



Credible Catholic

CREDIBLE CATHOLIC

Big Book - Volume 9

THE SACRED EUCHARISTIC LITURGY



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Credible Catholic Big Book

Volume Nine

The Sacraments, Part 1 –

The Sacred Eucharistic Liturgy

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**This Volume supports The Catechism of the Catholic Church,
Part Two – The Celebration of the Christian Mystery**

NOTE: All teachings in the **Credible Catholic** materials conform to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)** and help to explain the information found therein. **Father Spitzer** has also included materials intended to counter the viral secular myths that are leading religious people of all faiths, especially millennials, to infer that God is no longer a credible belief. You will find credible documented evidence for God, our soul, the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the Catholic Church, as well as spiritual and moral conversion.

Part One from the CCC is titled, ***THE PROFESSION OF FAITH***. The first 5 Volumes in the *Credible Catholic Big Book* and *Credible Catholic Little Book* fall into Part One. **Part Two** of the CCC is titled, ***THE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY***. This is covered in Volumes 6 through 12. **Part Three** of the CCC is ***LIFE IN CHRIST*** and information related to this topic will be found in Volumes 13 through 17. Credible Catholic Big and Little Book Volumes 18 through 20 will cover **Part Four** of the CCC, **Christian Prayer**.

The Big Book can also be divided into two major movements – the rational justification for God, the soul, Jesus, and the Catholic Church (Volumes 1 through 6), and life in Christ through the Catholic Church (Volumes 9 through 20). If you would like a preview of this dynamic, please go to Volume 6 (Chapter 7) at the following link – [Chapter 7 – Where Have We Come From and Where are We Going?](#)

We all need to be Credible Catholics. St. Augustine said in his work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*,

"Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens and other elements... Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; ...If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven..."

If we don't respond to these secular myths, who will?

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Chapter One

Jesus' Intention at the Last Supper

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In Volume 4 (Chapter Five), we gave a detailed explanation of Jesus' intention in establishing the Eucharistic gift of His body and blood at The Last Supper. We will give a brief review of that explanation here, but readers seeking a deeper understanding, should return to Volume 4. As noted there, Jesus placed Himself at the center of a ritual self-sacrificial act, separating His body (given before the Supper) and His blood (given after the Supper) precisely as would be done with a sacrificial animal offered for the forgiveness of sins. His intention is not only to give us His body and His blood, but His whole self – crucified and risen in an act of unconditional love which redeems our sins, heals and transforms our hearts, and leads us to eternal life with Him.

If we are to enter into this celebration of unconditional love more fully, we will first want to understand His Eucharistic words. When He said, “This is my Body which will be given up for you,” the Greek word used to translate His Hebrew (*zeh bašari*) or Aramaic (*den bisri*) was *sōma* instead of *sarx*. *Sarx* means “flesh” and would certainly refer to Jesus' *corporeal* body given on the cross, while *sōma* is much broader and refers to the *whole* person (mind, soul, will, as well as corporeal body). Thus, “*sōma*” is much like the word “body” in “everybody” or “somebody” in English. It might, therefore, be roughly translated as “person” or “self.” If we substitute the word “self” for “body” in the Eucharistic words, we obtain “This is my whole self given up for you.” This is remarkably close to Jesus' definition of love (“gift of self” – “greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” John 15:13). Thus, in the Eucharist, Jesus is not only giving us His whole self – His whole person – He is also giving us His love, indeed, His *unconditional* Love – that is, a love which cannot be exceeded.

This unconditional Love is confirmed by the gift of His blood (which, according to Jewish custom, is separated from the body of the sacrificial offering). When Jesus offered His blood separately from His body, He showed Himself to be an intentional self-sacrifice which He interpreted to be an offering of unconditional Love.

Blood (the principle of life for the Israelites) was the vehicle through which atonement occurred in sin or guilt offerings. Jesus' reference to His sacrificial blood would almost inevitably be seen as the blood of a sin-offering – with the notable exception that the sin-offering is no longer an animal, but rather, Jesus Himself, “the Beloved One of *Abba*.” Jesus humbled Himself (taking the place of an animal – a sacrificial sin-offering) as the Beloved One of the Father, to absolve the sin of the world forever.

Jesus goes beyond this by associating Himself with the Paschal lamb. His use of blood within the context of the Passover supper shows that He intended to take the place of the Passover lamb. He loved us so much that He desired to become the new Passover sacrifice, replacing an unblemished lamb with His own divine presence.

You may recall that the blood of the Passover lamb (put on the doorposts of every Israelite household) was the instrument through which the Israelite people were protected from death (the angel of death passing over those houses) which enabled them to move out of slavery into freedom (from Egypt into the promised land). When Jesus took the place of a sacrificial animal He replaced the situational dimension of the Passover (Egypt) with an unconditional and eternal Love. Thus, He made His self-sacrifice the new vehicle for protection from *all* death (for all eternity) by outshining sin and darkness with His unconditionally loving eternal light.

There is yet a third dimension of Jesus' use of blood which He explicitly states as "the Blood of the covenant." A covenant was a solemn promise that bound parties to an inextricable (guaranteed) agreement (written contracts were *extremely* rare during Jesus' time). When Jesus associates His blood with the covenant, He is *guaranteeing* the covenant with His life (because blood is the principle of life). When He sheds His blood on the cross (the following day), He elevates His guarantee from the status of word-based to action-based. By shedding his blood, he has guaranteed his covenant absolutely – there can be no higher proof of the guarantee.

So what is this covenant or contract about? It is a guarantee of His unconditional love (by giving us His whole self), a guarantee of the forgiveness of our sins (by making Himself a sin offering), a guarantee of freedom from darkness, emptiness, and slavery to sin and evil (by taking the place of the Pascal lamb), and a guarantee of eternal life (by giving us the blood of the new covenant).

How do we know that Jesus intended to give us His *real* body and blood – His *real* crucified and risen self – rather than a merely symbolic presence – in the bread and wine? First there are the obvious implications of John's Eucharistic discourse (John 6). Consider the following:

I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; *and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh...* Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him (Jn. 6: 48-51, 53-56).

Secondly, Jesus' action at the Last Supper is prophetic – that is, it reaches into the future toward its fulfillment – and in accordance with Jesus' intention – brings the future fulfillment into the present. Recall from Volume 4 (and Volume 7), that the First Century Jewish view of time is quite different from our physical view of time. While we view time as objectively determinant and measurable, First Century Judaism viewed it as malleable and collapsible – particularly with respect to prophetic utterances and the ritual reenactment of past events (see below). With respect to prophetic utterances, the prophetic word was understood to move into the future, collapsing the time between the prophetic utterance and its future fulfillment. Thus, when Jesus says, "Take, this is my body," He means it is really His body which is to be given on the cross in the immediate future – His body given in sacrifice brought, as it were, from the

future into the present. The same holds true for the blood. Thus, when Jesus uttered His prophetic words at the table, He made present His *real* future body sacrificed in love for humankind on the cross. For Him, the separation of time was insignificant – the reality of His future body sacrificed on the cross was just as real in the present moment as it would be in the future.

It is important to note here that First Century Judaism did not have a view of a merely symbolic (abstract) prophetic utterance. Aside from the fact that they did not make a strict separation between mind and body, there is no precedent for reducing a prophetic utterance to merely symbolic (non-real) significance. In view of this, we should interpret Jesus' words as He very probably meant them – that the bread was His real crucified body – and that the wine was His real blood poured out for us on the cross.

Jesus did not expect the bread to turn into the appearance of His flesh – or the wine to turn into the appearance of His blood. Though these appearances are very important to our scientific mindset, they were *not* significant to the First Century Jewish mindset which saw the bread as the medium through which the future salvific event is present – really present – irrespective of what it looked like to them. This is why John's Eucharistic discourse can be so explicit – “*and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh...*” (Jn 6:51).

It might be objected that “time really doesn't work in the way Jesus expected – scientific explanation implies that time does not collapse with prophetic utterances so that the future can become present.” While it is true that physical time does not work the same way as sacred time, sacred time works because God wills it to be so. If one believes that God is beyond all time (and that time exists through the mind of God), then God can do anything He wants – He can bring a future event into the present (as Jesus expects He will in His prophetic utterance), and He can bring the reality of a past event into the future – which is what Jesus expects He will do when He commands His disciples to “Do this in remembrance of me.”

So what did Jesus mean by His command to the apostles, “Do this in remembrance (memory) of me”? In Volume 4 (Chapter Five), we discussed the notion of “*anamnesis*” (memory) in detail. We will briefly review it here because of its importance in the development of the mass and to correct misunderstandings of it that have occurred throughout the centuries. Readers interested in the scholarly studies justifying the following synopsis should again consult Volume 4.

Recall that “memory” does not mean “calling to mind” – a merely cognitive recollection. It means a ritualistic re-living of the salvific event which brings the *reality* of God's grace and power into the present in the same way it occurred in the past. Recall that First Century Judaism did not make a separation between mind and body (a Greek distinction). Thus a ritualistic re-living was a re-presentation of a *real* – not merely an abstract -- event in which God's real saving grace and power are present.

Recall further that First Century Judaism shared with other contemporary cultures, the view of sacred time in which the re-living or reenactment of a sacred event causes time between the past event and the present to collapse. Thus, the reenactment brings the grace and power of the

past event into the present moment. So when Jesus said, “Do this in memory of me,” He meant that the apostles (and their followers) should engage in a ritual reenactment of His Eucharistic words (which would make His real body and blood – His whole person – really present in the bread and wine) so that the time between the Last Supper and the present reenactment would collapse. This would make His body and blood present to every generation until the end of time.

Thus the reality of Jesus’ crucified body and blood in the bread and wine is a result of a double collapse of time which God effects through prophetic utterance and ritualistic reenactment:

- Jesus’ prophetic utterance brings His real crucified body and blood (in the future) into the present bread and wine in the ritual during the Passover supper.
- Future priests’¹ (the apostles and their followers who have received the laying on of hands) collapse the time between the Last Supper (in which Jesus’ body and blood are really present in the bread and wine) into the present moment through the ritual reenactment of Jesus’ Eucharistic words at the Last Supper...

It may seem difficult for us in the present day to conceive of the Eucharistic gift (Jesus’ real body and blood) through a double collapse of time through the sacred modalities of prophetic utterance and ritual reenactment, but this difficulty can be mitigated by refusing to absolutize the physical notion of time which is perfectly justified when we consider that time must exist within the unrestricted mind of God – allowing Him to abrogate temporal separation however He wishes. Why shouldn’t sacred time be as real – if not more real -- than physical time, if God is in control of time? Evidently, it can.

This interpretation of Jesus’ historical words and actions is validated by contemporary scholars of the historical Jesus – both Catholics (e.g. John P. Meier²) and Protestants (e.g. Joachim Jeremias³).

Chapter Two

The Eucharistic Commemoration in the First Century

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Since the time of Christ’s resurrection, the Christian Church was obedient to Christ’s command to reenact His Eucharistic words within the community. Saint Paul, writing to the Corinthians (around the mid- 50’s) implies that the ceremony of the blessing cup and the breaking of the bread – which is a participation in the blood and body of Christ – has been taking place for a long time – presumably since Jesus’ resurrection and gift of the Holy Spirit:

¹ The development of the Christian priesthood is explained below in Chapter Two.

<http://practicalapologetics.blogspot.com/2013/07/early-church-fathers-on-ordination-and.html>

² John P. Meier. 1991. *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. Vol. 1. *The Roots of the Problem and The Person* (New York: Doubleday). pp 394-397.

³ Joachim Jeremias 1966. *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*. (London: SCM Press).

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The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread [the Body of Christ] (1Cor. 10: 16-17).

In the 30's and 40's, the Eucharist was celebrated within the context of a supper, but the supper was distinct from the reenactment of Jesus' Eucharistic words which held the same sacrificial meaning with which Jesus intended His own words. Paul's recounting of the Last Supper makes this sacrificial context clear:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you *proclaim the Lord's death* until he comes (1 Cor. 11: 23-26).

