

THE MASS

Lesson Five: Preparing For Sacrifice

Introduction:

“Holy Communion is the shortest and surest way to heaven. There are others: innocence, for instance, but that is for little children; penance, but we are afraid of it; endurance of the trials of life, but when they come we weep and ask to be spared. Once for all, beloved children, the surest, easiest, shortest way is by the Eucharist. It is so easy to approach the holy table, and there we taste the joys of paradise”.

- Pope Saint Pius X

We are reminded that the goal of our worship at Mass is a physical and spiritual encounter with The Lord, or as Bishop Barron states : *“ (It is) the most intense communion with Christ that is possible, as He becomes really, truly, substantially present to us.”*

So we bring ourselves more fully into preparation for this great moment through three distinct actions:

- 1.) The Preparation of the Gifts
- 2.) The Eucharistic Prayer
- 3.) The Rite of Communion

THE PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS

This is not a “downtime” during the Mass. We should remember what is being represented here. The Bread and wine are presented on behalf of us all. These are the products of creation itself: air, soil, wind sunshine, and rain go into the making of these elements. These are also the fruits of our labors: planting, tending, harvesting, grinding and pressing. Even packaging and transporting go into the final products.

Likewise, we present our monetary gifts to God at this time. This is both a sacrifice of gratitude as well as faith. In last week’s gospel Jesus assures His disciples that The Father judges the gift based upon the heart and the sacrifice of the giver that is represented here. We must never forget that “God loveth a cheerful giver” as the Proverbs tell us. Here is a genuine test of faith in the promises of God. “God is never

outdone in generosity” we are told by Saint Bernadette. Pope St. John Paul encourages us with his words as well: “Your being increases with the measure in which you give it away.”

Why did so many miracles abound in the first century Church? Perhaps Acts Chapter two hold the key...faith plus giving.

Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the Apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common and sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all, as anyone had need. And the Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved. - Acts 2: 42-44, 47

PREPARING FOR CONSECRATION:

We now enter the most solemn and mysterious part of the Mass; The Eucharistic prayer and the consecration. I have a friend who is actively involved in missionary work in Trieste Italy. His main task is to persuade people to abandon the Catholic Church and join his evangelical group. When he described the Eucharistic prayer (specifically the First Epiclesis) as the “ultimate act of pagan blasphemy”, and how he teaches people that it is during this prayer that the Roman priest – acting similar to the Egyptian priests – “commands God to come down from heaven to his altar, believing that God must obey his command” I told him he is somewhat correct, but only in the sense that God has given this power to men – specifically the Apostles of Christ and their successors – and must obey only in the sense that God will not break His covenant with the Church. I also reminded him that this belief is so firmly held by Catholic and Orthodox Christians, he should not be surprised by the very small number of converts he has secured in his 30 years of ministry. This very act – this sacred mystery – has been the center of our faith for 2000 years, and no other belief even dared to challenge it until the mid 16th century.

Many more mysteries and rituals abound during this time in the celebration, but I’ll let Bishop Barron detail those for us in the video. It is no wonder that we are experiencing the “source and summit” of the Christian life” at this time. Unless one has experienced this for themselves, no amount of explanation can convey its powerful meaning and message.