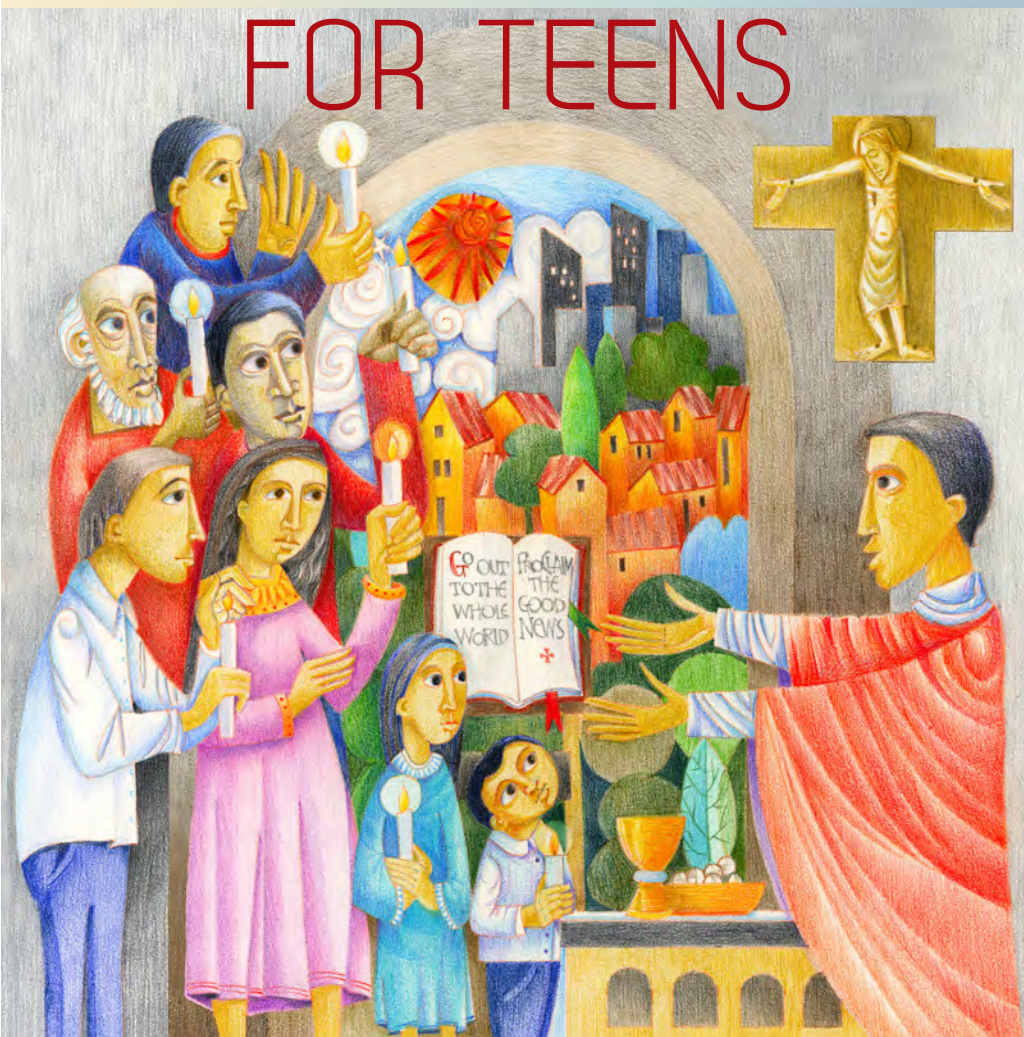


# FROM MASS TO MISSION

Understanding the Mass and Its  
Significance for Our Christian Life

## FOR TEENS



TRISH SULLIVAN VANNI

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In fond memory of Rev. Kevin Seasoltz, OSB, who taught that our gracious God lives for giving, especially in the Eucharist. —PSV and DAN

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The title of this booklet was inspired by *Dies Domini*, 45. The cover of this book presents a metaphorical illustration of our charge to go forth from Mass as disciples enlightened by the light of Christ (see Matthew 28:16–20).

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# Why Is Going to Mass Important?



“The Church and the world have a great need of eucharistic worship. Jesus waits for us in this sacrament of love.”

—Pope John Paul II, *Dominicae Cenae*, 3



It's Sunday morning. Someone is shaking you awake. “Don't oversleep!” they say. “You will be late for being part of the mystical body of Christ! The outpouring of God's love! The sacramentality of the universe revealed!”

Well, that's probably not how it goes. But it could. Because going to Mass, the celebration of the Eucharist, is all of that, and a lot more. “It's boring,” you might say. “It's always the same. I'd rather sleep in.” But if you were



Christ is always ready to welcome us.

to experience the reality of being in the presence of Christ at Mass, if you knew in your heart that he would be waiting there especially for you, his arms open, his heart filled with forgiveness and love, ready to meet with you and give himself to you, would you feel the same way? If Sunday morning was your personal date to be in the company of Christ, would it feel the same?