Thus, the reenactment of the Eucharistic words make present Jesus' body and blood sacrificed for us in His passion and death. The early Eucharistic celebration was therefore a combination of a celebratory feast with the recollection of Jesus' sacrifice which brought the gathered community into communion with Him.

As time passed, however, the reenactment of the words of institution were separated from the supper, and the supper was no longer part of the Eucharistic celebration.⁴ At this juncture, seven dimensions of Jesus' actions and words of institution had to be repeated: The Lord took bread; gave thanks; broke it; distributed it with the corresponding words; took the chalice; gave thanks; and handed it to His disciples with the corresponding words.⁵ This gave rise to a liturgy with four major actions:

1. Preparing bread and wine (with water);
2. The thanksgiving prayer;
3. The breaking of the bread (with the seven repeated actions and words of institution); and
4. The communion.⁶

Once the four-fold Eucharistic action was separated from the supper, the *sacrificial* significance of the reenactment of the Lord's words and actions became the central focus of the assembly. The Eucharistic (thanksgiving) words and actions were closely associated with the sacrificial actions as they had been for Jesus. At this juncture (at the end of the first century), the tables – for supper – were removed from the place of commemoration, and it was transformed

⁴ Josef Jungmann, *The Mass: an historical, theological, and pastoral survey* (St. Paul, MN: The North Central Publishing Company), p. 20.

⁵ See Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

into an assembly hall with everyone focused on the one table of Eucharistic and sacrificial reenactment (*anamnesis*).

The prayer of thanksgiving was quite well developed at this time. Though it was not like one of the later full Eucharistic prayers, it had many of its components: thanksgiving for the work of creation and redemption – recalling particularly Jesus’ divinity, incarnation, sacrifice, death, and resurrection. The core of these thanksgiving prayers may be found in the early Christological hymns (dating back to as early as the 40’s) recorded in the New Testament Epistles – Colossians 1: 12-22; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Timothy 3:16; and 1 Peter 3: 18-21. Also, the Johannine hymn (John 1: 1-6), and the prayers of thanksgiving in the Book of Revelation – (Revelations 4:11; 5: 9-14; 11: 17-18; 15: 3-4), as well as John’s Farewell Discourse (John 14-17) may also have been included.⁷

The *Didache* (*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*) – an early work (written toward the end of the first century – c. 90 A.D.) is the first complete catechism of the Christian Church. It contains a wealth of information about church rituals, authority, ethical norms, disciplinary practices (e.g. fasting), and church organization. It is of great importance to our discussion, because it contains two full early Eucharistic prayers, an identification of the Eucharist with sacrifice, and an identification of who was celebrating this sacrificial reenactment of the Last Supper.

With respect to the identification of the Eucharistic (thanksgiving) commemoration with sacrifice, the *Didache* notes:

Gather together on the day of the Lord, break bread, and give thanks, but first confess your sins, so that your *sacrifice* may be pure.⁸

The *Didache* not only uses the word “sacrifice” to describe the commemoration, it tells how important this interpretation of the commemoration was – for it required the early Christians to insert a penitential rite (a confession of sins) to assure that the celebration of the sacrifice by the congregation was pure – not defiled -- in conformity with the pure sacrifice of Malachi (see Mal. 1:11, 14). If the sacrificial meaning of the commemoration had not been essential, there would have been no need for the early Christians to develop a penitential rite at the beginning of the commemoration. This view of the commemoration as sacrifice has remained quite strong throughout the centuries – in the Church Fathers, the medieval theologians, the Council of Trent, until today.

The *Didache* also tells us *who* was celebrating the Eucharistic commemoration in the earliest times -- apostles and prophets.⁹ Evidently the apostles were given authority by Jesus to preside over the Eucharistic commemoration. But why does the *Didache* mention prophets? Recall from Volume 7 that prophets are not necessarily people who foretell the future, but rather those appointed by Yahweh to speak on His behalf (Exodus 7:1). Sometimes this involves foretelling the future or initiating a direction of the future, but not always. Prophets in the early Christian Church were designated as those having a charism of the Holy Spirit to speak for God – delivering messages and teachings for the good of the Church. In Paul’s ranking in 1

⁷ Ibid. p. 22.

⁸ Anon. *Didache* Ch. 14: 1.

⁹ See *Didache* 10:7 – “But suffer the prophets to hold Eucharist as they will.”

Corinthians 12, they are listed as second in authority, immediately after the apostles (see 1 Cor. 12: 28). Given their charism to speak in place of God, they were naturally thought to have the charism to speak the words of commemoration on behalf of Christ (along with the apostles). Thus, they were viewed as acting *in the place of Christ* in the reenactment of Christ's self-sacrificial words.

The *Didache* indicates that in missionary territories, itinerant apostles and prophets were probably celebrating the Eucharistic commemoration.¹⁰ However, as churches became more stable, they had their own local authority structure that replaced itinerant apostles and prophets.¹¹ These local authorities – having the power of apostles and prophets – by ordination – are called *Episcopoi* (overseers) and *Presbyteroi* (elders).

In the earliest church organizations, *Presbyteroi* were *ordained* clergy – having authority to preside over the Eucharistic commemoration as well as teaching authority. In the Jerusalem Church, the *Presbyteroi* were under James – the head of the Jerusalem Church (Acts 11:30 and 15:22). Paul ordained *Presbyteroi* for local churches he initiated in Asia Minor (Acts 14:23).¹² The proliferation of presbyters for local church assemblies (by ordination) incorporated the prophetic role of presiding over the Eucharistic commemoration into itself, and the word “prophet” disappears as an ecclesiastical ranking, and is replaced by “*Presbyteroi*” in the Letters of 1 Timothy and Titus (in the early second century).

Throughout most of the first century, the distinction between *Presbyteroi* and *Episcopoi* was not clear – and often *Presbyteroi* were described as having the same overseeing function as *Episcopoi* (Acts 20:17; Titus 1:5-7; and 1 Peter 5:1). However, by the end of the first century, “*Episcopoi*” designated bishops (the head of the council or college of Presbyters) while “*Presbyteroi*” designated “priests who derived their authority from the bishop” (1 Tim 1:3; Titus 1:5, 2:15).

The idea of ministerial priesthood is vague in the New Testament, but this can be explained. As noted above, prophets were leaders in the Church (second only to the apostles) who had the authority to celebrate the Eucharist wherever they wanted (*Didache* 10:7). Furthermore, the role of prophets was assumed into the role of *Presbyteroi* (elders) who were ordained by the apostles to give stability to local churches. Thus, ordained leaders (prophets -- and later presbyters) had the authority to celebrate the Eucharist after Jesus' resurrection – from the inception of the Church.

Yet there is no clear mention of a ministerial priesthood in the New Testament. Though there is reference to the priesthood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7) and the royal priesthood of the faithful (1 Peter 2:9), there is no clear expression of priesthood with respect to Christian ministry. Why didn't the early Church clearly associate prophets and presbyters with “priests”

¹⁰ In *Didache* Chapter 11, a set of rules is given to distinguish true apostles and prophets from false apostles and prophets, with the implication being that there were itinerant apostles and prophets who had to be tested before they would be allowed to celebrate the Eucharist (see *Didache* 10:7) and instruct the faithful.

¹¹ See *Ibid*.

¹² The Greek words “*cheirotoneo*” (literally – “hand-outstretching selecting”) means more than “appointment.” It refers directly to the laying on of hands which refers to ordination to the Presbyterate (see 1 Tim. 4:14).

who were designated as “offerors of sacrifice” in the Old Testament? After all, Jesus¹³ (and His followers¹⁴) clearly associated the Eucharist with His self-sacrifice -- and the authority to celebrate that sacrifice (the Eucharist) was given to the apostles and prophets, and then to the Presbyteroi.

An implicit answer is given in Hebrews 7 with respect to the ministerial priesthood of Jesus in contrast to the Levitical priesthood of the Jewish synagogue:

If another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. For it is declared, “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God. And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever.’” Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant. Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever (Heb.7:15-28).

Though the Letter to the Hebrews is written in about 85 A.D. – when tensions between the Jewish and Christian churches was forcing a formal separation between them – this passage points to themes relevant to the *earlier* church that explain the Church’s reticence to associate prophets and Presbyteroi with priests. First, the early church would have had a keen interest to distinguish the animal sacrifices of the Levitical priesthood from the complete self-sacrifice of the Son of God. As noted above (in Chapter One), Jesus replaced the sacrificial animal with Himself – as the exclusive Son of the Father – to make perfect, eternal, and unconditional sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, liberation from evil, and sure impetus toward eternal life. The early church, recognizing the perfection and superiority of Jesus’ sacrifice (over previous sacrifices), would have wanted to keep them quite distinct.

¹³ See Chapter One above for a complete explanation.

¹⁴ See *Didache* 14:1 – as explained above in this section.

Secondly, the Jewish priesthood was derived from the lineage of Aaron (Moses' brother and the first high priest of the Israelites). Jesus' self-sacrifice was meant for *all people* – not simply for the Jewish people served by the Levitical priesthood (in the lineage of Aaron). This universal character of Jesus' sacrifice and priesthood would have deterred the early church from making an association of Jesus' priesthood (manifest in the Eucharistic self-sacrifice) with the priesthood of Aaron. Furthermore, Jesus wanted to separate Himself from the Jewish temple (located in Jerusalem and associated with a single people) so that He would become in His own body the new universal temple for all people and all nations (see Volume 6, Chapter Two, Section I).

Thirdly, the Christian Church did not want to associate its apostles, prophets, and Presbyteroi with the lineage of Aaron, because it wanted to become – as Jesus had instructed – a universal Church where those who presided over the Eucharistic celebration could come from every race, people, and nation. As noted above, Paul ordained Presbyteroi in the local churches he initiated. A close association between prophets-presbyters and priesthood (which would have been associated with the Jewish Levitical priesthood) would have contradicted this – or at the very least, confused the issue.

After 80 A.D., when tensions between the synagogue and the Christian Church would force a separation between them, the Christian Church wanted to establish the superiority of Jesus' high priesthood over that of the Levitical priesthood of Aaron. Indeed, this is precisely the reason why the author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes not only Chapter 7 (cited above) but also the rest of the letter.

So when did the concept of ministerial priesthood become attached to the Presbyteroi who were presiding over the Eucharistic commemoration of Jesus' self-sacrifice? The first clear indication is found in about 180 A.D. in St. Irenaeus' work, *Against Heresies*:

And all the apostles of the Lord are priests, who do inherit here neither lands nor houses, but serve God and the altar continually.¹⁵

Around 232-235 A.D., Origen associates the apostles and their successors with priesthood:

So, too, the apostles, and those who have become like apostles, being priests according to the Great High Priest and having received knowledge of the service of God, know under the Spirit's teaching for which sins, and when, and how they ought to offer sacrifices, and recognize for which they ought not to do so.¹⁶

Cyprian of Carthage (in about 250 A.D.) ordered an interdict against Novatian who is claiming to be a valid spokesman of the Church. Cyprian responds by negatively comparing Novatian to his own (Cyprian's) priesthood:

For the Church is one, and as she is one, cannot be both within and without. For if [the Church] is with Novatian, she was not with Cornelius. But if she was with

¹⁵ St. Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies* Bk. 4, Chap. 8, par. 3.

¹⁶ Origen *On Prayer*, Chapter 18.

Cornelius, who succeeded the bishop Fabian by *lawful ordination*, and whom, beside the honour of the *priesthood*, the Lord glorified also with martyrdom, Novatian is not in the Church; nor can he be reckoned as a bishop, who, succeeding to no one, and despising the evangelical and apostolic tradition, sprang from himself.¹⁷

In about 336 A.D., in a work called *The Canons of Hippolytus*,¹⁸ we find well worked out rules for priesthood and the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice:

Of the keeping of oblations which are laid upon the altar -- that nothing fall into the sacred chalice, and that nothing fall from the priests, nor from the boys when they take communion.¹⁹

In this passage, the priest is clearly seen within a sacrificial context – making an oblation (an offering of sacrifice) on an altar – which sacrifice is considered to be sacred.

