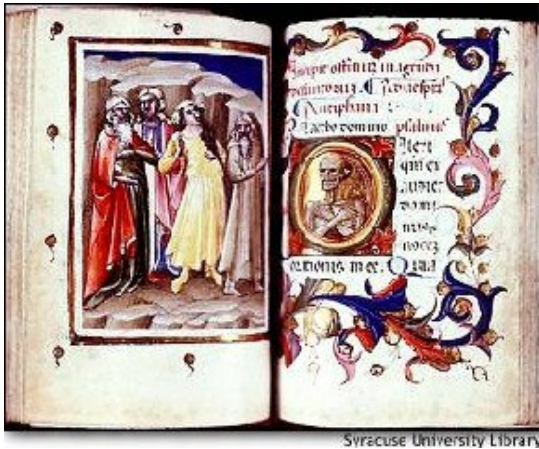


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## The Mass and the Once and For All Sacrifice of Christ

by Marcellino D'Ambrosio



From the very outset of the Reformation, Protestant leaders could not see eye to eye. They disagreed about whether Christ's body is really present in the Eucharist. They argued about whether we should baptize infants. They bickered about predestination.

But they were 100% united on two points— 1) the Mass is not a sacrifice and 2) those who offer the Eucharist should not be called priests.

The reason? Look what Heb 10:11-4 says about the Lord Jesus: "For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." To the early Protestants, it seemed that the Sacrifice of the Mass was crucifying Christ again and again, Sunday after Sunday, as if his awesome act on Calvary was not enough. To add insult to injury, Catholics were calling the Mass a sacrifice offered by *the Church*, as if we Christians could ever add anything to the all-sufficient work of Christ, the High Priest.

Were the Reformers all wet, or were they on to something?

The answer is, a little of both.

Christ's sacrifice *is* unrepeatable and entirely



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sufficient. There can be no other sacrifice and there can be no other priest. But at the same time, it is entirely appropriate to call the Mass a sacrifice and those who offer it "priests."

How can this be?

First of all, keep in mind that there is a unique quality to all of Jesus' activity, especially his death and resurrection, the climax of his mission. After all, He is God, and there is no time with God. Everything God does is "now," it is past, present, and future. So the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary and his glorious resurrection are not dead events, buried in the past like other milestones of human history. No, they are eternally present, alive, and active.

The Mass does not repeat these unrepeatable moments. It simply *re-presents* them, making them present again. Mass makes the power of the once-and-for-all sacrifice available to all those present in body and in prayerful remembrance. Yes, Jesus offered one sacrifice that objectively perfected everyone, once and for all. Yet the power of that sacrifice needs to be personally accepted and progressively appropriated by each human being throughout history. What better way than weekly, or better, daily Eucharist through which the Good Samaritan pours the wine and oil of His sacrifice upon our bruised flesh that we may be healed, strengthened, and made perfect in Him.

But what about this business of the Mass being *our* sacrifice?

Think about the ramifications of St. Paul calling the Church "the body of Christ." In baptism we are united to Him so that we become members of His Body. St. Paul says in Gal 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Through baptism, we share in his death and risen life; in confirmation, we are anointed by His Spirit in order to share in his mission. Christ the Prophet, the Priest, the King begins to work in and through us. That's why we are called a royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6).

Jesus, the head of the Body, was the perfect priest who offered the perfect sacrifice-- Himself. We, the not-yet perfect, offer ourselves with Him to the father, in obedience to St. Paul who said "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Ro 12:2). In the Mass, His sacrifice becomes present and, as it ascends to the Father, bears our imperfect lives and sacrifices

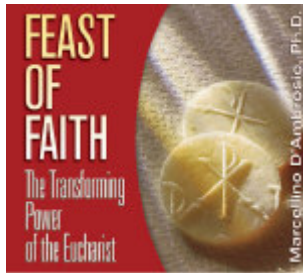
with it. His sacrifice mingles with ours much as the rich wine in the chalice unites with the insipid drops of water added by the presiding minister.

It is entirely the sacrifice of Christ that is offered in the Mass, the sacrifice of Jesus the head and we his members. And it is offered by the entire body of Christ too, head and members.

That's the point. It is no longer he and us, his sacrifice versus ours. All is his, all is ours. One sacrifice. One priesthood. One body. Forever and ever.

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