Most of us first learned about the Mass when we were preparing for First Communion. As we mature, we have the opportunity to deepen our understanding of what the Mass means in our lives and to our faith. That's the purpose of this booklet, to offer you

a more advanced understanding of what it means to participate at Mass more fully, and why this is absolutely central to our lives as Roman Catholic Christians.

When we understand and embrace the meaning of this gift that Christ has given us in the Eucharist, we can enter into the experience with hearts and minds that are more open to the mystery that it holds. We can begin to make connections between what we do at Mass and our commitment to justice, charity, and service in the world. We can become people who not only know Christ, but who also participate in the life and mission of the global Catholic community, inviting others to know him, love him, and serve him with joy and conviction.

In this book you will be learning about what the Church teaches about the Mass.



- ❖ **How do you relate to the Mass?**
- ❖ **Do you find that reading this book provides an opportunity for you to change your perspectives about the Mass?**
- ❖ **Are you open to having your perspective on the Mass altered, or even transformed?**

## The Many Names for the Mass

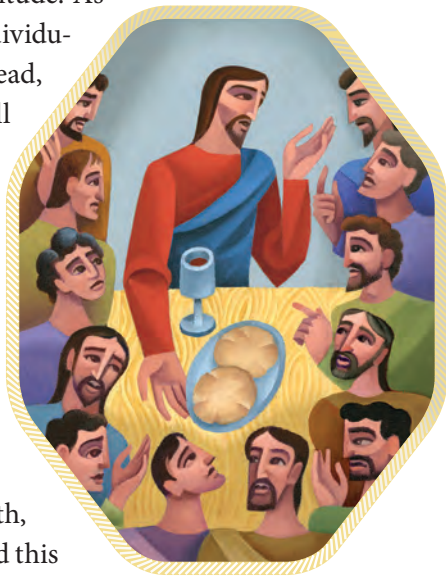
We give the Mass many names. The word *Mass* itself comes from the Latin word *missa*, which means “mission.” At the end of Mass, the priest or deacon sends us out into the world with a very important task: “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.” What we pray at Mass is an English translation of some Latin texts. If we attended a Mass in Latin, the priest would dismiss us with this phrase: “*Ite, missa est,*” which, translated literally, means, “Go, she [the Church] has been sent.” And so, what we call this entire celebration actually means “mission.” What we do at Mass is so important that it has a profound effect on how we live in the world.

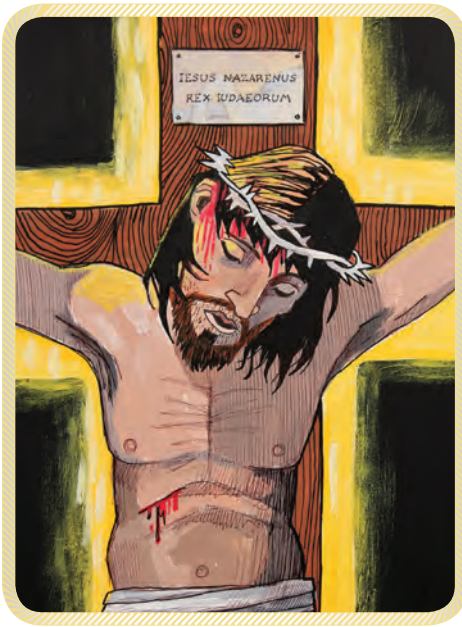
We call the Mass *Eucharist*, which means “thanksgiving,” or “to give thanks.” Eucharist is often used to refer to the sacrament itself but it also refers to the entire celebration of the Mass. To participate at Mass is to be part of a momentous, living act of gratitude. As Catholics, we don’t just thank God individually and in the silence of our hearts; instead, we come together physically to recall what God has done for us, thank God, and receive with gratitude the bread and wine that have been transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. We express gratitude for the abundance of our lives, the magnificence of creation, and our redemption in Jesus Christ.

We call the Mass *the Lord’s Supper*. Before embracing his Passion and Death, Jesus gathered his disciples and instituted this holy meal. He took the bread and said the blessing, broke the bread, and shared it; he took a cup of wine, blessed it, and shared it. His promise was that whenever this was done in remembrance of him,



The Mass sends us forth with a mission.





he would be there, and his followers would become one body in him.