In sum, we see a clear association of Episcopoi and the Presbyteroi with priesthood beginning in about 150 A.D. (with St. Irenaeus) and a continuous theological development of this association throughout the second and third centuries, culminating in Canons (rules) for priestly performance of the Eucharistic sacrifice on an altar. This association was strengthened and clarified until the present day.

Chapter Three

Transubstantiation

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In the Middle Ages, theologians – particularly St. Thomas Aquinas – articulated the change that occurs when the bread and wine are consecrated by the priest acting in place of Christ (reenacting and re-presenting Jesus’ self-sacrificial words at the Last Supper). Though they were not familiar with Jesus’ Semitic understanding of making the bread and wine into His body and blood (through the double collapse of time), they faithfully interpreted the passages of the New Testament (from the gospels in Saint Paul) and the tradition they had received from earlier Church fathers – particularly Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine – which emphasized Jesus’ real crucified and risen presence – body, blood, and whole being – in the Holy Eucharist. The metaphysical interpretation they developed is perfectly consistent with Jesus’ Semitic understanding of His real presence. In order to see this, we must give a brief explanation of the medieval doctrine of transubstantiation.

¹⁷ Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle 75*, par. 3.

¹⁸ *Canons of Hippolytus*, Canon 28. Though this work is attributed to Hippolytus of Rome, supposedly written around 210 A.D., some scholars believe that it may have been composed by Egyptian Christian authors between 336 and 340 A.D. Other scholars – such as Jungmann – still date it to 210 A.D. I used the more conservative (later) dating here.

¹⁹ Hippolytus *The Canons of Hippolytus*, Can 28.

The term “transubstantiation,” developed by Archbishop Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury in the 11th century, received its first conciliar approval at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. The deepest and most nuanced interpretation of this doctrine was given by Saint Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* (III, Q. 75, A4) using two concepts from Aristotelian metaphysics – “substance” and “accidents:”

I answer that, as stated above (Article 2), since Christ’s true body is in this sacrament, and since it does not begin to be there by local motion, nor is it contained therein as in a place, as is evident from what was stated above (1, ad 2), it must be said then that it begins to be there by conversion of the substance of bread into itself. Yet this change is not like natural changes, but is entirely supernatural, and effected by God’s power alone... For it is evident that every agent acts according as it is in act. But every created agent is limited in its act, as being of a determinate genus and species: and consequently the action of every created agent bears upon some determinate act. Now the determination of every thing in actual existence comes from its form. Consequently, no natural or created agent can act except by changing the form in something; and on this account every change made according to nature’s laws is a formal change. But God is infinite act, as stated in I, 7, 1; 26, 2; hence His action extends to the whole nature of being. Therefore He can work not only formal conversion, so that diverse forms succeed each other in the same subject; but also the change of all being, so that, to wit, the whole substance of one thing be changed into the whole substance of another. And this is done by Divine power in this sacrament; for the whole substance of the bread is changed into the whole substance of Christ’s body, and the whole substance of the wine into the whole substance of Christ’s blood. Hence this is not a formal, but a substantial conversion; nor is it a kind of natural movement: but, with a name of its own, it can be called “transubstantiation.”²⁰

This passage is not intended for philosophical or theological neophytes – so please do not be discouraged if it is not immediately intelligible. First the term “accidents” does not resemble the way we use the term today – it means only those qualities of a natural being that give rise to its appearance – size, shape, color, molecular constituency, atomic constituency, and any other quality that gives rise to detectable or measurable physical attributes. The term “substance” does not mean “a particular kind of matter with uniform properties,” but the most fundamental expression of a thing’s reality.

Don’t get discouraged yet. These technical terms can be made a little clearer. Saint Thomas Aquinas looks at a being from the opposite way a contemporary scientist does. Instead of starting with the appearance of things (which Saint Thomas called “accidents”) as scientists do, he begins with the most fundamental dimension of a reality which is necessary for it to be what it is. So what dimension of reality is most necessary for any being – including God? Saint Thomas said it is its *existence*. For him, God is pure existence itself -- existing through itself (“*ipsum suum esse subsistens*”). Since there can only be one reality that exists through itself, all

²⁰ Saint Thomas Aquinas 1947, *Summa Theologica*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Providence (New York: Benzinger Brothers) pp. 2449-2450 (Part III, Ques. 75, art. 4).

other realities must exist through causation by God – the One uncaused reality (see the Thomistic metaphysical proof of God in Volume 1, Chapter Two, Section I). So what is the most fundamental – the most necessary – part of any reality that is *not* God? It must be the existence (*esse*) it receives from God in order to exist. Without *esse*, a thing is merely hypothetical – not real.

Now here is where we come to the concept of “substance” – the essential power or activity that determines what a thing is. For Saint Thomas the substance of God is His pure uncaused existence through itself. He proves that this unique reality must also be an unrestricted act of thinking that creates everything else in reality (see the Thomistic metaphysical proof of God in Volume 1, Chapter Two, Section I). As we noted there, this being is a purely spiritual, self-reflective, unrestricted power or activity – and is therefore the highest of all substances.

Saint Thomas then examines substances other than God. Perhaps the best way of describing “substance” for him is the word “soul” as used by Aristotle. Though we think of “soul” as the transphysical, self-reflective reality that apprehends the five transcendental desires and God’s presence to us – the transphysical reality capable of surviving bodily death -- Aristotle also conceived of lower levels of “soul” than ours. He called our soul “the rational soul,” but he also noticed that animals had consciousness that was not self-reflective and rational, but nevertheless, capable of awareness needed for self-movement (which he called a sensitive soul or “an animal soul”). He also saw an even lower “soul” that differentiated living beings – such as plants – from non-living beings (which he called a “vegetative soul”). Why call these lower sources of activity “soul”? Because Aristotle (and Aquinas) perceived that animal consciousness and the life principle of plants and other living beings could not be explained solely in terms of physical elements (that are not themselves living or conscious). Each higher level of activity required a greater *sensitivity to itself*. Physical processes – such as atomic and molecular processes -- do not give rise to greater interior sensitivity – only more complex extrinsic activities.²¹

Now here is the rub – even though a thing’s “soul” gives rise to its most sophisticated activities -- its interior sensitivity to itself, which organizes its extrinsic activities – a soul cannot be directly observed or detected by even the most sophisticated instrumentation – like an electron microscope. It can only be known by its *effects*. Thus we know that a bacterium or a plant has sufficient interior sensitivity to itself to react as a whole to outside stimuli (revealing its lower level of soul), but we cannot put the bacterium under an electron microscope to detect that soul. In Saint Thomas’ words, we can only see the extrinsic activities (its “*accidents*”) that give rise to its appearance. This as we shall see is very important to the notion of the invisibility of transubstantiation which we will talk about below.

Now if you are not completely confused at this juncture, we can now examine the six levels of “invisible” souls that give rise to “interior sensitivity to self” on higher and higher levels – from which we can discern six levels of *substance*. Remember these levels of “interior sensitivity to self” organize the extrinsic activities we observe and detect through scientific

²¹ I explain this in much greater detail in Robert Spitzer 2015 *The Soul’s Upward Yearning: Clues to Our Transcendent Nature from Experience and Reason* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), Chap. 6.

experimentation. Let us proceed from the lowest level of “interior sensitivity to self” and proceed to the highest levels:

1. *A purely natural substance* -- no interior sensitivity to self – no soul of any kind (e.g. an atom, a molecule, or any complex set of atoms or molecules giving rise to a non-living reality).
2. *A vital soul* -- an elementary sensitivity to self, allowing an organism, such as a bacterium, to react *as a whole* to outside stimuli – giving rise to the search for nutrition (attraction to salutary environments), self-defense (aversion to hostile environments), and reproduction. This vital soul is also present in complex cellular organisms such as plants.
3. *A sensitive conscious soul (e.g. animalic soul)* -- a higher sensitivity to self that allows the whole organism to have a sense of self (though not an awareness) of self. This sense of self enables an animal to *feel* pain, pleasure, desire, and self-satisfaction sufficient to awaken perceptual cognitive activities and self-movement to seek biological opportunities and to avoid biological dangers. Higher mammals seem to have an even greater interior sensitivity to self, giving rise to an elementary form of empathy and even desire for affection beyond merely instinctual pack behavior.
4. *A rational self-conscious soul (human soul)* – an even higher sensitivity to self, enabling a person to be aware of his awareness, to formulate conceptual ideas, to desire perfect truth, love, goodness, beauty, and home, and to be aware of God and the numinous.²²
5. *An angelic substance* – a purely spiritual substance that is not unified with natural substances – and is capable of perfectly reflexive acts of consciousness and will. Though these beings transcend time and space, they are not unrestricted in consciousness – nor do they exist through themselves.
6. *The divine substance* – complete and unrestricted sensitivity to self within complete and unrestricted existence through itself – a being which must be completely unique, completely present to itself, and present to everything else it causes to exist through its unrestricted creative mentative activity (the one God).

For Saint Thomas, these levels of substance organize all of the other extrinsic activities (that we call “physical processes” today) – which in turn determine the observable and detectable data of appearances that Saint Thomas called “accidents.”

Now we are in a position to talk about “transubstantiation” in the Holy Eucharist. Let’s go back to the quotation from Saint Thomas cited above. Saint Thomas indicates that the *substance* of the bread is transformed into the substance of Christ’s body and that the *substance* of the wine is transformed into the substance of Christ’s blood. It might be easier to think about this by translating the genitive “of” to “underlying.” Thus we might retranslate Saint Thomas’ sentence as follows, “The substance underlying the bread (a purely natural substance) is transformed into the substance underlying Christ Himself (the spiritual substance underlying the unique person of the God-man Jesus Christ) – and the substance underlying the wine (a purely natural substance) is transformed into the substance underlying Christ’s blood (the spiritual substance underlying the unique person of the God-man Jesus Christ).”

²² For a complete explanation of these powers, see Robert Spitzer 2015 *The Soul’s Upward Yearning*.

As noted above, this substantial change cannot be directly observed or detected – it can only be known by its *effects* within the human being who receives this transformed substance faithfully into himself. Saint Thomas notes that all of the “accidents” – the extrinsic physical activities giving rise to observable and detectable appearances -- remain those of bread and wine – so the host still looks like bread – and if subjected to microscopic and electron microscopic analysis – would still have the same atomic and molecular constitution. However, the substance – the interior sensitivity to self (the invisible organizing principle giving rise to interior self-sensitive activities) -- has changed radically – from a substance with no interior self-sensitive activities (the substance of bread and wine) to a spiritual substance of the highest level of interior self-sensitive activity – the self-consciousness of the unique person of the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Though this substantial change is not observable or detectable (because the extrinsic physical processes have *not* changed), the *effects* of this substantial change on the soul of the human being who receives this transformed substance faithfully is enormous (see below Chapter Five). Saint Thomas says that this substantial change can only occur through the supernatural act of God Himself. Why? Because an effect must have a cause commensurate with it – in other words a purely natural substance cannot produce a spiritual substance, because it lacks the interior self-sensitive activities that would be necessary to produce a spiritual substance. Indeed, no lower level substance can produce a higher level substance, because the lower level substance lacks the very quality and activity necessary to transform it into the higher one. Since the substantial change that occurs in transubstantiation is the most pronounced one possible – from the lowest level of substance (a purely natural substance) to the highest level of substance (the spiritual substance of the self-consciousness of the unique God-man, Jesus Christ), only God can cause it to occur. Even though a priest mediates this transubstantial change by reenacting the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, only God can cause this radical substantial change to occur through the priest’s mediative action.

