The Mass: An Act of Worship

Even though the Mass got its start in the Jewish ceremonial meal for a family, it is for a family that includes thousands and thousands of people. It is the main occasion for the community of the faithful to assemble, celebrating the Eucharist. Most important of all, it is a way that Christ stays physically present in His Church, and the Passover service was not directed to that end.

Jesus is our Passover, but unlike the Angel in Exodus, He does not come to rescue His people and then "Pass-over" and fly away. No, He rescues His people and remains with them.

The Apostles and their immediate successors stuck firmly with the liturgy that Christ established at the Last Supper - you cannot compromise with a directive like "Do this" - and on this foundation they framed the Mass as a unique liturgy in its own right. The core of the Mass has not changed. As time went by, though, other procedures, prayers, and symbols were attached to this basic framework, so that the Mass could do what it needs to do and be understood by everyone who attends.

Blessing Upon Entering Church

Upon entering Church, dip your finger in the holy water font and bless yourself, saying: "By this holy water and Your Precious Blood, cleanse me of my sins, O Lord."

At your chosen pew, genuflect to the altar and tabernacle. If you are unable to genuflect due to age or physical condition, then make a slight bow or nod of the head as a sign of adoration and devotion. Enter the pew and offer prayer.

Bells

The use of bells in sacred and secular worlds has a long and varied history. In sacred use, bells:

- announce the beginning of Mass,
- announce the presence of the unseen Deity,
- call the faithful to prayer
- call special attention to a significant part of the ritual or liturgy,

- deeply honor the unseen Deity when an instrument is held or given a prominent place and role which may symbolize or contain the presence of the Deity: the Monstrance or the Tabernacle,
- announce the Angelus Prayer (6:00 AM, Noon, 6:00 PM),
- close evening prayers in a monastery or church and,
- help us express our sorrow, as in the tolling of the bells.

A little before the consecration, the server may ring a bell as a signal to the faithful. The server may also ring the bell at the showing of both the host and the chalice.

To conclude, usually a signal with the bell should be given in order to elicit joy and attention.

Music in the Church

A visitor to the Catholic Church will notice paintings and statues, the Stations of the Cross or Way of the Cross, stained glass windows, colorful vestments and even the architecture, but there is another treasure which the Church has especially cherished: its music.

The Church has always regarded Her music as a "treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for preeminence is that, as a sacred song united to the words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy" (Second Vatican Council on the Liturgy). In other words, the sung parts of the Mass are exactly that: parts of the Mass. They are not just incidental music to listen to until something else happens in the liturgy, they are part of what is happening. So, the Church's music has substance. It is entirely different from secular music and is entirely different from revival hymns, gospel tunes, and commercial songs with religious themes, as well.

Flowers

We know the role that flowers play as decorative and beautiful, but are there any lessons we can learn from flowers at Mass?

- real flowers are God's creations and give glory to Him,
- the placement of flowers adds beauty to the altar and liturgy,
- their perfume or scent symbolizes our prayers rising to Heaven (as does incense),
- the variety of flowers and colors symbolizes the variety of people who worship the Father - the universality of the Church and,

- unhappily, flowers wilt and die. But even in dying, flowers teach a lesson: they remind us of our own mortality.

Getting the Most out of Mass

The best way we can show our love and gratitude to God is by faithfully worshipping Him at Mass every week. There are 168 hours in a week, and most services last about 35 to 40 minutes or about 0.005% of our time. The Mass is the greatest prayer of all, the central act of worship for a Catholic, and the source of uncounted blessings in our spiritual life.

If you want to make the Mass the most important thing in your life, you must put yourself completely into the Mass by:

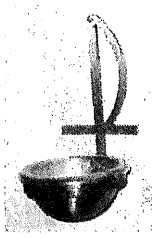
- arriving on time,
- genuflecting or bowing properly,
- watching what the priest does and listening to what he says,
- saying the responses clearly,
- singing the songs fervently,
- trying to get from the Scripture readings and the homily just one point that would make a difference in your life,
- paying particularly close attention during the Eucharistic Prayers, especially at the consecration of the bread and wine,
- receiving Holy Communion devoutly,
- taking time to say your thanksgiving to God after Communion,
- bowing as you leave the Church at the end of Mass and,
- endeavoring to live the rest of the week as God would want you to live.

