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EWTN Exploring the Catholic Church #2: Understanding the Mass

By: *Marcellino D'Ambrosio, Ph.D.*

I. Intro:

- a. **Catholic's known for Mass being central:** must go Mass on Sun.
- b. **Focus on Three elements:** Lots of Names
 - 1) Sacrifice (Holy Sacrifice)
 - 2) Presence
 - 3) Meal (Lord's Supper)

II. Sacrifice (Holy Sacrifice of the Mass)

a. Christ's Sacrifice:

- 1) Heb 10: ¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ then to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. RSV
- 2) Christ is God. An eternal person. No time with God.
- 3) Not repetition but re-presentation of the one sacrifice of the cross; applying its power (cf. CCC 1366). Give us access in a marvelous way.
- 4) Unbloody sacrifice: same sacrifice as on cross offered differently
- 5) Power of resurrection, too made present. Sunday.
- 6) It is as if we are suddenly there at the foot of the cross & outside the empty tomb on Easter morning and Christ says to us: I did this for you. Receive my power.

b. Our Sacrifice:

- 1) **Sacrifice of Praise and Thanks:** Eucharist Ps 50; CCC 1359-61

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- a) In Baptism & Confirmation we've been consecrated priests
- b) *1 Pet 2:5* "You too are living stones built as an edifice of spirit, into a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." NAB
- c) Natural & supernatural blessings
- 2) **Offering all of ourselves & Lives**
 - a) In OT, sacrificial offering a substitute for one's own life
 - b) Bread wine, money in the collection
 - c) *Ro 12:1-2*. "I appeal to you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."
 - d) SC 48: laity at Mass should not be "silent spectators:" "Offering the immaculate victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with Him, they should learn to offer themselves."
 - e) Enter into the total self-giving of Christ
 - f) The laity "consecrate the world itself to God." LG 34
- 3) Really, the two sacrifices are one: he in us. Drops of water in wine. *Gal 2: 19b-20* "No longer I that live but Christ that lives within me"

III. The "Real Presence"

- a. **Four "Real" presences of Christ** [Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (SC) 7]
 - 1) **In the congregation**
 - a) *Mat 18:20* "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them." (RSV)
 - b) Sign of peace: *Mat 5:23f* "So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (RSV)
- b. **In the Word**
 - 1) **Readings**
 - a) Challenge to grow/ conviction about sin: *Heb 4:12* "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (RSV)
 - b) Guidance (St Anthony of the desert). **Pers EX:** My own conversion began hearing word at church. Ripped page out of missalette.

- c) Nourishment: the two tables. DV 21. "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body."
- d) Build our faith so that we can give ourselves more completely, recognize Christ's body & blood

2) **Virtually all prayers of the Mass drawn from Scripture**

- a) "May the grace of Our Lord JESUS CHRIST, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." 2 Cor 13:13
- b) Glory to God in the highest Lk 2:14
- c) Holy, Holy Sanctus. Is 6:3 (echoed in Rev 4:8)
- d) "Behold the Lamb of God" Jn 1:29
- e) Great Italian who said: Lord I am not worthy . . . Mat 8:8 "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed."

c. **In the priest: *in persona Christi***

- 1) Not a question of his personal virtue or holiness or giftedness as a preacher, etc.
- 2) Sacramental anointing, not just a functionary or official
- 3) Icon or image of Christ the only priest: CCC 1545. St Thomas Aquinas: Only Christ is the true priest, the others being only his ministers."
- 4) Pray for priests!

d. **In the Eucharistic Species:** sacrament. Most special

- 1) Both real & symbolic: sacrament as a full symbol
- 2) CCC 1084, "they make present efficaciously the grace that they signify."
- 3) Eucharist is the Sacrament of sacraments: Here he gives us not only his grace but his very self. His whole self.
- 4) Council of Trent (ca. 1550) teaches that in the Eucharist, Christ give us his body, blood, soul & divinity. His glorified body.
- 5) Happens Through the word of God & power of his spirit
 - a) Creation of the world out of nothing. Gen 1
 - b) Mary conceived virginally
- 6) "Transubstantiation:" Radical, essential, substantial change. Means that the inner essence of the thing is totally changed though the appearances may stay the

same. We're used to the essence of a thing staying the same while the appearances change.

- 7) **Example: mid-life crisis** analogy: Makeover.
- 8) He is as really and bodily present as he was walking through the streets of Galilee. Under appearances of bread & wine.

IV. **Meal** (Christ host of the meal)

a. He becomes present this way not simply that we adore Him, but though we may receive Him in our bodies as our food.

b. **Meaning of wheat bread**

- 1) Basic daily nourishment. "Give us day our daily bread."
- 2) **Jn 6: 26-58.** Bread of heaven that gives life to the world.
- 3) Recalls manna *Deut 8*: "know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

c. **Meaning of Grape Wine**

1) **Blood of the grape obtained only by crushing.**

a) Cup of suffering. Agony in Garden. Symbol of Christ's suffering, the cup he had to drink for our redemption. *Lk 22:42*

b) Cup we must drink to follow Him (mother of James and John) *Mk 10: 35-39*

2) **Joy, celebration, messianic banquet**

a) *Judges 9:13* "cheers gods & men"

b) *Ps 104:15* Gladdens the heart of man. Foretaste Wedding Feast of heaven.

3) **Blood as life:**

a) In OT to consume blood, even of an animal, is forbidden. Christ gives us his blood as our life, our nourishment, our purification.

b) *Jn 6:52ff* ⁵⁵ For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶ He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in Him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me."

c) *Jn 10:10* "I came that they might have life, and have it to the full." Abundantly. Abundanza!

d) Not just decent folks; law-abiding citizens of the kingdom: HS makes us partakers in the divine nature (self-giving, unconditional love). CCC 1129 (2 *Pet 1:4*)

d. **This is how intimate He wishes to be united with Him.**

- 1) **Common Meal means common life** (we don't only eat with God)

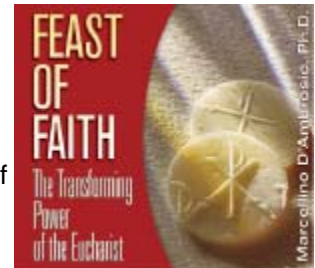
- 2) **You are what you eat. He transforms us into Himself.**
 - a) Individually sanctifies us. Saints.
 - b) Unifies the Church as the body of Christ. The Eucharist makes the Church.
 - c) Pray this when I receive.
 - d) Foretaste of heavenly banquet, wedding feast that will have no end.
- 3) Bring Him what needs to be healed. Expect healing. I try to remember that I am receiving into your body the one who raised Lazarus and the healed the man born blind.

V. **Conclusion: Marvelous Exchange**

- a. Sacrifice, Really present, Meal
- b. Offertory: We give to Him ourselves: weak, limited, imperfect, needy
- c. In the liturgy of the word and especially in sacramental communion, we receive back from Him His entire self, His risen humanity and eternal divinity.
- d. He holds nothing back from us; let us learn to hold nothing back from Him.

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