By now the reader may be thinking, “Was all this really necessary to explain how the body and blood of Christ can be present in the bread and wine – without a change in the appearance and atomic structure of bread and wine?” The answer is pretty much – yes. Strange as it may seem, this metaphysical explanation does show *how* the detectable and observable atomic and molecular constituents do not change while the essence – the substance – moves from the lowest order to the highest order through the supernatural activity of God. The analysis of the six kinds of substance (from no soul to divine substance) is not merely medieval thinking – it recognizes an essential component of reality often overlooked by many natural scientists today – the interior self-sensitive activities that determine the levels of being. It must be emphasized that no scientist has yet discovered an explanation for this kind of interior self-sensitive activity by means of physical processes alone. That is why there is no complete explanation of how to produce life from non-living constituents and processes, how to produce sensate consciousness from non-conscious constituents and processes, and how to produce self-consciousness from non-self-conscious constituents and processes. Indeed, many scientist philosophers – such as Alfred North Whitehead, Michael Polanyi, Bernard Lonergan, Sir John Eccles, Friedrich Beck, Henry Stapp, and David Chalmers – insist that physical processes will never be able to produce these interior self-sensitive activities because they lack interior self-sensitivity altogether. I have

written extensively about this (and the thought of these philosophers and scientists) in *The Soul's Upward Yearning*.²³

Is this metaphysical explanation of transubstantiation consistent with Jesus' Semitically conceived intention at the Last Supper? It certainly is. Jesus' intention at the Last Supper was to make His whole self – his future crucified and risen self – present in the bread and wine of the Last Supper – and in the bread and wine of future reenactments of the Last Supper. The above metaphysical explanation affirms this intention and shows *how* this is possible without altering the atomic and molecular structure and appearance of bread and wine. By taking seriously the doctrine of transubstantiation, we show that Jesus' intention and claim at the Last Supper – “This is my body” and “This is my blood” is not a vexing, contradictory, or inexplicable act. It is completely consistent with the highest form of undetectable change within the extrinsic exterior activities of the atomic and molecular constituents of bread and wine. Saint Thomas' explanation not only shows *that* Jesus' claim is possible – but *how* it is possible through a metaphysics which is applicable to, complementary to, and needed within contemporary scientific paradigms of physical processes. If readers are interested in how what appears to be bread and wine can affect the most radical kinds of interior transformation by the simple reenactment of Jesus' words at the Last Supper, they will benefit from the time, study, and thought they give to Saint Thomas Aquinas' brilliant and valid explanation.

Chapter Four

The Later Development of the Mass of the Roman Rite

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Before proceeding to later developments in the Mass, it may prove helpful to give a list of the major sources (and their dates) that provide the historical basis for the material in this chapter.

Letters of St. Paul	50-58 AD
Gospel of Mark	66 AD
Gospel of Matthew	75-85 AD
Gospel of Luke	80-90 AD
The Gospel of John	90-95 AD
The Book of Revelation (anonymous Christian prophet)	90-95 AD
The Didache (anonymous--earliest Church catechism)	95 AD
St. Ignatius of Antioch (multiple letters)	95-105 AD
Justin Martyr (<i>First Apology</i> and <i>Second Apology</i>)	150 AD
St. Irenaeus (<i>Against Heresies</i>)	180 AD
Tertullianus, (<i>De Oratione</i>)	190 AD
Origen (<i>On Prayer</i>)	235 AD
The Council of Nicaea	325 AD
<i>The Canons of Hippolytus</i> (anonymous--detailed liturgical instructions)	336 AD

²³ Robert Spitzer 2015 *The Soul's Upward Yearning*. Chapters 3&6.

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<i>Apostolic Constitutions</i> (anonymous—detailed liturgical instructions)	375 AD
The Council of Constantinople	381 AD
The Council of Calcedon	451 AD
The Fourth Lateran Council (definition of transubstantiation)	1215 AD
The Council of Trent (Tridentine Mass)	1570 AD
Second Vatican Council (<i>Constitution on Sacred Liturgy</i> —contemporary Mass)	1963 AD

We have already seen in Chapters One and Two, how the celebration of the Eucharistic commemoration became the center of what is known today as the Mass of the Roman Rite. Jesus' command to "Do this in memory of me" -- to reenact His words so as to bring the past into the present -- would enable His whole self -- given in love on the cross -- and raised to new life to be brought into the bread and wine offered by the apostles and prophets who would later be called bishops and presbyters, and still later be called priests at the altar of unbloody sacrifice.

By the time Saint Paul wrote the First Letter to the Corinthians (mid-fifties), the supper had been dropped from the Eucharistic commemoration. The rite of the bread-body and the rite of the wine-blood were brought together in an assembly devoted to a three-part ceremony:

1. The offering – the presentation of the bread and wine to be offered.
2. The *Eucharistia* – the reenactment of Jesus' words of thanksgiving, followed by His words of institution – "This is my body..." and "This is the cup of my blood..."
3. The distribution and communion rite.

By the end of the First Century (around 95 A.D.²⁴), the *Didache* indicates that this three-part central rite was preceded by a penitential rite to assure that the congregation would have time to make appropriate contrition for sins in order to faithfully receive the Holy Eucharist. The *Didache* also gives some early, elementary versions of two Eucharistic prayers that preceded the offering and words of institution.

I. The 2nd Century through the 4th Century [Back to top](#)

In about 150 A.D., Justin Martyr indicates that the Christian Church also incorporated a scripture service – in imitation of synagogue custom – before the Eucharistic prayers.²⁵ Old Testament passages (including Psalms) were an essential part of the scripture service, and as the Christian canon became better known and distributed – New Testament scriptures as well. The scripture service was not always part of the Eucharistic commemoration, and in some communities, it was celebrated separately from it.²⁶ Later, the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the Eucharist became unified, giving rise to the basic structure of the mass of the Roman rite.

²⁴ Helmut Koester 1982, *Introduction to the New Testament – Vol II : History and Literature of Early Christianity*, New York, Walter de Gruyter & Co, p13

²⁵ Jungmann, *The Mass* p. 156.

²⁶ Ibid.

The development of Eucharistic prayers in which the three-fold rite of offering-*Eucharistia*-communion was embedded, was remarkably varied from place to place – Rome, Antioch, Egypt, Syria, Ethiopia, and places influenced by Jewish custom. By the latter part of the 4th century (c. 376), the *Apostolic Constitutions*²⁷ gives us a fairly good idea of the four major components of most Eucharistic prayers:

1. Cosmological section – with a detailed description of God’s work in creation.
2. Anthropological-religious section – “Recalling the history of salvation from the fall of the first man to God’s election and guidance of his people in the old covenant.”²⁸
3. The triple Sanctus – assimilated from Jewish custom.
4. Christological section – with the words of institution and prayers for the Church.²⁹

The four common sections of the Eucharistic prayers seem to have come from a common root or tradition present at the time Constantine issued his Edict of Toleration (in 313 A.D.). Constantine sought (along with Church administrators) some uniformity in the liturgical expression of the Eucharistic commemoration, but he left it up to the patriarchates of each region to make this determination. Apparently, the traditions concerning the three-fold rite of Eucharistic commemoration (offering-*Eucharistia*-communion), the four common sections of the Eucharistic prayers, the penitential rite, and the scriptural service were quite strong – and so all of the patriarchates integrated these four elements into their liturgical rites. The penitential rite preceded the scriptural service, which preceded the Eucharistic commemoration. Part of the Eucharistic prayer preceded the Eucharistic commemoration and part followed it.

Beyond this basic structure, the composition of liturgical texts was quite distinct. The different Eucharistic prayers approved within the major patriarchal regions of the Church gave rise to the many rites still existing today. Jungmann describes some of them as follows:³⁰

- The Syro-Malabar rite (which came from the East Syrian liturgy influenced by the Greek liturgy),
- The Byzantine rite (which was derived from the West Syrian liturgy influenced by Greek–Antioch thought),
- The Coptic and Ethiopian rites (derived from the Egyptian liturgy centered in Alexandria),
- The Roman rite (which sprang from the Latin western liturgy, and had several “branches” growing independently – Old Spanish, Gallican, and Milanese).

²⁷ The *Apostolic Constitutions* (composed between 375 and 380 A.D.) is a work of unknown authorship originating in Syria (probably Antioch). It contains a catalogue of rules and disciplines of the Christian Church from various parts of the Christian world. One of the more important parts of this work comes from Book 8 – Chapter 47 – the *Canons of the Apostles*. This chapter contains a very lengthy Eucharistic prayer which combines many elements of different Eucharistic prayers, giving us an idea of the four-fold constituency of the many prayers developed throughout the Christian world by the 4th century.

²⁸ Jungmann *The Mass*, p. 158.

²⁹ See Ibid pp. 157-158.

³⁰ See Ibid, p. 159.

II. Development of the Five Major Parts of the Mass after the 4th Century

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It now remains to give a brief description of the evolution of the five parts of the mass of the Roman rite:

1. The introductory rites (including the entrance, penitential rite, Gloria, and collect).
2. The liturgy of the word (including the Old Testament reading, responsorial psalm, readings from the epistles, the gospel, homily, creed, and general intercessions).
3. The liturgy of the Eucharist (including preface, Eucharistic prayer, Sanctus, offertory, Eucharistic commemoration).
4. The Communion Rite (including the Lord's Prayer, the *Agnus Dei*, "Lord, I am not worthy," and prayer after communion).
5. The concluding rite (concluding prayer, benediction).

II.A Introductory Rites

The mass – the Eucharistic celebration – is a sacrament of the community *par excellence*, and as such the introductory rite was designed not only to bring the community together, but to bring it into the presence of God. After the 6th century, the following order of community gathering was observed both in the West and East.³¹ After the community was assembled, the priest would enter the Church from the sacristy (which was ordinarily at the back of the Church near the entrance) and would process to the altar amidst the chanting of Psalms. In the Roman rite, these Psalms were designated for both high mass and simple mass, but after Vatican II, any appropriate gathering song was permitted. When the priest reaches the altar, he kisses it and the mass begins with the sign of the cross. The greeting of the people follows – generally using one of the greetings from Saint Paul's letters – "The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you."³²

After the greeting, the priest begins the *penitential rite*. As noted above, the penitential rite was included in the very earliest liturgies and is explicitly mentioned in the *Didache* written around 95 A.D. By the 4th century, the "Kyrie" was in use throughout the western and eastern churches, and by 529 A.D., the Synod of Vaison acknowledges its universal presence in the Church.³³

Throughout the East, the *Kyrie* was repeated multiple times – occasionally dozens of times – accompanied by chant and song. In the East, it was surrounded by other penitential prayers which made the rite quite extensive. The post Vatican II (1969) *Order of the Mass* limited it to between three to nine recitations (with the latter reciting – *Kyrie, Christe, Kyrie* – 3

³¹ See Ibid, pp. 160-174.

³² See Ibid pp. 166-167.

³³ See Ibid. p. 168.

times each).³⁴ The *Kyrie* was followed by an invocation for mercy by the priest which had a dimension of sacramental absolution included in it until the 13th century – the beginning of high scholasticism.³⁵ The current formula still reflects this character of absolution – “May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.”

The development of a public confession (“Confiteor”) prior to the *Kyrie* seems to have also been an early development. During the early Middle Ages – 7th and 8th centuries – names of the saints were added to it – and in the later Middle Ages, large numbers of saints, constituting a litany, were included. The post-Vatican II (1969) *Order of Mass* reduces the list of saints to Mary and “all the saints.” The Confiteor concludes with a request to the members of the congregation to pray for God’s mercy for each congregant.

