

WHY DO CATHOLICS HAVE MASSES?

Why do we need priests to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass? Catholic doctrine says that no new or additional sacrifice is necessary or possible for the salvation of the world. If this is true, then how does the Catholic Holy Sacrifice of the Mass fit into God's plan for the salvation of mankind? Why is it so important and what would be the consequences if the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass vanished from the earth?

Strangely enough, the word, "priest," is one word that has not acquired any other meaning. Even today, when used literally, *priest* has only one specific meaning; it is applied only to a man who offers sacrifice. That is why non-Catholic clergymen are not called priests. They do not offer sacrifice; they do not believe in sacrifice.

THE NATURE OF SACRIFICE

When God raised up Moses to lead His people from Egypt to the Promised Land, God made some changes. God specified exactly the kinds of sacrifices that were to be offered to Him from then on; and God established an official and hereditary priesthood. With the coming of Jesus Christ, a new age began, the Christian Age in which you and I are living. All that had gone before was but a preparation for this final stage in God's plan for man's salvation.

In the sacrifices of the Old Law, the offerer brought his goat, ox, or sheep, laid his

hand on it to show that he gave it to God, and its throat was cut; then the priest sprinkled the blood round the altar, and the victim was entirely burnt (holocaust) or partly burnt and partly eaten by the priests or by the offerer and his friends at a common meal (sacrificial banquet).

This sacrificial banquet in the New Law is our receiving of the Eucharistic Jesus during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Jesus said: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever;... he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and... abides in me, and I in him" (Jn 6:51, 54, 56). ("Catechism of the Catholic Church" (CCC) 1406)

"The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's Passover, that is, of the work of salvation accomplished by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, a work made present by the liturgical action." (CCC 1409)

THE LAST SUPPER, THE CROSS AND THE MASS

Christ at the Last Supper offered up to God His Passion and Death for the redemption of mankind. "This is My Body," He says, "which is delivered up for you; this is My Blood which is shed for you unto the remission of sins." This One Offering was completed and carried out on the Cross. The sacrifice which Christ offered at the Last Supper and the sacrifice of the Cross are not two sacrifices, but one and the same sacrifice. By the words: "Do this for a commemoration of Me" He gave His Apostles and their successors not only the *power*, but the *command* also, to do what He Himself had just done. He made them priests and thereby perpetuated the Sacrifice of our Redemption in His Church.

When the priest consecrates the Body and Blood of Christ during Mass, He offers up to God the Victim of the Passion, the "Sacrifice of our Ransom," as St. Augustine says. By pronouncing the words of consecration he is doing the same thing which was done by Christ before him. He is carrying out the command given to the Apostles and their successors by Christ Himself at the Last Supper: *Do this for a commemoration of Me*.

At the consecration of the Mass, the Crucified Christ becomes present on the altar Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the form of the bread and wine, and is offered up once again in an unbloody manner to the Father along with all our personal petitions and supplications, acts of reparation for our sins and those of others (living or dead), and loving expressions of adoration and gratitude, praises and thanksgiving for our God. (Leo J. Trese, "The Faith Explained", Fides Publishers Association, Chicago, IL 1959)

THE PHYSICAL BODY VERSUS THE MYSTICAL BODY

The Mass is the Sacrifice of the Mystical Body of Christ, and is one with Calvary, which was the sacrifice of the physical body of Christ. The Mass is by which the glorified Christ in Heaven pro-longs His sacrifice on the Cross by and through us. Though He is Priest and Victim the manner of offering is not the same in both the Mass and the Cross. On the Cross He was alone; in the Mass He is with us. On the Cross He offered up His Life for all who would one day be incorporated into His Mystical Body; in the Mass He renews the Sacrifice for all who are actually incorporated into that Mystical Body. The Mass is the same Cross made actual throughout space and time. There is no time

or space between Calvary and now. The Cross purchases Redemption; the Mass applies it.

The Consecration during the Mass is the *sacrifice* of Christ and us. The Vine sacrificed Himself on the Cross; the Vine and the Branches now sacrifice themselves in the Mass. The primary meaning of the words of Consecration then refers to the Vine: This is the Body and this is the Blood of Christ, renewing the sacrifice of Calvary. But the secondary meaning refers to the branches united to the Vine to form the Mystical Body.

Our sufferings and our pains, our disappointments and our poverty, our mental anguish and our tears are now all offered in the Mass. They have Christ's name stamped on them, and they become precious because they are part of His sacrifice. We see this in one of the prayers of the Mass said after the consecration:

"We humbly beseech Thee, Almighty God, to command that these things - Christ's Body and Blood, as well as ourselves, our vows and prayers be borne by the hands of Thy Holy Angel to Thine Altar on High, in sight of Thy Divine Majesty, that so many of us as at this Altar shall partake of and receive the Most Holy Body and Blood of Thy Divine Son, may be filled with every heavenly blessing and grace, through Christ Our Lord. Amen." (Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, "The Fullness of Christ, The Sacrifice of the Mass", Our Sunday Visitor, Huntington IN, 1935)

OUR WORLD WITHOUT THE MASS

The Mass is a barrier that Jesus instituted to prevent sin from spreading it's darkness and evil rapidly throughout the world. If this sacrificial and perpetual offering of Jesus for the offenses against God

by sin would cease to exist, His sacrificial offering on Calvary would still be intact and redemptive, but it would change from a perpetual offering to being a sacrifice of the past. Since God is a God of the present, He would be denied the present and perpetual offering that Jesus planned to offer and that God is most deserving of. Jesus knew that sin would exist throughout time. He died for the remission of all of these sins even before they were ever thought of or committed. His unbloody offerings united through the Mass to His one time offering and death on the Cross is the redemption for all sins throughout all time. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is to be a perpetual offering made present by Jesus through the priesthood to God the Father.

For every Mass which is not said, the redeeming effects of His sacrifice is diminished, and subsequently sin can then flourish more and more. Think of all the redeeming power of His sacrifice which has been diminished by the loss of all the Masses that could have been said since the Protestant Reformation of the 1500's. If the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass were to disappear entirely from the face of the earth, God's justice would then rule over sinners instead of His loving and tender mercy.

To better understand this fact, let us try to picture the following illustration in our minds. We first see the earth as seen from outer space. We then see God the Father looking at the earth from heaven. We need to remember that God is both merciful and just. God is looking down at the earth with all its sin and tremendous evil. God grows very angry, but now in the line of His sight is His Son Jesus Christ on the cross, and He now sees only His Son, redeeming mankind from their sins. If the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

were to disappear from the face of the earth, Jesus on the cross would no longer be in His line of sight, and He would now only see the earth and its evil sins. He would no longer be a merciful God, but now a just God.

What would our Catholic religion be without the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the Eucharistic Jesus? The Catholic Church would be no more. She has everything because Jesus Christ is with her in the Holy Eucharist. All her riches, all her light, all her strength, grace, and beauty come to her from Him. Jesus in the Holy Eucharist is the foundation of her unity, her activity, and her very existence. The Holy Eucharist - the Real Presence, the Holy Mass, and Holy Communion - is the Church's first and most sublime object of devotion and love; her treasure.

Let's never forget to praise and thank God for the graces and mercy we receive because of Jesus' perpetual offering of the Mass, and His real presence in the Holy Eucharist. Let us pray that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass may flourish even more in our world. Surely we would be lost without it! (St. Leonard of Port Maurice, "The Hidden Treasure, Holy Mass", Tan Books and Publishers, Rockland, IL)

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