

**The Mass, Our Treasure**  
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Every year, the Paschal celebrations relate to us a truth dear to our hearts: the Mass is the Testament of the Lord entrusted to His church, the supreme Mystery of Faith and treasure of the Christian life.

We contemplate Jesus at the time of the Last Supper, at the end of His earthly life, just at the time He was betrayed. He institutes a rite: He takes bread and wine. His sacred and venerable hands holding these material gifts, He raises a prayer of thanksgiving to the Father, Who blesses the gifts through the immensity of His generosity and for sake of the redemption thenceforth to be accomplished. With the same vigor the sacrifice of praise offered through the bread and wine receives its full accomplishment and pours out its supreme blessing: the offering of God-made-man in sacrifice of appeasement, in propitiation, for the sins of mankind. Thus, at the Last Supper, Jesus makes the offering that He was about to make shortly afterwards on the Cross: “Take and eat, this is My body. Take and drink, this is My blood, shed for you and the many in remission of sins.” He links the Supper to Calvary; He extends over the Supper the shadow of the Cross. In the rite He institutes, He offers to the Father, under the visible signs of bread and wine, His body and His blood, and He does so precisely in view of the extension of this holy gesture by the Church: “Every time that you do this, you do so in memory of Me.”

The sacrificial rite of the Mass thus reproduces that of the Last Supper. Fully as much as the Last Supper, the rite of the Mass is the sacramental sign of the unique sacrifice on Calvary, with the difference that the Last Supper was offered through prefiguration, and thereafter accomplished “in memory,” through commemoration. Therefore, the sacramental sacrifice is not a sort of additional sacrifice, reiteration, or multiplication of the sufferings of Calvary, but is one with the unique sacrifice of the cross which it represents and commemorates. At the altar, according St. Augustine, “Christ Himself Who is sacrificed once for all (on Calvary), is sacrificed every day in this sacrament,”[1] while, “elevated above the heavens” (Heb. 7:26), our High Priest “is always living to intercede in our favor,” (Heb. 7:25), consummating His priestly mediation in His humanity. True and authentic sacrifice, “celebration of the death of the Lord until He comes again,” (1 Cor. 11:26), the sacrifice of the Mass is, as expressed by Bossuet, “a perpetual application [of the sacrifice of the Cross], like that which Jesus Christ makes at all times in Heaven before the eyes of His father; or rather, it is a continued celebration thereof.”[2]

The Church has received the mission and the power to accomplish this application and celebration to the end of time, so that the faithful of Christ, always and everywhere, can receive the benefits of the redeeming Passion. In fact, because it contains the most perfect worship of Christ through which sins are forgiven and spiritual goods are given in abundance, the eucharistic sacrifice establishes a very close contract, one could say, physical, between redeemed man and God. At Mass, the faithful adore God with the sentiments, prayers, and gestures of the Savior and His Church. They are admitted to offer along with the whole Church, under the visible appearances of bread and wine, the very sacrifice of Jesus, through which they are “filled with every grace and blessing”[3] and render thus to God “all glory and honor.”[4]

By communion of the precious gifts offered and transubstantiated, they enjoy the divine Presence, Presence hidden but nevertheless real and receive “the pledge of future glory.”[5]

The testament of the Lord, the Mass is the sun of our lives and our treasure. We love it for what it is substantially and primarily, by the institution of the Lord. But we love it further because the Church, to which Jesus entrusted the celebration, has transmitted the Mass to us down through the centuries by means of diverse liturgical traditions. For it is in order to explain and make manifest to the eyes of the whole Church the unfathomable riches of the essential rite bequeathed to us by the Lord that the prayers and rituals have developed over the course of centuries. It is in fact possible to follow step by step “the history of the Mass,” from its first developments to the codification of the different ritual usages of the East and West. Thus, a simple look at the words of institution permits a glimpse at the evolution of the gestures of the offering, the developments of the eucharistic prayer, and the communion rites. Also, as Fr. Roguet once wrote, “[the sacrificial value of the Eucharist] is made precise and explicit by the secondary rituals, which thereby become indispensable: the words of the canon, the use of the altar, the sign of the cross, etc., which require that the priest in pronouncing these words not give himself over to making a mere commemorative meditation, but instead truly accomplish a sacrifice.”[6] For all these reasons, which we have only outlined here, we feel ourselves deeply bound to the liturgical traditions, and in a special manner to the Roman rite with the Mass as it was codified by St. Pius V. We cannot in any case renounce a patrimony slowly built up by the faith of our fathers, their ardent devotion, and theological reflection surrounding the sacrament of the Passion of the Lord. In contact with the Mass of St. Pius V – where we see also the purest masterwork of Western civilization, hierarchical and sacral – our souls are lifted and our hearts expanded, while our intelligence enjoys the most authentic eucharistic doctrine. That is why we would like to know and love all the more the traditional Mass, our treasure, which we will not cease to defend and promote.

[1] “Semel immolatus est in semetipso Christus, et tamem quotidie immolatur in sacramento” (St. Augustine, Epist. 98 ad Bonifacium, PL 33.363)

[2] Bossuet, Explication de quelques difficultés sur les prières de la Messe à un nouveau catholique, XIII

[3] “omni benedictione caelesti et gratia repleamur” (Canon Romanus, “Supplices Te rogamus.”)

[4] “omnis honor et gloria” (Canon Romanus, Doxology.)

[5] “O sacrum convivium, in quo... futurae gloriae nobis pignus datur” (St. Thomas Aquinas, Office of Corpus Christi, Magnificat Antiphon of 2nd Vespers).

[6] A.-M. Roguet, La somme théologique, les Sacrements, éd. La revue des jeunes, Paris, 1945, p. 376.