



What is the Sacrifice of the Mass?

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The Council of Trent (1545-1563) taught that the Mass is the same as Calvary, "*only the manner of offering being changed*" from bloody to unbloody [following the example of the High Priest Melchizedek, Genesis 14].

The sacrifice of the Mass (in contrast to pagan concepts) has two elements: the outward sign and the interior dispositions. The outward sign expresses and promotes the interior. Without the interior [disposition] it would be worthless. Hence, God once complained through Isaiah 29:13: "*This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.*" We need to take care that we do not descend into mere externalism, thinking it enough to just make the responses and sing, etc.

At the Last Supper, the outward sign was Jesus' offering of body and blood (the two Eucharistic species). In the Mass, by the agency of a human priest (who acts "in the person of Christ") (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* (LG) #10) Christ continues and repeats His sacrificial offering. The external sign is multiplied as many times as there are Masses.

Since the Mass has the same external sign, and the same interior dispositions on the part of Christ, we rightly call it a sacrifice, the continuation of Calvary. It does not need to earn redemption all over [and each time]- that was done once for all (Hebrews 9:28) by Jesus' death. So, it pleases God to have the Mass provide the means for the distribution of what was once for all on Calvary.

Catechists often like to use the memory word **ACTS** to express the dispositions: **adoration**, **contrition**, **thanksgiving**, and **supplication**. This is not wrong, but it leaves out the essential disposition of [our] **obedience** to the [Will of God, the] Father (cf. Romans 5:19 and LG #3).

Firstly, at the Last Supper, Jesus ordered, "**Do this in memory of me**" [Luke 22:19]. Since we were not there [at the Last Supper], He wants us to join our dispositions to His. The Liturgy Encyclical of Pius XII, **Mediator Dei** [1947], explains well that the people can be said to exercise their royal priesthood, to offer the Mass with the priest: first, "from the fact that the priest at the altar in offering a sacrifice in the name of all [the faithful present], does so in the person of Christ," whose

members they are. [as the Body of Christ]. Since only the ordained priest acts "in the person of Christ", Vatican II says (LG #10) that the ordained priesthood differs from that of the laity in essence.

Secondly, the people can be said to offer since: "The people join their hearts in praise, petition, expiation and thanksgiving with the prayers or intention of the priest. In fact, of the High Priest Himself, so that in the one and same of offering of the Victim ... they may be presented to God the Father "(cf: Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 39:556 [1947]). Vatican II explains (LG # 10) that this is what it means for them to "offer spiritual sacrifices".

These spiritual sacrifices consist of their obedience to the will of the Father, already carried out, and planned for the future (cf. LG #34). This includes their works, their bearing the troubles of life, their prayers, their apostolic efforts, their living out the duties of their state in life, even their relaxation of body and mind if all these things are done as part of the Father's plan, to enable them to serve Him better. We can call this a royal priesthood, since to live this way is to reign, instead of being a slave to vices (2 Peter 2:19) [and this world].

We can see how Vatican II calls the Mass the renewal of the new covenant: in the making of that new covenant, the essential condition, which gave it all its value was obedience, the obedience of Jesus, which is to be re-presented again on the altar, so we may join with it. His Mother shared in this sacrifice by her obedience on Calvary, and now, as St Pope John Paul II taught: she "is at every altar" because "she was present at the original sacrifice", sharing in it, and now from heaven, she still joins her will to His, as He offers the flesh and blood He received from her.

The graces of the Mass are communicated in accord with how often the Mass is offered for a certain intention, the dispositions of the priest, the dispositions of the faithful who join with him, the dispositions of those for whom it is offered, and God's Providence. We say we offer the Mass in honor of Our Lady, the angels, particular Saints. In it we thank God for what He has done for them, and for us through them. But we offer the Mass to God alone.

The Mass brings forgiveness for venial sins, for which there is sorrow, and for temporal punishment, commonly left over after forgiveness of sins.

[The Intention of the] Mass may be offered for the living or the dead. Special benefits are for the priest who offers, and those for whom a Mass is specially offered, and for those who actively participate at the Mass.

In it we recall not only His death, but also His Resurrection, as Eucharistic Prayer I [the Roman Canon] reminds us.

That is why, regular Mass attendance along with our full, active participation on Sundays and Holydays of Obligation remains an **obligation**; binding under grave personal sin each and any time we do not fulfill our obligation, without a just cause or reason (i.e., sickness or hospitalization, work schedule conflict, suddenly no means of transportation, etc.). If we can't come to the Mass, Catholics are encouraged to at least watch a livestreamed Mass that day and make a "*spiritual communion*". St. Pope John Paul II wrote that "it is good to *cultivate in our hearts a constant desire for the sacrament of the Eucharist*. The practice of "*spiritual communion*", has been established in the Church for centuries (cf: *Ecclesia Eucharistia*, 34).