The Gloria is a very early hymn of praise to God and Jesus Christ. Its Greek formula was already established in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (376 A.D.). In the western Church it was translated into Latin, and was integrated into the regular Sunday liturgy by the 6th century.³⁶

It begins as a hymn of praise to God (the Father) for His glory manifest in creation and redemption. It then proceeds to a hymn of praise to Christ our Redeemer, and then asks the Lord to have mercy on us and to answer our prayers. It concludes with a confession and proclamation that Jesus Christ *alone* is holy, Lord, and Most High – against all other false gods and idols. It concludes with a Trinitarian doxology.

It is one of the most perfect Christian hymns of praise in the tradition of Old Testament Psalms and New Testament canticles bringing the congregation into the glorious, holy, and divine presence of Jesus Christ – who is the center of the upcoming liturgy of the Eucharist as well as the liturgy of the Word (in the gospel). The music to which it is put is filled with grandeur and deep emotion, betokening the holiness and glory it is meant to celebrate.

The introductory rite concludes with *the collect* – a summary prayer of petition for general needs – relief from suffering, grace towards salvation, help in the pursuit of holiness, etc. It may be connected with the liturgical season (advent, Christmas, lent, Easter, Pentecost) or a particular saint’s feast or memorial. It concludes with the well-known Trinitarian invocation that was part of Christian liturgy from the 1st century – “We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.”³⁷

II.B Liturgy of the Word

The Liturgy of the Word began to develop in the 2nd century, and is currently constituted by eight parts (for Sunday liturgies):

³⁴ See Ibid. pp. 168-169.

³⁵ See Ibid p. 164.

³⁶ See Ibid. pp. 169-170.

³⁷ See Ibid. pp. 171-174.

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1. A reading from the Old Testament.
2. A responsorial psalm – frequently sung.
3. A reading from the New Testament epistles.
4. The Alleluia verse.
5. The gospel.
6. The homily.
7. The Creed.
8. The intercessions (prayers of the faithful).

I will not address these eight parts in the order in which they occur, but rather according to their importance and the time of their development.

As noted above (Section I), the liturgy of the word was integrated into the Eucharistic commemoration midway through the 2nd century – as indicated in 150 A.D. by Justin Martyr. This scripture service conformed to earlier Jewish customs, and as the Christian canon became more solidified, the New Testament became central to the service. As the liturgy of the word became consistently connected with the liturgy of the Eucharist in the mass, it was seen as a way of preparing for the liturgy of the Eucharist by considering the word and life of Jesus whose body and blood were about to become present and consumed in the liturgy of the Eucharist. It was, as it were, a way of making the Lord come alive in the minds and hearts of the congregation before they received His whole being (given in self-sacrifice).

Though the *Old Testament readings* (from Moses, the prophets, and the *Psalms*) were very familiar to Jewish Christians, the *gospel* and *New Testament epistles* became the focus of the scripture service. Since there was no formal lectionary in the 2nd to 4th centuries, much of the selection of Sunday and feast day readings from the Old Testament, Psalms, New Testament epistles, and gospels was left to various regional churches to decide.³⁸

Around the 3rd and 4th centuries, a set of pericopes from the gospels began to be set out – with pericopes from the synoptic gospels being selected for the Sundays after Pentecost. These pericopes took the most important parts of those gospels and kept them in the same sequence presented in the gospel texts. Pericopes from the gospel of John were used in special seasons (Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter) along with pericopes from the synoptic gospels.

The *gospel* was given the central and highest place of honor in the liturgy of the word. The gospel texts were frequently illuminated and decorated with gold and silver foil, and it could not be read by a lector, but only by a deacon, priest, or bishop. Later, two ambos were used for the reading – the high ambo on the right for the gospel, and the lower ambo on the left for the epistles and Old Testament. Frequently candles were lit for the reading of the gospel, and it was preceded by a procession of the book of the gospels.

The *alleluia verse* (going back to ancient times) preceded the gospel to help the congregation recognize the holiness and significance of the word of God given through Jesus Christ.³⁹

³⁸ See Ibid. p. 176.

³⁹ See Ibid. pp. 174-178.

In many churches, the *New Testament epistles* were selected to reflect the theme of the gospel. This seems to have been done by the presiding priest – and later local bishops began to coordinate various epistle readings with the sequence of gospel pericopes in an informal lectionary. Old Testament readings and responsorial psalms were selected to fit the gospel and epistle readings in the same way – first, by presiding priests, and then by regional bishops. By the 7th century, the Latin Church had several illuminated lectionaries (with gospels, epistles, and related Old Testament texts). These readings were assigned particular days within the liturgical calendar.⁴⁰ Though there was some similarity among lectionaries from various western regions, they were by no means identical. Throughout the Middle Ages, most dioceses settled on an annual lectionary (having a one-year cycle repeated year after year).⁴¹

After Latin became less known by the population of Western Europe, the Latin lectionary had limited effectiveness among the vast majority of people who did not understand it. The Latin lectionary had to be complemented by a homily in the vernacular as well as mystery plays, religious art, and catechism in the vernacular. Unfortunately, this left many lay people without any real sense of the New Testament beyond these dramatic, artistic, homiletic, and catechetical interpretations.

The problem was resolved at the Second Vatican Council in its Instruction of September 26, 1964, where the new lectionary and missile in the vernacular were approved. The new Sunday lectionary was placed on a three-year cycle (instead of the prevalent one-year cycle), and attention was focused each year on one synoptic gospel – Matthew, then Mark, then Luke.⁴² The gospel of John continued to be used for special seasons (Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter) along with synoptic gospels. The weekday lectionary was placed on a two-year cycle for epistle and Old Testament readings, and on a one-year cycle for gospel readings, allowing the congregation to hear the gospel readings from all four gospels throughout each year.

Evidently, this change led to a surge in interest in biblical studies among Catholic clergy and laity. The Second Vatican Council anticipated and encouraged this interest in its document on biblical studies entitled *Verbum Dei*. The effect of this change on all parts of the liturgy was remarkable. It not only oriented homilies toward the scriptures but allowed the word of God to make the person of Jesus (and biblical history) come alive in the congregation's heart before entering into the liturgy of the Eucharist.

In view of the Latin text of the lectionary and the lack of secondary education among many in the populace, the *homily* was of particular importance in the Liturgy of the Word. The homily was an integral part of the mass since the time of Justin Martyr (mid-second century) and was originally oriented toward an exposition of the scriptural readings. During the late Middle Ages, some dioceses drop the homily *during* the mass, and replaced it with a more extensive teaching after the mass.

⁴⁰ Robert G. Calkins, 1983, *Illuminated Books of the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press) pp. 18-19.

⁴¹ A catalogue of New Testament lectionaries dating back to the 7th century is available online. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_New_Testament_lectionaries#List_of_named_or_notable_lectionaries.

⁴² See the post-conciliar Decree on the Lectionary of August 5, 1969.

At the Second Vatican Council, renewed emphasis was placed on the homily as a means of interpreting the New Testament scriptures in light of contemporary exegetical and hermeneutical studies.⁴³ However, it is not limited to this single objective. It should also relate the teaching of the scripture to the everyday lives of the people – helping them to live the general norms of moral and spiritual life.⁴⁴

What is now called the “Nicene *Creed*” recited during the mass contains the articles of faith that evolved in the East (responding to three Christological heresies -- Aryanism, Docetism, and Monophysitism):

- The Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.)
- The Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.)
- The Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.)

It appeared in the Eastern liturgy only a few decades after the close of the Council of Chalcedon, introduced by Patriarch Timotheus in about 500 A.D. After that time, the inclusion of the Creed in the liturgy spread to virtually every Eastern Church. It also moved into the Western Church and was formally accepted into the liturgy by the Spanish National Synod (complete with *Filioque*) in 589 A.D.⁴⁵ After that time it spread throughout the Western Church, and is recited at all Sunday and Feast day masses until this day. The reason the Creed was included at the end of the liturgy of the word was because of its articulation of the Christological mysteries that are about to be celebrated in the Eucharistic prayers and the words of institution. Unfortunately, as the Middle Ages proceeded, people in the Western Church were not able to handle the Latin of the Creed, and so it was left to professional singers to chant it for the congregation. Though these chants were beautiful, the congregants who were not familiar with Latin derived very little from it. This was rectified at the Second Vatican Council when the Creed was translated into the vernacular, and it once again became one of the six major prayers recited by the congregation – the *Kyrie*, the *Gloria*, the *Creed*, the *Sanctus*, Our Father, and the *Agnus Dei*.

The *General Intercessions* (sometimes called the “Prayers of the Faithful”) was included in the Liturgy as far back as Justin Martyr (c. 150 A.D.) who viewed it as the communities prayer for the Church, bishop and clergy, peace in the world, country and city, the sick, the poor, the needy, the dead, and for a holy death.⁴⁶ Evidently, the solemn petitions offered on Good Friday were based on this theological and spiritual intention – and our current Good Friday petitions reflect ancient texts. Throughout the centuries, the placement of the General Intercessions was moved around from after the homily to the Introductory Rites (along with the Collect), and the Penitential Rite (integrated with the *Kyrie*). In some Roman churches it was thought to be replaced by the *Kyrie* and was dropped. However in the mid-20th century, the original intent and placement of the prayer was rediscovered, and was integrated by the Second Vatican Council into the post-conciliar liturgy (see Constitution Sacred Liturgy 53).⁴⁷

⁴³ Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, Section 52.

⁴⁴ See Jungmann, *The Mass*, pp. 180-181.

⁴⁵ See Ibid. p. 181.

⁴⁶ See Ibid. p. 184.

⁴⁷ See Ibid.

II.C Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Offertory. As the Eucharistic prayer begins, the priest moves from the presider's chair and ambo to the altar which becomes the new focus of the Liturgy. The offertory, as noted above, dates back to the earliest Eucharistic commemorations because it was borrowed from Jewish custom and was (in a simple way) part of Jesus' prayers of thanksgiving at the Last Supper. Justin Martyr attests to the strong tradition of it in the mid-2nd century, and it has maintained its prominence to this day. The Eastern Church structured the reception and preparation of the gifts in a highly formalized ritual that was simplified in the west.

The Western Church began the Offertory with a procession of gift offerings from the congregation. These would include the bread and wine and sometimes other offerings that could be used during the mass (candles, oil, etc.). When these were brought forward the priest took them and offered them to God with prayers based on the Jewish table blessing for both bread and wine.⁴⁸ These simple prayers were accompanied by many other prayers and blessings during which the congregation would sing chants or songs.⁴⁹

After the 8th century, the priest began to recite the preparation blessings and prayers "*Sotto voce*" (in very subdued, almost silent voice). It was thought at this time that the priest alone could enter into the deepest most sacred places – the holy of holies – which began formally with the Offertory. This was extended into the Eucharistic prayer and the words of institution. Even though the priest was present at the altar – and was not going into a separate holy place – he expressed to the people that he would be taking leave of them to go into that place by using the prayer, "Pray brethren that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Almighty Father."⁵⁰

The Second Vatican Council ordered that the Offertory prayers once again be made audible – giving each part of the rite a simple yet dignified status. The procession of gifts, though simple, came from the faithful; the prayers of blessing were reduced to the prayers of table blessing which Jesus may have used during the Last Supper; the "pray brethren..." was retained, but with inclusion of the lay people, who would accompany the priest into the mystery and sacredness of the upcoming celebration, and the acclamation was added, "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands..." to bring the congregation into the Offertory Rite.

The washing of hands was placed at the end of the Offertory which was customary in the late Middle Ages and the pre-Vatican II Church, however from the 4th century into the 9th century (particularly in the East) it was placed at the beginning of the Offertory as a purification rite for the priest before he embarked on the Eucharistic sacrifice. It was moved to the end of the

⁴⁸ The table blessing for bread is *Hamotzi* – "Praised are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth..." The table blessing for wine is the *Kaddush* – "Praised are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine."