We speak of the Mass as both a *sacrifice* and a *memorial*. Jesus Christ made the perfect sacrifice in his Death on the Cross, and this one sacrifice is made eternally present in the Eucharist. The same Jesus Christ who gave himself freely on the Cross at Calvary, establishing the new, eternal covenant, now offers himself and becomes present to us in the sacrifice of the Mass. We call the Eucharist a memorial because in the Mass, we recount the Lord's Passion and proclaim his Resurrection anew. We

### Real Memory

Have you ever seen a memorial to something? When most people visit Washington, DC, our nation's capital, they make a day of visiting memorials. There are buildings commemorating the lives of presidents and other noteworthy Americans. When we visit these places, we are reminded of bygone events. We may find ourselves feeling reverent or emotionally stirred.



When we speak of the Eucharist as a memorial, our first impulse may be to think of it as being somehow the same as these other memorials—something that spurs our memory. In our liturgical theology, however, it means much more.

Christ instituted the Eucharist so that humankind might have an everlasting, living memorial of what he would accomplish in his Death and Resurrection—the forgiveness of sin and the reconciliation of all of humanity with God. He entrusted the Church with this memorial so that throughout the ages, his followers would directly experience what he had accomplished on the Cross.

We believe that when we memorialize Christ's life, he becomes present for the worshipping assembly. We are not simply having a recollection of something, however moving. We believe that every time we pray the Mass, God makes present the very thing we are remembering, here and now, right in this very moment. We call this anamnesis or "real memory"; an eternal now moment!

remember that Jesus Christ has conquered sin and death once and for all, and has reconciled all of humanity to God. Transformed by Christ, we become a sign and an instrument of God’s love and promise. What an amazing thing to remember!

The Mass is also called liturgy. The word *liturgy* is from the Greek word *leitourgia*, which means the work of the people. The Mass is not the work of one person—the priest—but the entire community that is worshipping God.

## An Encounter with Christ

Each Sunday, we commemorate the Lord’s Passion, Death, and Resurrection in the Mass. With one heart and voice, we celebrate that Jesus Christ not only freed us from sin, but embraced us in his Resurrection and achieved our salvation. At Mass we encounter Christ, joining ourselves—body, mind, and spirit—to our Redeemer, who pours himself out for us.

At its heart, the Mass makes present the reality of how completely loved we are. God loves us with an unlimited, infinite, perfect, almost humanly incomprehensible love. In fact, “God is love” (1 John 4:16b), a love that comes to us as pure gift. It is a gift that never stops giving. He sent us Jesus his Son, and with and through him the Holy Spirit, so that we would be empowered to do the one thing he asks in return: that we love God and love one another.

When we celebrate the Mass, we are remembering that Jesus Christ came into human experience and brought with him grace, reconciliation, and life everlasting. He did this through his suffering, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension into heaven. We call that pattern “the Paschal Mystery” (see also page 4). *Paschal* is an English word that derives from the Hebrew word *Pesach*, or *Passover*.



The saving Death of Jesus is associated with the Jewish festival of Passover because the Last Supper was most likely a Passover meal. At Passover, then and now, the Jews recount how God helped Moses obtain their freedom from captivity in ancient Egypt.

On the first night of Passover, the Torah instructs Jews to ritually slaughter a lamb, commemorating the first night before the Exodus. On that night, the enslaved Israelites marked their doorposts with the blood of a lamb, a sign to the angel of death to pass by their homes and spare their firstborn sons.

**“This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.”**

**—John 15:12**

But unlike the Passover account in Exodus, the Paschal Mystery of Christ affirms God’s saving plan for all people, not just the Jewish people. In Christian tradition, Christ is called “the Lamb of God,” because he has become the perfect—and final—sacrifice. The First Letter of Peter notes, “You were ransomed from your futile conduct, handed on by your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ as of a spotless unblemished lamb” (1 Peter 1:18).



Christ is present to us in many ways during the liturgy.



We use the phrase “the Real Presence” to describe how Christ is truly present in the Eucharist. However, Christ is present to us in other ways during the Mass. This is one of the great mysteries of our faith. Christ is present in his Word when the Scriptures are proclaimed, in the priest, and in the faithful who are gathered with the priest to pray. Most especially, Christ is substantially present in the Eucharist.

When we come together at Mass, we are not merely imitating, replicating, or reproducing an event that happened in Jerusalem long ago. The Mass is not mere recollection. We believe that every time we pray the Mass, God makes present the very thing we are remembering, here and now, right in this very moment. We bring our fears and our hopes, our personal and global concerns, and we place them before the Lord, trusting that he hears our prayers and is concerned about our every need. God is waiting to hold us in our struggles with school, our conflicts with our parents, siblings, or teachers, and our challenges in our friendships or with those we’re dating. God is listening for the deepest longings of our hearts, ready to heal our hurt, anger, fear, and more.

The Risen Christ is present to us in four ways:

- in the Eucharist
- in the Word of God
- in the priest
- in the faithful



God listens to the deepest longings of our hearts.

