

What is the Mass? For what is the sacrifice of the Mass offered?

Let's begin with what the mass is not. The mass is not a community or common meal designed to strengthen our unity and "gather us in." Feelings of unity and community can be strengthened at any number of events, including: potlucks or Church picnics. At most, feeling unified with our brothers and sisters in Christ is a nice byproduct of the Mass, but it is certainly not its chief end.

Second, the Mass is not about "us—you or I". It is not about having a wonderful or entertaining "weekend experience," as one new parish based program recently claimed. Nor is its purpose to make us feel good about ourself: to encourage you, to inspire you, or to make you feel included and welcomed. We—you and I—simply aren't the audience—God is, and the Mass is all about Him.

So, what is the Mass essentially? It is first and foremost a sacrifice. In fact, it is the once for all sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, that transcends human time and space, made present for us again and again in an unbloody manner. It is the perfect sacrifice that all the Old Testament sacrifices prefigured (cf: Malachi 1:11). In it, Jesus Christ lovingly offers himself in an act of oblation [something presented or offered to God] to God the Father on our behalf. He *adores* God the Father; he *atones* for our sins; he offers *thanks* and praise; and he *petitions* for our needs.

As Catholics, we have the privilege of attending this sacrifice, and uniting ourselves to Christ's self-offering. Put another way, we can imitate Christ by offering ourselves, souls and bodies, to God the Father as "living sacrifices," as St. Paul says (cf: Romans 12:1). This is what participation in the Mass really means.

In the prayer *Orate Frates* [Prayer Over the Offerings/Gifts], the priest acknowledges this participation of the faithful when he prays:

"Pray brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the Almighty Father."

The Four Ends of the Holy Mass



Now that we've discussed what the Mass is, let's briefly look at its four ends or purposes.

1. **Adoration** – The Holy Mass is first and foremost an *act of loving adoration*. It is worship of God our Father. Why? Because he deserves it. Almighty God is the most perfect and all that exists owes its existence to him. He is the Supreme Good, the Good from which all other goods receive their existence and meaning. He is the Supreme Beauty, the sole standard by which, we can recognize and understand that which is beautiful. And he is Love itself; giving of himself from all eternity. He alone is worthy of our awe-struck adoration.

“*Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created,*” the saints and angels cry in the book of Revelation (cf: Revelation 4:11), and the Mass is participation in this heavenly worship.

2. **Thanksgiving** – All that we are and have comes from God’s generous hand. Every good, every blessing finds its source in God alone, and our very existence is dependent on his will. In response to God’s endless generosity, which we often don’t even notice, thanksgiving is the only acceptable response. And guess what? True gratitude is one of the most joyful feelings we can have. “*I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought,*” said G.K. Chesterton, “*and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.*” That is exactly what the Holy Mass should be—an experience of happiness, doubled by wonder.

3. **Atonement** – We are all sinners, and while we do our best to rationalize and minimize it, all sin is a grave offense against God, incurring his just wrath. However, while we all deserve hell, we are not without hope. On the Cross, Jesus atoned for our sins totally and completely, and we have the assurance that, if we turn to him in repentance and faith, we can find forgiveness and healing.

The sacrifice of Christ on the Holy Cross is our certain hope, and the Holy Mass is the representation of this sacrifice. Therefore, the third end of the mass is atonement for our sins. The Book of Revelation describes Christ appearing as a “*Lamb as if it had been slain*” (cf: Revelation 5:6). In heaven, Jesus stands before God’s throne, offering God the Father his once for all sacrifice in continual atonement for our sins and the sins of the whole world. This reality is made present at every Mass.

4. **Petition** – The Mass is a powerful form of prayer. In fact, it is *the* most powerful prayer the Church possesses. St. Jerome once said, “*Without doubt, the Lord grants all favors which are asked of Him in Mass, provided they be fitting for us.*” Many of the saints tell us that bringing our requests before Our Lord after the consecration is one of the most effective ways to obtain all that we spiritually and physically need.

Go to Mass

In every mass, Jesus Christ descends upon the altar in the fullness of his Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. He is truly present, giving himself to us completely in the Holy Eucharist. It is truly the sacrifice of Calvary made present once again. What a beautiful and profound reality! As St. Padre Pio once said, “*If we only knew how God regards this Sacrifice, we would risk our lives to be present at a single Mass.*” Why would we miss Mass for anything?

(SR: <https://catholicgentleman.com/2014/10/four-ends-mass/>)