⁴⁹ See Jungmann, *The Mass*, pp. 189-190.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Offertory for additional practical reasons – to wash off the residue from the material gifts offered by the congregation and the incensing that concluded the Offertory Rite.⁵¹

As noted in Section I, *The Eucharistic Prayer* was an integral part of the earliest liturgies dating back to the *Didache* (in 95 A.D.). Large numbers of different Eucharistic prayers were developed in both the East and West to fill out the “thanksgiving” (*Eucharistia*) prior to the words of institution. The history of this extensive and varied development of the central prayer of the mass is far too extensive to recount here. A brief description of some of the rites that evolved in the East and West was given in Section I above. For the moment we will concentrate solely on one kind of Eucharistic prayer containing the common elements of most Eucharistic prayers – placing these elements in the basic order used today. There are six major elements in these prayers usually found in the following order:⁵²

1. Preface (thanksgiving).
2. The triple Sanctus.
3. The *Epiclesis*.
4. The words of consecration (effecting transubstantiation).
5. Intercessions for the Church, the dead, and the faithful.
6. The Concluding Doxology and “Amen.”

I will refer to the above numbers in the explanation of each part of the Eucharistic Prayer below.

II.C.1 The Preface

The Preface begins with a three-fold dialogical acclamation going back to the 2nd century and is preserved faithfully in the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I):⁵³

The Lord be with you; and with your Spirit; lift up your hearts;
we have lifted them up to the Lord; let us give thanks to the
Lord our God; it is truly right and just.

This dialogical acclamation is clearly an invitation to praise and thanksgiving, which is followed by a recitation of God’s gifts of creation and redemption. Many different prefaces have been written throughout history which are still part of the Roman missal today. Each emphasizes God’s work of creation and redemption that best fit particular occasions -- liturgical seasons, feast days, and votive masses. Amidst these variations, the preface is centered on Christ’s redemptive act in the passion, death, and resurrection which saves us.

Eucharistic Prayer II has its own preface, and is based on the Canon of Hippolytus of Rome which was probably written around 336 A.D.⁵⁴ Hence it shows us how the early Church

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² The placement of the epiclesis may be before or after the consecration – usually before.

⁵³ See Ibid. p. 201.

conceived of this important part of the Eucharistic Prayer. As noted above, it is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving for Christ our Savior and Redeemer, recounting the sacrificial actions in which he engaged to give us the Holy Eucharist (His body and blood) and eternal salvation. The preface of Eucharistic Prayer II makes this clear:

It is truly right and just, our duty and salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Father most holy, through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, your Word through whom you made all things, whom you sent as our Savior and Redeemer, incarnate by the holy Spirit and born of the Virgin. Fulfilling your will and gaining for you a holy people he stretched out his hands as he endured His Passion, so as to break the bonds of death and manifest the resurrection. And so, with the Angels and all the Saints we declare your glory, as with one voice we acclaim.

As the centuries passed, various churches added new elements to the above basic preface. Eucharistic Prayer IV (of the west Syrian Byzantine type) adds a hymn of praise for creation – particularly the creation of human beings in the image of God – as well as a recounting of how God guided and led humanity throughout the ages.

Eucharistic Prayer III does not contain a preface, and so a priest can use any preface in the Roman Missal (depending upon the liturgical season, feast day, or votive mass). All of the available prefaces speak about Jesus' redemption (similar to that recounted in Eucharist Prayer II above), so the Canon of Eucharistic Prayer III speaks about the Church and the Eucharist as works flowing out of Christ's redemption. Eucharistic Prayer I (the Roman Canon) follows Eucharistic Prayer III by not providing a fixed preface, but allowing any appropriate preface to be selected from those provided in the Roman Missal.

II.C.2 The Sanctus

The preface leads to a high point of solemn praise and adoration – the triple Sanctus – which probably goes back to the 1st century liturgy:

Holy Holy Holy Lord God of Hosts
Heaven and Earth are full of your glory – Hosanna in the Highest!
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord – Hosanna in the highest.

This hymn of praise synthesizes two passages of scripture – Isaiah's vision and the "Benedictus" proclaimed during Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

The first part comes from Isaiah's vision (6:2-3):

Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings:

⁵⁴ As noted earlier, some scholars date this work to the early 3rd century (210 A.D.), and some to the early 4th century (336 A.D.). I have used the more conservative (later) dating here.

with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

These words of sublime adoration, involving the divine mystery and heavenly hosts, was part of the Jewish liturgy, and would have been well-known by the apostolic church and the following generation. The second part of the Sanctus acclamation is called the "Benedictus" – "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord -- Hosanna in the highest!" This passage comes from the New Testament accounts of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and was added to the Sanctus acclamation in the 5th or 6th century in the Roman Church.

II.C.3 *Epiclesis*

In the East, the *epiclesis* began as a prayer to the Holy Spirit to make the gifts of bread and wine holy prior to the words of consecration. This action includes a blessing, purification, and "spiritualizing" of the gifts so that they will be acceptable as the sacramental species through which Christ's body and blood will become present through transubstantiation. The words normally used to do this in most Eucharistic Prayers (with the exception of Eucharistic Prayer I – the Roman Canon) resemble the ancient *epiclesis* of Hippolytus of Rome (336 A.D.) upon which Eucharistic Prayer II is based:

Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them, so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It should be noted that the *epiclesis* is not the point at which the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ occurs, but rather a rite of blessing and purification of the gifts prior to their transubstantiation at the words of consecration.⁵⁵

Eucharistic Prayers III & IV (composed later) follow Eucharistic Prayer II in the above understanding of *epiclesis*. Eucharistic Prayer I (the Roman Canon), however, does not mention the Holy Spirit in the words of *epiclesis*. Rather, it focuses solely on a blessing, purification, and spiritualizing of the gifts to make them acceptable for consecration:

Be pleased, O God, we pray, to bless, acknowledge, and approve this offering in every respect; make it spiritual and acceptable, so that it may become for us the Body and Blood of your most beloved Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

⁵⁵ See Jungmann *The Mass*, pp. 61, 93, 194-195, and 200.

II.C.4 The Consecration

After the *epiclesis*, the priest reenacts Jesus' words at the Last Supper in the words of *consecration*. First, He recites words similar to the historical narrative in the Synoptic Gospels and Saint Paul:

“He took bread, and giving thanks, gave it to His disciples saying, ‘Take this all of you and eat of it, for this is my body which will be given up for you.’”

In Luke 22:19 we read the passage from which these Eucharistic words were taken:

“And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you.’”⁵⁶

The priest then reenacts Jesus' rite of the wine–blood using the words of consecration:

“In a similar way, when supper was ended, he took the chalice, And once more giving praise, gave it to his disciples saying, ‘Take this All of you and drink from it for this is the chalice of my blood – The blood of the new and eternal covenant which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.’”

This passage synthesizes two versions of Jesus' Eucharistic words over the cup during the rite of the wine-blood -- Luke's version and the common version of Mark-Matthew. The scriptural texts follow:

Luke: “In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the *new covenant in my blood*, which is poured out for you’” (Lk. 22:20).

Mark-Matthew: “Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for *the many for the forgiveness of sins* (Mt. 26:27-28).

Luke 22:20 uses the phrase “poured out for *you*, ” while Matthew 26:20 says “poured out for *the many*.”⁵⁷ J. Jeremias believes that the Mark-Matthew version is Jesus' original, and that Luke and Paul change “the many” to “you,” because this was the formula used at the celebration of the Last Supper in the Early Church. The personal pronoun, “you,” makes Jesus' action

⁵⁶ The use of the past participle, “given,” referring to a future event was explained above in Chapter One. Jesus' prophetic words bring the entire future event (His body sacrificed on the cross) into the present (at the Last Supper) as if the future event were already done. The Eucharistic words of consecration translate Jesus' words into “will be given” (future tense) to alleviate confusion in modern audiences – but they have the same meaning as Jesus' prophetic words.

⁵⁷ The words “the many” very probably mean “all.” This was explained above in the Chapter One.

efficacious and relevant to the congregation listening to the reenactment. The early Church did not make a decision as to which words were more original, but rather combined the two versions into the Eucharistic words we use today – “poured out for you and for many.”

Luke’s version does not mention “the forgiveness of sins,” but the Mark-Matthew version does. Jeremias believes that Jesus intended to harken back to Isaiah 53:12.

...He poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession
for the transgressors.

The early Church recognized Jesus’ intention to forgive sins in His self-offering, and so included these words from the Mark-Matthew formula in the words of consecration.

Luke’s version uses the words “*new* covenant in my blood” while the Mark-Matthew version uses, “My blood of the covenant.” The early Church did not make a decision as to which version was more original, but settled on Luke’s version which is more extended – “the *new*” covenant in my blood.

The Mark-Matthew version is more explicit about transubstantiation – “This *is* my blood of the covenant.” It unmistakably associates the wine with Jesus’ blood. The Lucan version seems to put the emphasis on the covenant, but it is essentially referring to the blood of Jesus – while putting extra emphasis on the covenant. Thus it is consistent with the Mark-Matthew version. In order to clearly associate the wine with Jesus’ blood, the early Church used the Mark-Matthew version, “This is the chalice of *my blood*” – and then adds the Lucan version afterward – “The blood of the new covenant.”

The reader may have noticed that the early church added a word to the Lucan formula – “everlasting.” The Lucan version states, “The new covenant in my blood” while the words of consecration say, “This is the cup of my blood; the blood of the new and *everlasting* covenant.” The word “everlasting” is not mentioned in the Mark-Matthew formula either. As can be seen from the above analysis, the early church was exceedingly careful to ground the words of consecration in the two scriptural formulas – Mark-Matthew and Luke-Paul. So why did they break from this careful approach in this one case? What was their source for including the word “everlasting” in the words of institution?

The first liturgical formulas of the words of consecration were very likely formulated by the apostles and used shortly after Jesus’ resurrection -- *before* the writing of the Pauline letters and the gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Though formulas written in the later 1st century were likely based on the two scriptural formulas, they were not limited to them. Apparently, one or more of the apostolic versions of the central words of institution included the word “everlasting,” in it, and this found its way into the later 1st century versions of the words of institution.

If one or more of these apostolic formulas used the word “everlasting,” it would probably have had its origin in Jesus Himself – and would not have been a later addition. Why would Jesus have used the word “everlasting” within His formula of “the new covenant”? The likely explanation lies in the words of Jeremiah which would have been on the mind of Jesus when considering the establishment of His new covenant. There are only three passages about the “new covenant” in the Old Testament – all of which come from the book of Jeremiah -- 31:31-38; 32:39-41; and 50:5. Let us examine each in turn.

The days are coming, declares the LORD, “when I will make a *new covenant* with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “*I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts*. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. For I will forgive their wickedness and *will remember their sins no more* (Jer. 31:31-34).

I will make an *everlasting* covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear, so that they will never turn away from me (Jer. 32:40).

They will ask the way to Zion and turn their faces toward it. They will come and bind themselves to the LORD in an *everlasting covenant* that will not be forgotten (Jer. 50:5).

So what does Jeremiah say about the new covenant? The above passages highlight three basic attributes of it:

1. It will lead to an interiorization of the law and the essence of God in our minds and hearts.
2. It will be an everlasting covenant.
3. It will lead to a permanent and everlasting forgiveness of sins.

In Volume 6 (Chapter Two, Sections I and II), we discuss Jesus’ view of the new temple and the new covenant in His body. Jesus viewed this new temple and covenant as the foundation of a new church in His body – a universal church (not limited to Jerusalem), a church grounded and led by His Holy Spirit (giving rise to an interiorization of the law and essence of God), and a permanent and unconditional forgiveness of sins. The remarkable coincidence of these three characteristics with those mentioned by Jeremiah – and Jesus’ association of the new covenant

and temple with His *body and blood* -- strongly imply that Jesus had the words of Jeremiah in mind when He was establishing His new covenant in His body and blood during the Last Supper.

