

INTRODUCTION



When you walk into church on Sunday, what are you feeling? What are you expecting? How do you feel about being there? Are you looking forward to celebrating? Or just enduring?

The truth is, the Mass is something Jesus does, and we are all there to do it with him. This is not clear to everyone yet.

A fresh look at the Mass will give us a new way of seeing ourselves and, because of this, a new way of perceiving our participation in the celebration. We won't be there to "hear" Mass or even to "follow" the Mass as the priest celebrates it. We will be there to offer Mass together with Jesus and others—*with* Christ and *as* Christ—to offer Jesus to the Father for the life of the human race, and to offer ourselves with him and in him: our flesh with his "for the life of the world."

The Mass is being renewed. And the Mass is renewing us—wherever and whenever we are willing to let it.

So let's take a deep breath, open our eyes, and take a fresh look at the Mass.

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1 | Remembering, together

Imagine you are Jesus at the Last Supper. You are about to die. What will keep your followers together when you are gone? What will keep your words alive among them? What will keep their hearts on fire?

The Mass. The celebration of Eucharist. That is what Jesus relied on. The church calls Eucharist the “source and the summit of the Christian life.” At the Last Supper, Jesus took a loaf of bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” This is a *sacramental remembrance*: a remembrance that *makes present* what we remember.

In the Mass, Jesus is present and acting. That is where we encounter him—not alone, but in company with others: in a communal meal where we listen to his words together, respond to them together, and experience his presence among us and within us.

All we have to do is pay attention at Mass, understand what we are paying attention to, and enter into it.

2 | First, We Gather

A fresh look at the Mass literally takes us “out of this world.” The very first words the presider speaks lift us up into a new world. We enter the world of mystery—the world of conscious relationship with God.

And since every relationship is a way of interacting with another, the Mass is gathering us together to interact with God the “Father,” as infinite Being and Goodness; with God the Son as “Word” of God, infinite Truth; and with God the “Holy Spirit” as infinite Love.

We may think of the celebration of the Eucharist, not as the beginning of our week, but as a “time out,” after which we return to the “real” world of family, school and social life, business and politics. Nothing could be more mistaken.

Mass is the real world, a world in which everything we hear and see speaks to us about the authentic relationship between God and all creation. The real world reflects the Existence from which all existence comes: the existence of God, who is Existence itself. And God’s existence, we know from revelation, is relationship.

3 | “In The Name...”

When we begin the Eucharist “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” we enter explicitly into this world of relationship—of interaction—with God.

The Sign of the Cross is the oldest Christian profession of faith. It expresses the meaning, and is the fruit of the *cross*, on which, by baptism, we died in Christ and rose again with him as a “new creation.” If we understand this, we understand the mystery of Christianity.

The Sign of the Cross expresses the *identity* we have through relationship with the Three Persons of God. We can use it all week to remind us of who we are. We can “extend the Mass” by making the Sign of the Cross when we wake up and go to bed, when we sit down at table or get in the car, whenever we turn on a computer or pick up a cell phone.

The Mass reminds us to do everything we do “*in the name*” of the relationship we have with the Father, Son, and Spirit. By making the Sign of the Cross, we can express all week long our awareness of the relationship we have with each other and with the God in whose name we gather.

4 | Our Real Bond of Union

Eucharist is meant to be a source of unity, not an experience of division. This is what we affirm at every Mass when the presider says to everyone present: “the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

The Eucharist proclaims that the real bond of union between Christians is the mystical experience of being enlightened, inspired, moved, and guided by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in each one’s heart.

The “communion of the Spirit”—trying to be united on the level of faith instead of divided on the level of its expression—is the starting point and the goal of the process: love that seeks unity. Our shared divine life is the theological basis this love is built on, the doctrine of faith that helps us understand the deep relationship we have with all who know Christ.

This communion is not perfect. It was not perfect in the early Church, and it is not perfect now. But to be aware of who you are through your divine relationship with God—Father, Son, and Spirit—is a mystical experience. A fresh look at the Mass summons us to look for and to deepen this communion wherever and with whomever it might exist.

5 | I Confess

After the greeting, the presider continues, “Brothers and sisters, let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries.” This is the “great equalizing” at the start of Mass. Once we have recognized our divine dignity and relationship with God and with each other “in Christ,” we go on to present ourselves only as “sinners.” We claim no other titles or dignities. There is no one present who doesn’t deserve to be there, because no one deserves to be there. Everyone is equally undeserving—and equally accepted.

God forgives and accepts us all. The price of entry into the Eucharistic celebration is that we must forgive and accept everyone as God does, and pray for each other with hope.

No one should feel uncomfortable or feel judged coming to Mass. Down deep we all see ourselves as being just as sinful as everybody else. If we know our hearts, our spontaneous prayer is, “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.”