A VISITOR'S GUIDE TO WHAT CATHOLICS BELIEVE AND HOW THEY WORSHIP



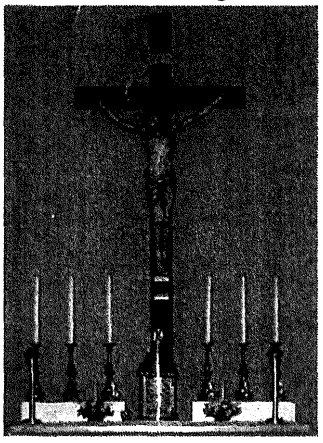
Scripture teaches that God *"destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ"* (Eph 1:5). At the entrance to our Church stands a statue of Our Blessed Mother, the woman foretold in Genesis (3:15), who, as a young girl, became the channel of all grace for humanity by accepting God's plan to become the mother of God incarnate saying, *"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word"* (Lk 1:38). From the cross, Jesus who *"saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, said 'Woman, behold, your son'* (and) *to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother'"* (Jn 16:26-27). Scripture informs us that we are the *"rest of her offspring...those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus"* (Rev 12:17). Inside the vestibule, is the Infant of Prague, a copy of an ancient relic, that affirms that Jesus was *"all God"* and *"all man"* from the time of his conception and, therefore, may be worshipped as infant, child and resurrected Savior. In the sanctuary are statues of St. Joseph with the Christ Child and St. Ann with St. Mary as a child. In the side chapel is a statue of Our Lady, Queen of Heaven, as depicted in Revelation (11:19-12:17). Prior to Bibles being available, the heroes of the Christian faith were portrayed by statues. Therefore, statues of faithful believers are placed in Churches as *"three dimensional"* pictures of esteemed saints for Christians to emulate. Saints are honored, never worshiped.



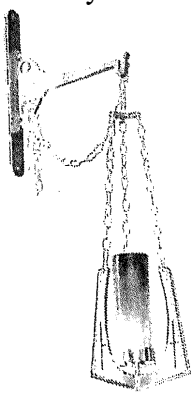


At each door of the Church there are fonts for holy water, sanctified by the bishop or priest for the purpose of use in baptism and anointing. As Catholics enter, they dip the tip of a finger and touch their forehead, stomach, left and then right shoulder in the traditional sign of the Cross while saying or mentally rehearsing, *"In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"*. The sign of the Cross is possibly the oldest Christian practice, recorded by first century Church Fathers affirming belief in the Trinity as central to the Catholic faith. Use of holy water renews the baptismal vow and is a regular reminder that Catholics are living temples of the Trinitarian God.

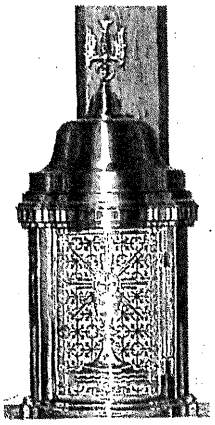
Over the altar is a life-size crucifix. Catholics rejoice at the resurrection of Christ but are admonished by St. Paul's, *"to know nothing... except Jesus Christ and him crucified"* (1Cor 2:2, see also Gal 6:14). Therefore, the Catholic Church preaches, *"Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles"* (1Cor 1:23). The crucifix is a vivid reminder to believers that, while freely offered, our salvation came through the eternally costly death of Christ and our hope is because of his resurrection. Catholics rejoice in the knowledge of the resurrection because, as St. Paul wrote, *"if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised... If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished, (for) if for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied"* (1Cor 15:13-19).



Mounted on the wall to the left of the altar is the Sanctuary Candle which is kept burning as witness

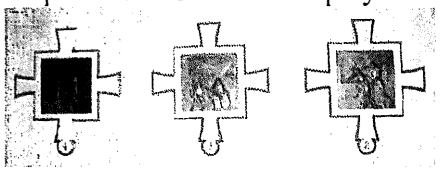


to the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the Tabernacle, located on the altar below the Crucifix. Christ made water into wine, multiplied the few loaves and fish to feed thousands and in the "*Bread of Heaven*" discourse said *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you"* (Jn 6:53; cf. 6:22-69). At the last supper he initiated the sacrament of the Eucharist when He said, *"This is my body... this is my blood"*, (Mt 26; Mk 14; Lk 22 & 1Cor 11). Thus, since the time of the apostles (cf. 1Cor 11:29) and as recorded by St. Ignatius of Antioch (c. AD 100) and St. Justin Martyr (c. AD 130) the Church has accepted scripture and taught that Christ's body, blood, soul and divinity are truly present in the consecrated bread and wine. This offering is the *"pure offering"* prophesied by Malachi, that will continue to the end of time and that is not to be *"profaned"* or *"despised"* (Mal. 1:11-12).



The Mass contains many prayers. In order to ensure that the prayers are intelligible, doctrinally correct and that verbal *faux pas* are kept to a minimum, Catholic prayers are written in advance and read. Two thousand years of continuous Church history provides for many thousands of devotional prayers that are orthodox, speak precisely to the believer's concerns, express the Church's mission and are appropriate for the liturgical season. *"The Lord's Prayer"*, recited in every Mass, *"is truly the summary of the whole gospel, the most perfect of prayers"* (Catechism 2774).