Since Jesus' view of the new covenant, the new universal temple, and the New Jerusalem are so closely related to these passages from Jeremiah, it is almost inconceivable that he did not know about them or use them as the basis for His Eucharistic words. Though the first passage (Jer. 31:31-34) does not mention "everlasting," the subsequent two passages – extending the first – do mention it. If Jesus really did base His notion of the new covenant on Jeremiah's conception of it, then it is quite conceivable that He used the words, "new and everlasting covenant" in His Eucharistic words. If so, then it would not be surprising if early apostolic formulas of the words of institution included the word, "everlasting" in them – and that this tradition was handed down to the formulators of the final tradition we use today.

So what might we say about the early Church's version of the words of institution (consecration)? She resolved not to leave out anything. Her strategy was clear – when in doubt, put it in. As can be seen, the Eucharistic words today are a faithful synthesis of both versions of Jesus' Eucharistic words which point to His intention to bring His future crucified and risen body into the bread and wine used at His Last Supper – so that He would be really present to them and lovingly active within them. This was discussed in detail above in Chapter One.

We now move to the last part of the words of institution – the *anamnesis* – "Do this in memory of me." Luke places these words after the rite of the bread-body (before the supper), while Mark-Matthew places them after the rite of the wine-blood (after the supper). Jeremias believes that the Mark-Matthew placement is more original. The early Church did not make a decision about this, but followed the Mark-Matthew version because it clearly included *both* the rite of the bread-body, and that of the wine-blood. We have explained Jesus' meaning of this simple phrase in detail above (Chapter One). For the moment, suffice to say that these words mean, "Reenact my words to bring this past event into the present moment so that my body and blood will once again become present through bread and wine for you."⁵⁸

The "mystery of faith" follows the words of institution. Though it was implicitly included in various Eucharistic Prayers, the Second Vatican Council made it explicit so that the people would respond with an acclamation directly to Jesus about the mystery of His body and blood made possible through His total self-sacrifice. There are three formulas for this acclamation:

- "We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection, until you come again."
- "When we eat this Bread and Drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again."
- "Save us, Savior of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free."

Why do we pray directly to Jesus instead of the Father (which is the norm throughout the mass)? It is an acknowledgement that Jesus has become really present (in His body and blood) through

⁵⁸ If readers do not understand this, they will want to return to Chapter One to gain insight on how prophetic ritual reenactment collapses the past sacred moment into the present. If readers are unclear about how bread and wine can be transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ (without changing the appearance of bread and wine), they will want to return to the detailed explanation in Chapter Three.

the gifts on the altar. The acclamation is one of praise and love for His self-sacrifice that has made our salvation (and the Eucharistic gift) possible.

II.C.5

The Intercessions

Given the absolute centrality of the words of institution -- making present the real body and blood of Christ – the Eucharistic prayer continues with praise for the gift of Christ’s body and blood and intercessory prayers for the Church, the deceased, and the congregants. Most Eucharistic Prayers follow a formula of commemoration and praise similar to that of Eucharistic Prayer II:

Therefore, as we celebrate the memorial of his Death and Resurrection, we offer you, Lord, the Bread of life and the Chalice of salvation, giving thanks that you have held us worthy to be in your presence and minister to you. Humbly we pray that, partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, we may be gathered into one by the Holy Spirit. Remember, Lord, your Church, spread throughout the world, and bring her to the fullness of charity, together with N. our Pope and N. our Bishop and all the clergy. Remember also our brothers and sisters who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection, and all who have died in your mercy: welcome them into the light of your face. Have mercy on us all, we pray, that with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, with the blessed Apostles, and all the Saints who have pleased you throughout the ages, we may merit to be coheirs to eternal life, and may praise and glorify you.

Most Eucharistic Prayers (as in Eucharistic Prayer II above) begin with a recognition that Jesus’ body and blood has become present in the reenactment (the “Memorial”) of His death and resurrection. This is followed by a prayer for unity within the Church – the unity of the “body of Christ” about which Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 12. Eucharistic Prayers I, III, and IV follow this formula precisely.

Most Eucharistic Prayers (as in Eucharistic Prayer II above) continue with prayers for the leadership of the Church, the deceased, and the congregants. This is followed (as above) by a recognition of the saints (as above) and a petition to be with the Trinity and the whole Communion of Saints forever.

Eucharistic Prayer I (the Roman Canon) is unusual, because it has two sets of intercessions – one before the consecration (after the Sanctus) and another after the consecration. It also has two extended prayers recognizing the saints and petitioning the Lord to join them in the heavenly kingdom – one before the consecration and one after. In the recognition of the saints, the Roman Canon has an extended listing of the martyrs. In the prayer before the words of consecration, it lists, along with the Blessed Virgin Mary, the apostles, and some of the early Roman martyrs. In the prayer after the consecration, it adds John the Baptist, Stephen, Matthias, Marcellinus, Barnabas, Ignatius, and several woman martyrs – including Felicity, Perpetua, Agatha, Lucy, Agnes, Cecilia, and Anastasia. It also adds a prayer for an angel to take the consecrated gifts to God’s altar in heaven:

In humble prayer we ask you, almighty God: command that these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high in the sight of your divine majesty, so that all of us who through this participation at the altar receive the most holy Body and Blood of your Son may be filled with every grace and heavenly blessing. (Through Christ our Lord. Amen.)

This prayer does not imply that the words of consecration are not sufficient to transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ – that something more is needed in order for Jesus' body and blood to become effective within us or the community. Furthermore, this prayer is not a secondary *epiclesis* – a secondary blessing and spiritualizing after the consecration. So what is it – and what purpose does it serve?

John Harriott indicates that the focus is not on the angel or the angel's carrying of Jesus' body and blood to the heavenly domain, but on the name "Divine Majesty" which is the most perfect name and address for God in the Middle Ages. As Harriott notes:

[Divine Majesty] is used in such a way [in the Roman Canon] as to suggest that it is the highest and most complete title by which we can address God. It is God's majesty which his holy people gathered together are to praise; his majesty to which the sacrifice is offered; his majesty from which the benefits of that sacrifice are to be asked for and expected.⁵⁹

For Harriott, this prayer to the Divine Majesty is a way of refocusing the sacrifice and presence of Jesus back on the Father who most perfectly is described as Majestic – glorious, powerful, awe-inspiring, royal, splendid, Creator, and perfectly good. It is a call to refocus on and worship the One who is present – along with Jesus in the offering and transformation of the Eucharistic gifts which bring us into the Divine life. This prayer does not compete with the consecration or add anything to it; it is a reengagement of the Father's presence within the sacrifice and praise of the mass.

II.C.6

Concluding Doxology

At the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest elevates the body and blood of Christ and recites the ancient hymn of praise:

Through Him, with Him, and in Him, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, for ever and ever. The people respond, "Amen."

⁵⁹ John Harriott "Your Divine Majesty" in *The Way*, <http://www.theway.org.uk/Back/052Harriott.pdf>

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This solemn doxology is in all four Eucharistic Prayers, and goes back to the time of Justin Martyr (c. 150 A.D.). It concludes the Eucharistic Prayer of Hippolytus of Rome (336 A.D.) upon which Eucharistic Prayer II is based. The doxology is addressed to the Father (“Oh God Almighty Father”) through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ who is present in the priest, the words of institution, in the sacrifice reenacted, and in His body and blood on the altar – who is in unity with the Father through the Holy Spirit. Thus, the solemn doxology focuses on the presence of Jesus (in His body and blood elevated by the priest) who is unified with the Father through the Holy Spirit from the moment of the consecration.

Though the *epiclesis* focused on the Holy Spirit, the words of institution and consecration on Christ, and the preface and intercessions on the Father, the concluding doxology brings all three persons together in a grand vision of the Trinity who is present through, with, and in the body and blood of Christ. The priest declares that all honor and glory are to be found in this grand vision of the Trinity present in the Holy Eucharist.

When the people respond, “Amen,” which means “So be it – truly!” they not only recognize the real presence of Christ and the Trinity in the Eucharist, but also enter into the divine triune reality through their acclamation of faith. This entrance into the Trinity includes every aspect of the Eucharistic prayer – the praise of the Father in the Preface, the recognition of the Holy Spirit in the *epiclesis*, the adoration of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, and the petitions to the Father in the intercessions. When they enter this triune reality, they truly become Church – through the body of Christ they are about to receive who is unified with the Father through the Holy Spirit. As the Pauline author notes in the Letter to the Ephesians:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all (Eph. 4: 4-6).

II.D The Communion Rite

The Communion Rite has six parts:

1. The Our Father
2. The Sign of Peace
3. Fractioning of the Bread and the *Agnus Dei*
4. The Mingling of the Body and Blood
5. The Minor Elevation & the “Lord, I am not Worthy”
6. The Reception of Communion

This rite was not viewed as having a distinct liturgical significance and framework until the latter part of the 4th Century.⁶⁰ At that time, it only had an opening prayer, the reception of communion, and a prayer of thanksgiving. Soon after, additional parts were added to this rite in

⁶⁰ It is not mentioned in Justin Martyr (150 AD) nor in the Canon of Hippolytus (336 AD), but seemingly for the first time in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (circa 376 AD) in a simplified form.

both the East and the West, beginning with the *Our Father*, at the turn of the 4th century.⁶¹ Using the above numeration, we will briefly discuss each of the six parts in their sequence within the Mass.

- (1) The *Our Father* became a regular part of the Liturgy in the 5th century—both in the East and West. In the East it was proclaimed by the people, and in the West by the priest (though the people prayed the last petition as a response). The reason for its inclusion in the Liturgy is two-fold—its origin in Jesus and the petition, “give us this day our daily bread,” which was spiritualized to signify the Holy Eucharist. There are other important reasons for saying the Our Father before receiving Communion, such as, the efficacy of Christ’s Body and Blood in bringing us to God’s Kingdom, actualizing God’s Will in our lives, freeing us from the trial, and protecting us from the evil one.
- (2) The *Sign of Peace* (originally called “the kiss of peace”) was an integral part of the Roman liturgy from its earliest days (witnessed by Tertullian in about 190AD).⁶² It was placed variously at the end of the Liturgy of the Word or immediately before the reception of Holy Communion. The latter practice was typical in the Roman rite. As Jungmann notes the rationale for its early addition within the communion rite was as a gesture of fraternal love in the spirit of Matthew 5:23-24: “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”⁶³

In the Tridentine Liturgy (promulgated by the Council of Trent in 1570—and celebrated until 1962), a distinction was made between High Mass and Low Mass. The Low Mass, which greatly simplified the liturgy, dropped *the kiss of peace*. However, in 1969 with the promulgation of the Mass of Pope Paul VI, *the kiss of peace* was restored to the Liturgy, and placed prior to Communion as was the practice of the early Roman rite.

- (3) The *fractioning of the bread* and the *Agnus Dei* were not originally connected. The fractioning was part of the earliest Church liturgies, and was done not only as an imitation of Jesus’ actions at the Last Supper, but also out of practical need to split the consecrated loaves into sufficient pieces for the congregation. This continued until the 10th century when single hosts were manufactured in Germany. After that time the fractioning of a single large host (as symbolic of Jesus’ actions) replaced the full fractioning rite.⁶⁴

In the 4th century, the Lamb of God was connected with the fractioning rite in the East, and in the 7th century, the “*Agnus Dei*” formula we use today was connected with the Roman rite:

⁶¹ Jungmann notes that St. John Chrysostom refers to the *Our Father* in his divine liturgy (390AD), see Jungmann *The Mass* (p205)

⁶² Quintus Septimius Tertullianus, *De Oratione* 18

⁶³ See Jungmann *The Mass*, (p 209)

⁶⁴ See *ibid*, p 208

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,
Have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,
Have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,
Grant us peace.

