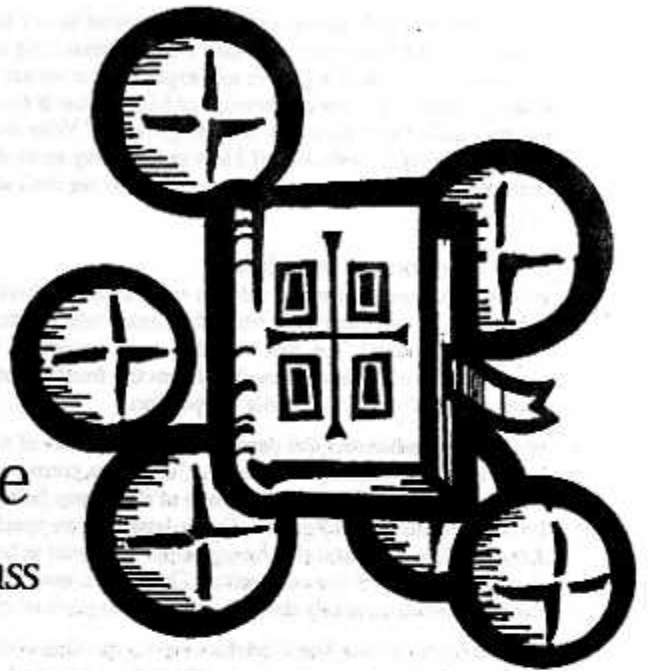


Give Thanks and Praise

A Popular Explanation of the Mass



Part 1 Introduction

Sunday after Sunday, year after year, Catholics have come together to celebrate the Mass. This weekly gathering of the community is a hallmark of the Church. From the earliest days of Christianity coming together on the Lord's Day has characterized the followers of Christ. We assemble for common prayer, to hear the scriptures proclaimed and explained, and to share in the eucharist. This tradition of marking the Lord's Day with common prayer is an essential part of our lives as a community of God's people.

The Development of a Tradition

Having its origins in the meal celebrated by Jesus with his apostles at the Last Supper, the Christian Sunday celebration soon incorporated various ritual elements from Jewish and other cultural practices. Throughout the centuries the development of the Mass has varied according to diverse places and religious mentalities. While preserving a fundamental outline, this history followed many and often divergent paths. There were borrowings by local churches from other local churches. There were many additions to the ritual, some of which lasted for centuries while others were soon abandoned. There existed many popular understandings of the Mass which in turn influenced or were influenced by the manner in which the Mass was celebrated.

The Reform of a Tradition

Not all the historical developments of the Mass were happy ones. This is why the bishops at the Second Vatican Council called for a reform of the Mass that would bring out more clearly the intrinsic nature and purpose of its several parts, the connection between them, and would more readily achieve the devout, active participation of the faithful. (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 50)

This reform of the structure of the Mass has already been accomplished. The Church has provided us with a basic pattern for our Sunday worship. According to all reports the vast majority of Catholics are happy with the changes that have taken place. People are beginning to feel that the Mass is indeed their Mass, that they are called upon and have an opportunity to participate actively in its celebration.

A Challenge for the Future

Even though we have made considerable liturgical progress over the last two decades, our American bishops in 1983 issued a word of warning. We must not yield to complacency.

There have been many significant liturgical gains in the past twenty years, but there remain many areas of unfinished liturgical business ... we must continue to make efforts to appreciate and open our hearts to the spiritual and prayerful dimensions of the liturgy. (*The Church at Prayer: A Holy Temple of the Lord*, no. 46)

