

What is the Consecration in the Mass?

"The Holy Mass is an infinite divine madness," Saint Josemaría used to say. The Eucharistic presence of Christ begins when the priest, "in persona Christi," pronounces the words of consecration over the bread and wine. This article is dedicated to the very heart of the Mass.

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Summary

1. What is "consecration" in the Mass? Is it the same as transubstantiation?
2. Why is it important?
3. At what point in the Mass does it occur?
4. Who can carry out the consecration?
5. Can there be Eucharistic consecration outside of Mass?

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1. What is "consecration" in the Mass? Is it the same as transubstantiation?

"Consecration" at Mass refers to the central moment when the bread and wine, by the words of Christ spoken by the priest and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become the Body and Blood of Christ. The Eucharistic presence of Christ begins at the moment of the consecration and endures as long as the Eucharistic species subsist. (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1377). Faithful to the Lord's command, the Church continues to do, in his memory and until his glorious return, what he did on the eve of his Passion (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1333, *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* (GIRM), no. 79d).

By the consecration, the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is brought about. Under the consecrated species of bread and wine, Christ himself, living and glorious, is present in a true, real, and substantial manner, with his Body, his Blood, his soul and his divinity (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1413). The Church calls this transformation “transubstantiation,” so we can properly say that, through the consecration, the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ takes place.

Meditate with St. Josemaria

- What we cannot do, our Lord is able to do. Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect man, leaves us, not a symbol, but a reality. He himself stays with us. He will go to the Father, but he will also

remain among men. He will leave us, not simply a gift that will make us remember him, not an image that becomes blurred with time, like a photograph that soon fades and yellows, and has no meaning except for those who were contemporaries. Under the appearances of bread and wine, he is really present, with his body and blood, with his soul and divinity. (*Christ is Passing By*, 83)

- *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." (*Christ is Passing By*, 90)

2. Why is it important?

Consecration is important because, within the Holy Mass, it is the realization of the Sacrament of the Eucharist, by which Christians enter into "communion with Christ truly present in the consecrated Bread and Wine" (Pope Francis, Catechesis on the Holy Mass, March 7, 2018). The Church has celebrated this

Sacrament from the beginning, as recounted in Scripture: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). This practice was the response to the desire of Jesus Christ himself during the Last Supper: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24-25). With these words Jesus asks his disciples to accept the gift of his sacramental presence and to repeat it "until I come again" (cf. 1 Cor 11:26).

The Sacrament of the Eucharist is not a simple reminder of an event that happened in history. It is the "fulfillment" of the "memorial of Christ, of his life, of his death, of his Resurrection, and of his intercession in the presence of the Father" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1341) through the liturgical celebration. Therefore, through the power of the Holy Spirit and the

words of Christ, in the consecration "Christ is thus really and mysteriously made *present*" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1357) among people so that they may be in communion with him and with one another. As St. John Paul II stressed, "The Eucharist, as Christ's saving presence in the community of the faithful and its spiritual food, is the most precious possession which the Church can have in her journey through history" (Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 9).

Meditate with St. Josemaria

- We must finish these minutes of prayer. Savouring in the intimacy of your soul the infinite goodness of God, realize that Christ is going to make himself really present in the host, with his body, his blood, his soul and his divinity. Adore

him reverently, devoutly; renew in his presence the sincere offerings of your love. Don't be afraid to tell him that you love him. Thank him for giving you this daily proof of his tender mercy, and encourage yourself to go to communion in a spirit of trust. I am awed by this mystery of Love. Here is the Lord seeking to use my heart as a throne, committed never to leave me, provided I don't run away.