Around the walls of the congregational seating area are 14 plaques of the Stations of the Cross with depictions of events beginning with the condemnation of Jesus and ending with his burial. A special set of devotional prayers and songs are



recited and sung as a means of drawing the believer's attention to the love which Christ has for us sinners to remind us that if anyone *"would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"* (Matt 16:24; see also 10:38).

"Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ" (St. Jerome, c. 360 ad.). A Missal is placed in the book rack for use during each Mass. The Missal contains all the daily Bible passages that will be read and preached on during the current liturgical year. The Catholic Church has developed a liturgical calendar with daily readings that encompass almost the entire Bible during a three year cycle. Also contained in the Missal are the prayers, the creeds, order of services and a collection of hymns. The savvy reader will recognize that the majority of the prayers, hymns and creeds are composed of quotes directly from Scripture.



As Catholics enter the *nave*, or seating area, they genuflect by touching their right knee to the ground and cross themselves. Genuflection is toward the Tabernacle where the unused, consecrated host (bread), is stored. As mentioned above, by a mystery too great for us to understand, Christ is present body, blood, soul and divinity in the consecrated bread and his presence continues after the communion service is complete. The communion wine is always completely consumed but, since the consecrated host does not spoil, the host may be saved for the purposes of being taken to the sick, the shut-in or be used at the next Mass.



The Mass always begins and ends with a recitation of, *"In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* (Matt 28:19), at which time, the presiding priest and the worshippers cross themselves. Crossing oneself (frequently performed during personal prayer or devotions, when faced with direct confrontation by evil forces, or when seeking protective grace) is an outward proclamation of faith. The practice was universal by the beginning of the second century suggesting that it was practiced from the time of the Apostles and is presumed to reflect the fulfillment of the prophesy, *"the LORD said to him, 'Go through... Jerusalem, and put a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it'."* (Ezek 9:4) The Jewish Greek translation of Scripture, the Septuagint, rendered the Hebrew term for *"mark"* as *"Tau"*, a cross shaped mārk. (Holy Trinity, fresco by Luca Rossetti da Orta, 1738-9; St. Gaudenzio Church at Ivrea).

Catholics only worship one God, mysteriously in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. However, *"since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses"* (Heb 12:1a), the



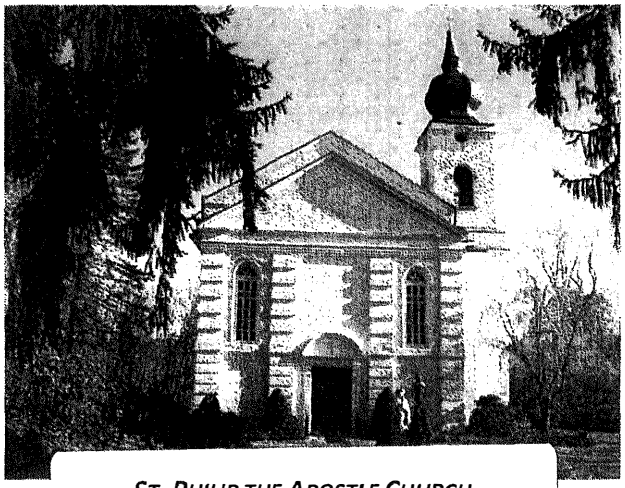
Catholic Church has recognized, from the time of the apostles, the doctrine of *"the Communion of the Saints"*. This doctrine, contained in the *Apostle's Creed* (c. Ad 150), recognizes that even after death Christians are still part of the one body of Christ. Therefore, one may request prayer from a saint in heaven just as readily as from a fellow "living" believer. Scripture makes it clear that the saints and angels pray for us and intervene for us with God (Matt 18:10; Rev 5:8; 8:3-4). As Catholics we talk with and make petition to the saints knowing that, *"The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects"* (Jas 5:16). Knowing that *"God our*

Savior... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1Tim 2:1& 3-4), it stands to reason that those who have attained heaven are consumed with God's greatest concern; the salvation of any who may believe.

"The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him" (Hab 2:20). The congregation maintains a worshipful silence, or close to silence, prior to the start of Mass because



this building is God's house and the *"Lord of lords, the King of kings, God incarnate"* is truly present. Most Catholics begin by immediately kneeling and praying for personal concerns. During the Mass, worshippers kneel or stand for prayers. The elderly or infirm may continue to sit. (Juan de Juanes; The Last Supper; 1560).



ST. PHILIP THE APOSTLE CHURCH

All Biblical references are from the Revised Standard Version.
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