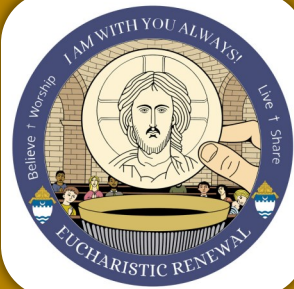


Encountering the Eucharist

Believe ✦ Worship ✦ Live ✦ Share



The two small bottles or vessels that are used to contain the water and wine used at the Consecration at Mass are called cruets. The General Instructions of the *Roman Missal* say, "It is praiseworthy for the bread and wine to be presented by the faithful. They are then accepted at an appropriate place by the priest or the deacon and carried to the altar. Even though the faithful no longer bring from their own possessions the bread and wine intended for the liturgy as in the past, nevertheless the rite of carrying up the offerings still retains its force and spiritual significance." These offerings represent ourselves. The bread and wine symbolize what we have and what we are, and we acknowledge that it all comes from God and it all belongs to God.

What We Believe...

The Mass Is A Sacrifice

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that "The *Holy Sacrifice* [of the Mass]...makes present the one sacrifice of Christ the Savior and includes the Church's offering. The terms *holy sacrifice of the Mass*, 'sacrifice of praise,' *spiritual sacrifice*, *pure and holy sacrifice* are also used" (#1330). These phrases and terms are probably familiar as we've heard them before especially during the liturgy. But what does it mean to call the Mass a "sacrifice?" In common usage, the word "sacrifice" has the meaning of foregoing or giving-up something that we like or want for the sake of some benefit for ourselves or someone else. For example, during Lent we willingly forego food as a self-sacrifice and penitential act to remind ourselves of the poor and our obligation to share what we have with them. Another way we understand "sacrifice" is through giving something away to help someone else. For instance a family member needs a kidney and we undergo surgery to remove one of our kidneys giving it to them so that the family member can live. It is perhaps in these ways that we understand the Mass is a sacrifice. We think we "give-up" our time and maybe some other activities that might be more exciting or appealing and we *sacrifice* them to God by our attendance at Mass. This is partially true of course, but that is not precisely what we mean when the Mass is described as a sacrifice. Literally, the word "sacrifice" comes from two Latin words: *sacrum facere* meaning "to make holy." If we allow ourselves to meditate on this for just a second it will become apparent that in some way when talking about the "sacrifice of the Mass," it has something to do with actions directed toward our holiness, that is our sanctification. The definitive act whereby we are justified and thus made holy so as to stand before God in righteousness was the death of Jesus on the cross. Nonetheless, many of us view the crucifixion as a historical event that happened over two thousand years ago. We might have a somewhat vague notion that in a way we can't quite explain, the death of Christ redounds to our benefit and takes away our sin. Yet we generally conceptualize the crucifixion as a uniquely singular event long removed from our contemporary situation. And we would be wrong! In the Mass we experience the crucifixion right here, right now in our own time in history. We are not just "remembering" a past event, but we actually partake of the event *AS IF* we were living through those events in the present. The Mass is about flooding the memory and binding the mind to the eternal. In evoking the past, meaning is restored to the present and hope assured for the future. The Mass is a sacrifice not because we are "giving-up" something to be there, but because we are sacramentally witnessing the remission of our sins, our sanctification, and the renewal of our inner person by being present at the foot of the cross and watching Our Lord offer Himself to the Father in an unbloody manner. It is the *sacrifice of Christ* that is being made present at each Mass. "The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice: The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross;

continued on the back

“The Mass Is A Sacrifice” continued from the front...

only the manner of offering is different." "And since in this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and offered in an unbloody manner" (CCC. #1367). Conceiving of the Mass as a re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice on the cross in this "unbloody" way might be challenging. Some people might have been taught that the Mass is principally a sacred *meal* and we are reenacting the events of the Last Supper. If the Eucharist that Jesus instituted on Holy Thursday was just a meal, then Jesus' death on Good Friday was just a Roman execution! Obviously, there is something more profound happening at Mass than some type of ritual meal. A ritual sacrifice in the bible always had three parts: the offering of the victim, the slaying of the victim, and consuming the victim either by immolation (i.e. destroying by fire) or by burial. So too, in the Liturgy of the Eucharist there are the same three parts. In the Offertory, bread and wine are brought to the altar where the priest elevates them and offers those gifts of God—the fruit of the earth and vine—and gives them back to God. The sacrifice actually happens when the words of consecration are spoken. A two-fold consecration takes place: first the bread and then the wine. When the bread is consecrated it transubstantiates into the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus. When the wine is consecrated, a mystical "separation" happens. The blood is presented in distinction from and, in a sense "extracted" from the body (while retaining the whole Christ). This separation is allegorical as death occurs when a body is exsanguinated. Finally, the sacrifice is consumed by the priest through eating and drinking. Incidentally, if the priest doesn't consume the body and blood, the Mass is declared invalid.



“Today the Lord wants you to honor His life wholly given to us in the Blessed Sacrament. You must be as a burning candle with no other desire than to be consumed in His honor. Surrender yourself to the Mercy of Providence and let Him do with you according to His designs.”

-from the writings of
St. Margaret Mary Alacoque

Life in the Eucharist: St. Margaret Mary Alacoque



St. Margaret Mary was born in Burgundy, France in 1647. At an early age she was drawn to devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. When she was 23, she joined the Visitation Sisters and became a nun. In 1673, she began to receive apparitions of Jesus. Those messages formed

the basis of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It's the love of Jesus for us in the Eucharist. The Sacred Heart devotion is therefore linked to the Eucharist in such a way that devotion to the Sacred Heart and the Eucharist are the same. Jesus specifically asked St. Margaret Mary to make reparation for all those who mistreat Him in the Eucharist: "Behold the heart which has so loved men

that it has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming itself, in order to testify its love; in return, I receive from the greater part only ingratitude, by their irreverence and sacrilege, and by the coldness and contempt they have for me in this sacrament of love." Our attitude towards the holy Eucharist is directly related to our love for Jesus and the love He showed us on the cross. His living Sacred Heart **is present** in the host we receive!

Adoro te Devote: The Eucharistic Prayer

The Eucharistic Prayer—also called the “Canon of the Mass,” sometimes called by the Greek word *Anaphora*, is the heart of the Mass. It is indeed an offering, something borne or “carried up” to the Father. The priest, acting in the very person of Christ, offers to God the Father, Himself for the sin of the world. “Jesus accomplished the only one sacrifice, the one great sacrifice, when, as priest and victim, He offered Himself on the altar of the cross. His sacrifice need not and cannot be repeated. But it can be re-presented so that we are able, sacramentally and spiritually, to enter it and draw spiritual nourishment from it.”* The oldest Eucharist Prayer is the one of Hippolytus of Rome, in the *Apostolic Tradition* (c. 215). Eucharist Prayer II is an adaptation of this ancient canon.

* from *The Mass* by Donald Wuerl, p. 153