- Comforted by Christ's presence and nourished by his body, we will be faithful during our life on earth and then we will be victors with Jesus and his Mother in heaven. "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?... Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus

Christ." (*Christ is Passing By*,
161)

- This is a miracle of love. "This is truly the bread for God's children." Jesus, the first son of the eternal Father, offers us himself as food. And the same Jesus is waiting to receive us in heaven as "his guests, his co-heirs and his fellows," for "those who are nourished by Christ will die the earthly death of time, but they will live eternally because Christ is life everlasting."
- Eternal happiness begins now for the Christian who is comforted with the definitive manna of the Eucharist. The old life has gone forever. Let us leave everything behind us so that everything will be new, "our hearts, our words and our actions."

- This is the Good News. News, because it speaks to us of a deep love which we never could have dreamed of. Good, because there is nothing better than uniting ourselves to God, the greatest Good of all. It is Good News, because in an inexplicable way it gives us a foretaste of heaven. (*Christ is Passing By*,152)
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3. At what point in the Mass does it occur?

The Holy Mass has been celebrated since the origins of the Church and has two parts: the "Liturgy of the Word" and the "Eucharistic Liturgy. The Liturgy of the Word comprises the proclamation and hearing of the Word of God through the readings provided by the Church. Then, the

"Eucharistic Liturgy" includes the presentation of the bread and wine, the anaphora or Eucharistic prayer -- which includes the formula of consecration -- and communion (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1345 - 1355).

The essential and necessary elements for transubstantiation to take place are: the bread of wheat flour and the wine of grapes, known as the "Eucharistic species"; and the words of consecration pronounced by the priest celebrant *in persona Christi*. These words are:

The day before he suffered, he took bread in his sacred hands and looking up to heaven, to you his almighty Father, he gave you thanks and praise. He broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:

**TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND EAT IT.
FOR THIS IS MY BODY WHICH WILL
BE GIVEN UP FOR YOU.**

When supper was ended, he took the cup. Again he gave you thanks and praise, gave the cup to his disciples, and said:

TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND DRINK FROM IT. FOR THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD, THE BLOOD OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL COVENANT, WHICH WILL BE POURED OUT FOR YOU AND FOR MANY FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME. (Roman Canon)

By the power of the words with which Christ instituted the Eucharist and his action through the priest, united with the power of the Holy Spirit, his Body and Blood are made sacramentally present under the species of bread and wine (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1353). "Christ instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist on the evening of Holy Thursday. He wanted his sacrifice to be presented

anew, in an unbloody manner, every time a priest repeats the words of consecration over the bread and wine. Millions of times over the last twenty centuries, in the humblest chapels and in the most magnificent basilicas and cathedrals, the risen Lord has given himself to his people" (*Benedict XVI*, Homily delivered in Paris, September 13, 2008).

Meditate with St. Josemaria

- The Mass is, I insist, an action of God, of the Trinity. It is not a merely human event. The priest who celebrates fulfills the desire of our Lord, lending his body and his voice to the divine action. He acts, not in his own name, but *in persona et in nomine Christi*: in the Person of

Christ and in his name. (*Christ is Passing By*, 86)

- The miracle of the holy Eucharist is being continually renewed and it has all Jesus' personal traits. Perfect God and perfect man, Lord of heaven and earth, he offers himself to us as nourishment in the most natural and ordinary way. Love has been awaiting us for almost two thousand years. That's a long time and yet it's not, for when you are in love time flies.
- Motivated by his own love and by his desire to teach us to love, Jesus came on earth and has stayed with us in the Eucharist. "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end": that's how St. John begins his account of what happened on the eve of the passover when Jesus "took bread and after he had given

thanks, broke it, and said, This is my body which is given up for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying: This is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." (*Christ is Passing By*, 151).

4. Who can carry out the consecration?

All of the faithful participate actively in every liturgical celebration. "It is the whole community, the Body of Christ united to its Head who celebrates" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1140). However, each member is called to exercise a particular role, because "all the members do not have the same

function" (Rom 12:4). The consecration is properly carried out by the priest, who, as "a figure of Christ, pronounces these words, but their efficacy and grace come from God" (St. John Chrysostom, *De proditione Iudae homilia* 1,6.). Indeed, by the sacrament of Holy Orders, priests receive a grace that enables them to carry out acts of worship, especially Eucharistic consecration, in the service of the rest of the faithful.