## Participating at Mass

Participating at Mass is the means by which we express the fullness of our relationship with God and receive his grace. It is the central and most

important act we make as followers of Jesus, so we use a specific, descriptive phrase to describe the place the Mass has for us: the liturgy is “the source and summit of the Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium*, 11).

The liturgy is our “source and summit” because it provides us with food for the journey. It’s the meal that satisfies our hunger for truth and freedom, and the fuel we need to live as disciples. Just like a mighty river flows from a source, our faith and our actions are empowered through our encounter with Christ, “the living bread that came down from heaven” (John 6:51). Just like hikers who come to the crest of a great mountain and are bowled over by the breathtaking view that they see from the mountaintop, the Mass is the moment when we experience not only everything that God has done for us in the past, but all that he is doing for us right here and now.

**“I am the living bread that came down from heaven.”**

**—John 6:51**

The Christian life is, and should be, filled with challenge and change. Just as we do in our everyday lives, we need to grow and mature, becoming conformed to the image and likeness of God. Our journey of faith will be complete when we take our last breath—hopefully when we have lived a full life and are ready to return home to God.

### **Eucharist: Happening Now**

Open your heart,  
learn in detail  
his sufferings  
and say to yourself:  
God who is without sin  
today was given up,  
today was mocked,  
today was abused,  
today was struck,  
today was scourged,  
today wore  
a crown of thorns,  
today was crucified,  
he, the heavenly Lamb.



—St. Ephrem of Syria (306–363)

Because of this, there is really nothing else that we can do—no prayer or action that is more significant or more important—than the moment we encounter Christ in the Eucharist. When we hear Christ speaking to us in the readings and receive his Body and Blood at Mass, we are able to bring him more fully into our everyday lives, to love and serve others as he did when he walked among us.

The Christian life is, and should be, filled

with challenge and change. Just as we do in our everyday lives, we need to grow and mature, becoming conformed to the image and likeness of God. Our journey of faith will be complete when we take our last breath—hopefully when we have lived a full life and are ready to return home to God.



## What are you getting out of Mass?

Sometimes, it seems like we aren't getting much out of Mass. It's easy to complain: "The homily is boring." "The music is for old people." Or say any number of other complaints.

When John F. Kennedy was president, he gave a number of speeches, but there is one that has stayed in the popular imagination of Americans for more than sixty years. In his inaugural address, he said to Americans, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." He challenged citizens to shift their focus from getting to giving.

In some ways, that would be good counsel for how to have a better experience at Mass. It is easy to focus on what "I" get out of an hour in church. In fact, the Mass is not just about each of us as individuals. It is about the whole Body of Christ—the people gathered in our setting, the millions of other people around the world, and all the faithful people who have died but who are alive in Christ in heaven.

Our Christian faith is not solitary. When Jesus sent his disciples out before him, he sent them two by two. Pope Francis observed, "Our Christian identity is belonging to a people: The Church. Without this, we are not Christians." To be a Christian is to take our belief in Jesus and then take steps to live it out in the company of others—to demonstrate to a world in need who he was through our own actions, and to join ourselves to all the followers of Jesus Christ who have gone before us.

Next time you are at Mass, take a moment to ask yourself . . .

- ❖ **How open am I to hearing the Word of God speak directly to me, my concerns and circumstances, today?**
- ❖ **How open am I to entering into the mystery of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ?**
- ❖ **Am I praying on autopilot? Thinking about other matters and giving in to distractions?**
- ❖ **Am I open to the possibility that God is working something wonderful in me, this very moment?**



The Mass forms us to serve Christ with joy in the world.

The Mass is a powerful source of our growth as Christians. Each week we come together and directly experience the presence of Christ. In doing so, we are slowly changed—transformed—understanding him more deeply and becoming more like him. Our Catholic faith is an experience of the unconditional love of God. Made in God’s image and likeness, we believe that God cherishes us and wants us to flourish. Our primary expression of this, a sort of great communication between God and us, is accomplished at Mass. There, we enter into “communion” with God, each other, and the world.



# The Introductory Rites



If we imagined the parts of the Mass like books on a shelf, there would be two big, important volumes: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Supporting these like beautiful bookends are two sets of rituals, the Introductory Rites and the Concluding Rites. All of the songs and prayers that lead up to the First Reading make up the Introductory Rites.

## Gathering

The word *ecclesia*, commonly translated as “Church,” means a gathering or assembly. Before we can worship, we need to come together as God’s people; we need to gather together.

Gathering as the Church is much more than sliding into the pew and picking up a hymnal for the opening song. In fact, the process of gathering begins much earlier. It starts when we open our eyes in the morning, and become aware that we are in the process of preparing ourselves to be together with others to hear God’s Word and take part in the Eucharist.

