help bring about the concord

among all men and women for which the Church intercedes in the Holy Mass" (*Living the Holy Mass [Vivir la Santa Misa]*, Bishop Javier Echevarría, Rialp).

Lamb of God

"Ecce, Agnus Dei... Domine, non sum dignus... We are going to receive our Lord. On this earth, when we receive an important person, we bring out the best — lights, music, formal dress. How should we prepare to receive Christ into our soul? Have we ever thought about how we would behave if we could only receive him once in a lifetime?

"When I was a child, frequent communion was still not a widespread practice. I remember how people used to prepare to go to communion. Everything had to be

just right, body and soul: the best clothes, hair well-combed — even physical cleanliness was important — maybe even a few drops of cologne... These were manifestations of love, full of finesse and refinement, on the part of manly souls who knew how to repay Love with love" (from "The Eucharist, Mystery of Faith and Love," Holy Thursday homily of St. Josemaria).

Prayer after Communion and the Concluding Rites

"With Christ in our soul, we end the holy Mass. The blessing of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit accompanies us all day long, as we go about our simple, normal task of making holy all honest human activity.

"As you attend Mass, you will learn to deepen your friendship with each one of the three divine Persons: the Father who begets the Son; the Son, begotten by the Father; the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. When we approach any one of the divine Persons, we approach the one God. And when we come close to all three Persons — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — again we come into the presence of the one true God. Love the Mass, my children, love the Mass. And be hungry to receive our Lord in communion, although you may be cold inside, although your emotions may not correspond to your desires. Receive communion with faith, with hope, with burning charity" (from "The Eucharist, Mystery of Faith and Love," Holy Thursday homily of St. Josemaria).

" We thank Jesus for having received him, and we ask him to help us to

live in communion with him" (*Para preparar, vivir y agradecer la Misa*, Cobel Editions).

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