This does not mean that the rest of the people do not have an important role because "this full and active participation by all the people is...the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14). In this sense, although the faithful cannot perform the consecration, their role is fundamental. "For the celebration of the Eucharist is an

action of the whole Church, and in it each one should carry out solely but totally that which pertains to him or her, in virtue of the place of each within the People of God. The result of this is that greater consideration is also given to some aspects of the celebration that have sometimes been accorded less attention in the course of the centuries. For this people is the People of God, purchased by Christ's Blood, gathered together by the Lord, nourished by his word, the people called to present to God the prayers of the entire human family, a people that gives thanks in Christ for the mystery of salvation by offering his Sacrifice, a people, finally, that is brought together in unity by Communion in the Body and Blood of Christ" (GIRM, 5).

Meditate with St. Josemaria

- Our Lord Jesus Christ, as though all the other proofs of his mercy were insufficient, institutes the Eucharist so that he can always be close to us. We can only understand up to a point that he does so because Love moves him, who needs nothing, not to want to be separated from us. The Blessed Trinity has fallen in love with man, raised to the level of grace and made "to God's image and likeness." God has redeemed him from sin — from the sin of Adam, inherited by all his descendants, as well as from his personal sins — and desires ardently to dwell in his soul: "If anyone love me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him."

- The Blessed Trinity's love for man is made permanent in a sublime way through the Eucharist. Many years ago, we all learned from our catechism that the Eucharist can be considered as a sacrifice and as a sacrament; and that the sacrament is present to us both in communion and as a treasure on the altar, in the tabernacle. The Church dedicates another feast to the eucharistic mystery — the feast of the body of Christ, Corpus Christi, present in all the tabernacles of the world. Today, on Holy Thursday, we can turn our attention to the holy Eucharist as our sacrifice and as our nourishment, in the holy Mass and in communion.
- I was talking to you about the love of the Blessed Trinity for man. And where can we see this more clearly than in the Mass?

The three divine Persons act together in the holy sacrifice of the altar. This is why I like to repeat the final words of the collect, secret and postcommunion: "Through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord," we pray to God the Father, "who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen."

- In the Mass, our prayer to God the Father is constant. The priest represents the eternal high priest, Jesus Christ, who is, at the same time, the victim offered in this sacrifice. And the action of the Holy Spirit in the Mass is truly present, although in a mysterious manner. "By the power of the Holy Spirit," writes St John Damascene, "the transformation of the bread into the body of Christ takes

place." (*Christ is Passing By*, n. 84-85).

5. Can there be Eucharistic consecration outside the Mass?

"The Mass is composed of two parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharistic Liturgy. They are so closely connected to each other that they form one single act of worship" (Pope Francis, *Catechesis on the Holy Mass*, December 20, 2017). For this reason, the Eucharistic Liturgy, in which the Eucharistic consecration takes place, is inseparable from the rite of the Mass. "For in the Mass, the table both of God's word and of Christ's Body is prepared, from which the faithful may be instructed and refreshed" (*General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, 28).

Meditate with St. Josemaria

- I see myself like a poor little bird, accustomed only to making short flights from tree to tree, or, at most, up to a third floor balcony... One day in its life it succeeded in reaching the roof of a modest building, that you could hardly call a skyscraper.
- But suddenly our little bird is snatched up by an eagle, who mistakes the bird for one of its own brood. In its powerful talons the bird is borne higher and higher, above the mountains of the earth and the snow—capped peaks, above the white, blue and rose—pink clouds, and higher and higher until it can look right into the sun. And then the eagle lets go of the little bird and says: Off you go. Fly!

- —Lord, may I never flutter again close to the ground. May I always be enlightened by the rays of the divine sun — Christ — in the Eucharist. May my flight never be interrupted until I find repose in your Heart. (*The Forge*, 39)

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