

The Mass

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Give us, our Father, a sense of your presence as we prepare to reflect on the mass. Grant us the wisdom to see the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection as we remember your goodness through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture

“When you meet in one place, then, it is not to eat the Lord's supper, for in eating, each one goes ahead with his own supper, and one goes hungry while another gets drunk. Do you not have houses in which you can eat and drink? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and make those who have nothing feel ashamed? What can I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this matter I do not praise you. For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup.” *(1 Corinthians 11:20-29)*

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

Saint Paul's reference to the "Lord's Supper" in 1 Corinthians 11:20 highlights the importance that he feels Jesus placed on this last meal with his disciples. Supper in Paul's tradition refers to a full meal. The early Christian community saw the Lord's Supper as an experience full of expectations of the final kingdom. No matter how it is viewed, this experience which Jesus requested to be continued in his memory must be viewed in the context of Jesus' complete ministry of table fellowship.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

The Catechism of the Catholic Church presents an extensive section on the celebration of the Church's liturgy. While it refers to signs and symbols, singing and music, holy images, and liturgical seasons, the Mass is mostly viewed and experienced as an action performed by the people of God through the language of faith which includes all persons and incorporates all cultures. To participate in the celebration of the Mass is to truly be engulfed in a sacrament of unity.

The Mass is at the heart of the Church's life. In the Mass, Christ Himself is present to His people in the Paschal Mystery. Rich in symbolism through ritual and gestures, the Mass bears within itself the whole mystery of Christ and brings to us His saving work. Through the church's history, the Mass had developed in many places at the same time. There naturally arose a variety of forms, which reflected the cultures of the various faith communities as well as the different theological insights and devotional preferences of the people. These developments have evolved into a beautiful expression of the Christian life in the Mass through four basic movements. The Introductory Rites where the community gathers together, the Liturgy of the Word where the community reflects on God's presence

to humanity and through the Scriptures, the Liturgy of the Eucharist where the community offers its gifts, gives thanks and shares a meal, and finally the Concluding Rites where the celebration comes to an end. Each one of these movements builds on the other. Each provides the opportunity for our individual faith story to enter into dialogue with the faith story of the whole Catholic community, and the ongoing story of God.

Introductory Rites – As the Mass begins, we gather and prepare to become a worshipping community. The presider welcomes the assembly; we make the sign of the cross, remembering that we need God’s mercy and forgiveness, then give glory to God. This gathering process is based on the experience of belonging as we prepare to enter prayer. Through baptism, we learn that we are part of a community and that we become a part of the great and wonderful family of God’s church throughout the world. And when we gather we need to make sure that there is room in our hearts for everyone to gather at the table with us, even room for those we don’t see. This is the purpose of the Penitential Rite. We clear the space in our hearts by acknowledging sin in our lives so that we are able to ask forgiveness and forgive others.

Liturgy of the Word – During the Liturgy of the Word we hear two readings from scripture that cause us to remember and praise God’s presence and saving activity in history and in the present. When the Gospel is read we hear and respond to the Good News. At the homily we reflect on God’s message and its application to our daily lives. This section comes to a close by praying the Creed, and the Prayer of the Faithful. We express our belief in God and ask for God’s help. This storytelling ritual lets us feast on God’s Word as it places before us the reality of our own truth, so we can be challenged to change our lives and be more Christ-like.

Liturgy of the Eucharist - As we begin the Liturgy of the Eucharist we present our gifts of bread and wine, give thanks for God’s gift of friendship, and share a meal by accepting God’s gift – Jesus Christ. We must realize that there are all kinds of food, but God knows that we need the best food - we need love. And so God gives us Jesus as our food. On the altar we see how great God’s love is for us as Jesus’ body is broken for us, and His blood poured out. By remembering often and by expressing profound gratitude we are able to remain close to Jesus throughout our lives. Sharing the Bread of Life by receiving communion can make us feel different. We become more aware of God’s presence in our lives.

Concluding Rite - The Mass ends with the presider blessing and dismissing the community. This ritual allows for a transition from prayer and community to our individual lives. We thank God for the opportunity to serve Him and receive our mission to live the Gospel by going out into the world to carry on the mission of Jesus. The Mass sends us out to bring to others the love we have received.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for a general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. Which of the four movements is most meaningful to you, and why?
2. What are your most memorable experiences at Mass? What qualities did they possess?
3. How do Serra gatherings nurture the community of Serrans just as the Mass nurtures the parish members?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

In summary, to worship God through the Mass means to express love and gratitude. It is here we meet the creator of all and ponder the depth of love as shown by Jesus' magnificent life, and the new life given through His resurrection in the Holy Spirit. This communion of love between God and God's people bonds a congregation of holy people in its mission around the world.

Bibliography

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