

THE MASS

At Mass, through the ministry of the priest, Christ becomes present for us under the form of Bread and Wine. The priest consecrated the Bread and Wine, changing them into Jesus' body "given up for you" and his "blood poured out or shed" for you'.

What Jesus did on Calvary is brought out in the Mass. The Mass is the memorial of His Suffering and Death. Memorial, in the scriptures is not merely recording a past event but in a certain sense making it present again. At Mass Christ does not suffer or die again. Rather he represents, prolongs, and renews his great moment of sacrifice down through the centuries so that we can be part of it. The Mass perpetuates the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross down the centuries. As members of the Church we unite with Christ our offering of our lives to the Father through the ministry of the priest.

An early Church document around AD 90 contains the following directive.

'On the Lord's own Day, assemble in common to break bread and offer thanks. But first confess your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure. No one quarrelling with his brother may join your meeting until they are reconciled - your sacrifice must not be defiled'

We have also an early account of the Eucharist from St Paul's first letter to the *Corinthians, chapter 11.*

Another early description of the Eucharist comes from the writings of St Justin around 150 AD.

'At the conclusion of the prayers, we greet one another with a kiss. Then the bread and a chalice containing wine mixed with water are presented to the one presiding over the brethren. He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of all. At the end of these prayers and Eucharist, all present express their approval by saying 'Amen'. Then each one present partakes of the consecrated Bread and Wine and also bring it to the absentees'.

The Eucharist was instituted at the last Supper. It was set in the context of the Jewish Paschal Meal. This is the meal which commemorates their deliverance from Egypt under the harsh King Pharaoh a thousand years before. It is through Christ's death and resurrection that we are delivered from sin and Satan and set free to live for and in Christ. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

The Catholic Church has always believed in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, not just during Mass but also outside of Mass. The Church refers to this as the 'Real Presence'.

'By the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the Bread into the substance of the body of Christ the Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His Blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation.

(Council of Trent in the 16th century).

Even in the early church this is what St John Chrysostom taught: When the priest pronounces the words 'this is my body' and 'this is my blood' the words transform the things offered into the Body and blood of Christ'. The presence remains as long as the species subsist. We acknowledge the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament by genuflecting before the tabernacle outside of Mass. We also expose the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance and position it on the altar before lighted candles. This is an opportunity to pray before Christ who is the 'bread of life'.

It was His love for us which led Jesus to the Cross. In the Mass and through Eucharistic adoration outside of Mass we are drawn into a more intimate union with Christ who loves us. We gradually become transformed into the kind of person Jesus was so that we are able to love others as Jesus does. Remember his parting words at the last Supper were: 'love one another as I have loved you'.

WE are encouraged to receive Holy Communion every time we come to Mass. However, we are only obliged to receive it once a year. The Eucharist also washes away our venial sins. Anyone conscious of grave sins should first have recourse to the Sacrament of Penance (Confession) before they receive Our Lord in Holy Communion.

Transubstantiation

Transubstantiation is the change of the substance of bread and wine into that of the body and blood of Christ, "Substance" here means what something is in itself. A hat's

shape is not the hat itself, nor is its colour the hat, nor is its size, nor its softness to the touch, nor anything else about it perceptible to the senses. The hat itself (the "substance") has the shape, the colour, the size, the softness and the other appearances, but is distinct from them. Whereas the appearances, which are referred to by the philosophical term accidents are perceptible to the senses, the substance is not.

Receiving the Eucharist

"A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to celebrate Mass or receive the body of the Lord without previous sacramental confession unless there is a grave reason and there is no opportunity to confess; in this case the person is to remember the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition which includes the resolution of confessing as soon as possible." [12]

"A person who is to receive the Most Holy Eucharist is to abstain for at least one hour before Holy Communion from any food and drink, except for only water and medicine." [13]