This prayer connects the fractioning rite to the dismemberment of Jesus during the Passion (“the Lamb of God”) who was at once the innocent victim and the Savior of the world. The prayer asks for two graces:

- forgiveness/mercy for our sins and failings
 - peace of mind and heart – with God and the challenges of the world around us
- (4) The *commingling rite* – in which a small piece of the consecrated host is dropped into the chalice of consecrated wine, followed the fractioning/Lamb of God since the time of the first Roman Ordo (the early 8th century).⁶⁵ It was meant to symbolize the reunification of the body and blood of Christ after their separate consecration into a single whole constituting the risen body and soul of Christ.⁶⁶ The separate consecration symbolizes the death of Christ, and the comingling of the body and blood symbolizes the reunification which represents the risen body and soul of Christ. Other rituals were combined with it – including the signing over the chalice with the words, “May the mingling of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring us all together into life everlasting.”
- (5) The minor elevation and “Lord I am not worthy” dates back to the 16th century⁶⁷ and consists of two parts. During the first part – the minor elevation – the priest raises the host – or both the host and chalice – and says the words of John the Baptist, “Look this truly is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (Jn 1:29) which is followed by the hymnic proclamation from the book of Revelation, “Blessed are those who are called to His supper” (Rev. 19:9). In the second part, the priest gives the congregation another opportunity to seek repentance for sin prior to the reception of the Eucharist. The wording (coming from the centurion’s request in Luke 7:7) implies that God’s forgiving and reconciling grace brings forgiveness and healing to us in our unworthiness -- “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed.”
- (6) *The Communion Rite* concludes with the faithful receiving the Holy Eucharist. Evidently this practice was integral to the earliest Church liturgies which imitated Jesus’ blessing and distribution of His body and blood through the species of bread and wine. It is integral to the *raison d’être* of the mass, and the point at which the grace of the Lord’s

⁶⁵ An Ordo is an official book describing liturgical ceremonial functions. Ordos would have had official approval by either a large episcopal region or by the pope. Many Ordos, approved by the pope or an official liturgical council, were promulgated between the 8th and 12th centuries, with the first being promulgated in the 8th.

⁶⁶ See *ibid*, p. 208.

⁶⁷ See *ibid*, p. 212.

body and blood becomes transformative and redemptive in the individual congregants and in the congregation itself.

The rite has changed in form throughout the centuries – first, seated at table, then distribution to the congregation, then the congregation coming up to receive, then the congregation kneeling to receive on the tongue, and then the congregants standing and receiving in the hand (similar to earlier centuries). Throughout the centuries, the Church has tried to blend the symbolism of the sacrifice, the supper, the real presence of Jesus, and the forgiveness of sins into the communion rite as a whole, and in the reception of communion by the faithful. This incited the Church in the early Middle Ages to move from the practice of receiving communion in the palm of the hand to receiving on the tongue. Saint Thomas Aquinas justifies this by noting that the Lord's body and blood should not touch anything unconsecrated before being consumed by the faithful. Since the chalice, paten, and priest's hands were consecrated, they could touch the host, but the faithful whose hands were not consecrated had to receive it on the tongue.⁶⁸

The practice of kneeling while receiving Holy Communion also dates back to the early Middle Ages. It was recommended to promote the *adoration* of Jesus' sacred body and blood so that it would not be received casually or unworthily. Saint Augustine stated, "No one eats that flesh without first adoring it; we should sin were we not to adore it."⁶⁹ Kneeling was thought to be a way of worshipping and inducing adoration – and so this practice became a norm in the Church for over a millennium. Pope Benedict XVI advocated the continued practice of kneeling to receive Holy Communion, though the church in the United States has recommended standing as the norm. It should be noted that Saint Augustine's admonition to adore the Holy Eucharist we are receiving applies as much today as it did during his time – and so we must try to be focused on the preciousness of the gift we are receiving – no matter what our position when we receive the host.

II.E The Concluding Rite

The concluding rite (constituted by a prayer and benediction) dates back to the fourth century and may be found in the Apostolic Constitutions. In the East it was expanded considerably with additional prayers and hymns – and even a distribution of bread to those who did not communicate.⁷⁰

In the Roman Liturgy, public blessings were reserved to the bishop alone, but in the 11th century, due to popular pressure, priests were allowed to do public blessings in place of the bishop.⁷¹ Thus, the priest concluded the mass with a final prayer, followed by a public blessing,

⁶⁸ See Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 82, art 3. See also Vatican documents "Communion received on the tongue and while kneeling"

http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/details/ns_lit_doc_20091117_comunione_en.html.

⁶⁹ Saint Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (*Explorations of the Psalms*) 98, 9.

⁷⁰ See Jungmann, *The Mass*, pp. 212-213.

⁷¹ See *Ibid*.

and a simple dismissal (“Go now the mass is ended”). After this the priest kisses the altar as a final valedictory gesture (complementing the initial kiss of the altar at the beginning of mass), and processes to the back of the church to a recessional hymn.⁷²

From the 19th century to the 1964 instruction of Vatican II, the Roman Liturgy inserted the *Placeat* (“May the homage of my service please you”) before the final blessing, and made several additions after it – a final gospel reading, the prayers of Saint Leo XIII, and additional diocesan prayers.⁷³

In the 1964 instruction, virtually all of the above additions were eliminated, and the concluding rite was reduced to a final prayer, followed by a benediction, a dismissal, kiss of the altar, and a recessional hymn. Several options for benedictions and dismissals were added to the Roman Sacramentary – incorporating longer blessings from the East as well as blessings for special occasions (e.g. Lent and Easter) from the Roman Liturgy. Concluding hymns were vastly expanded, incorporating contemporary music and lyrics into the hymnic repertoire.

Chapter Five

The Mass as Prayer and Union with the Lord

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The mass of the Roman Rite is one of the richest prayer experiences imaginable. Lying at its heart is the reenactment of Jesus’ words at the Last Supper, transforming the gifts of bread and wine into His redemptive and risen body and blood given for us on the cross. Receiving this most sacred gift in the communion rite is the natural fulfillment (completion) of the intentions of Jesus and the rite of institution. Every other part of the mass is built around this central rite of institution and its fulfillment in Holy Communion.

Some liturgists view the Liturgy of the Word as equivalent to the Liturgy of the Eucharist, but this view has no precedent either in the early church or throughout the two millennia prior to Vatican II. The Liturgy of the Word is very important indeed, but it was originally viewed as a scripture service which was for many years separated from the Liturgy of the Eucharist.⁷⁴ For centuries, it was viewed as a complement to the Liturgy of the Eucharist – engaging the congregants about the heart and mind of God and Jesus before the Eucharistic Prayer in which Jesus’ body and blood would become really present. No doubt, the new emphasis of the Second Vatican Council raised the importance and efficacy of the Liturgy of the Word, making it a primary vehicle for teaching and guiding the faithful, but it was not made equivalent in status to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We might say that it is the second most central part of the mass meant to illumine the presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. As Jungmann notes:

The readings could even be omitted altogether if an equivalent

⁷² See Ibid.

⁷³ See Ibid.

⁷⁴ See Ibid p. 156.

preparation was provided for in some other way.... The emphasis was not exclusively on the readings in themselves, but on the fact that the community gathered in God's presence and in God's name heard his words before glorifying him in the Eucharist.⁷⁵

With this in mind, we might view the mass as primarily the reenactment of Jesus' Eucharistic words and actions leading to the risen presence of His body and blood meant to be received by the congregants. This central act is so profound that the Church from its earliest days integrated it with every way of relating to and communicating with God:

- *Praise* of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit
- *Thanksgiving (Eucharistia)* for creation, redemption, and the Eucharistic gifts
- *Adoration* of Jesus in the most Holy Sacrament of the altar
- *Common Prayer for personal needs* – e.g. The Our Father
- *Repentance and forgiveness*
- *Lectio Divina* – contemplative listening to the word of God, particularly the gospel
- *Profession of faith*
- *Intercessions for the people and the Church*, and
- *Blessing*

These forms of relating to and communicating with God are accompanied by liturgical actions, symbols, music, art, and architecture – integrating *beauty* with communal prayer to evoke the sense of the sublime – being lifted into the divine presence – at once glorious, majestic, intimate, and deep – filled with glorious sound punctuated by silence and rest.

Let us examine more closely each of these forms of relating to and communicating with the Lord throughout the mass. Recall that the reenactment of Jesus' words transforming the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ is the primary way of relating to and communicating with the Lord, because we are allowed to enter into the mystery of transubstantiation through the mediation of the priest. As we attend to the words and actions of institution through our faith, we witness and participate in a great miracle – the reality of the Son of God coming into our midst so that we might receive Him into ourselves.

The second way of relating to and communicating with the Lord during mass is of equal significance to the first – we receive into ourselves the very body and blood – the risen person of Jesus through communion. In the consecration we witness the divine mystery coming present, and now we receive the mystery into ourselves. There can be no more intimate, profound, and transformative way of relating to or communicating with the Lord than this. The unconditionally loving God has made it all possible by sending His Son into the world to actualize this most precious gift through His passion, death, and resurrection.

All other forms of relating to and communicating with the Lord during mass are complementary to the above two central ways – they are like a prism that brings out the multi form spectra of the Lord's light (and presence) in the Holy Eucharist. Though these other forms

⁷⁵ Ibid p. 156.

of relating to God do not add to the sublime mystery of the Holy Eucharist, they help *us* relate to the Lord and to the central mystery with which He has provided us. Thus, these other ways of relating to the Lord transform the central melody and harmony into a grand symphony of communion with the infinitely good, loving, and awe-inspiring Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We now proceed to the third way of relating to and communicating with the Lord -- giving *praise*. In praising God, we express our appreciation for the blessings He bestows on us, and for His beauty, goodness, and love manifest in creation and redemption. Yet praise cannot be limited to appreciation and gratitude; it is also an expression of awe and love. We see this manifest in virtually all the Psalms of praise – for example:

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.
It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.
The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.
The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.
The decrees of the LORD are firm,
and all of them are righteous... (Psalm 19: 1-9).

Little wonder so many of these Psalms have been converted in ancient and modern times into hymns for the mass.

We can sense the same appreciation, gratitude, awe, and love for the Lord – our Creator and Redeemer – in many of hymns of praise patterned after the Psalms – such as, “Holy God we praise thy name”:

Holy God we praise thy name

Lord of all we bow before thee
All on earth thy scepter claim
All in heaven above adore Thee
Infinite thy vast domain;
Everlasting is thy reign.
Hark! the loud celestial hymn
Angel choirs above are raising,
Cherubim and seraphim,
In unceasing chorus praising;
Fill the heavens with sweet accord:
Holy, holy, holy, Lord.

Praise during the mass is not restricted to hymns. It is also found consummately in the *Gloria* -- praising Jesus, His Father, and the Spirit -- as well as the *Sanctus* which calls to mind Isaiah's vision and Christ's entry into Jerusalem. It is not surprising then that these acclamations of praise are almost always set to music (having the qualities of grandeur) during Sunday masses. Praise is also found the preface of the Eucharistic Prayer mixed with prayers of thanksgiving.

A fourth way of relating with the Lord during mass -- *thanksgiving* -- is closely related to praise. Evidently, thanksgiving ("*Eucharistia*") stands at the heart of the mass. It represents Jesus' initial action before pronouncing the words of institution giving rise to His body and blood -- which the Church calls "the Holy Eucharist" (the gift for which we are thankful). Since its earliest days, the Church combined this central rite of thanksgiving with thanksgiving prayers integrated into the preface, the prayers after communion, and sometimes in the responsorial psalm. The preface of the Eucharistic Prayer weaves together praise and thanksgiving and can be seen not only in the earliest Eucharistic prayers (from, for example, the *Didache* composed in 95 A.D.), but also in the New Testament Christological hymns which were undoubtedly used for liturgies in the 1st century and were precursors to the fuller (and later) Eucharistic Prayers (see for example John 1: 1-5, Phil. 2: 6-12, Col. 1: 15-20).

A fifth way of relating to and communicating with God is *adoration*. Adoration overlaps with praise and thanksgiving because all three involve *appreciation* of the divine essence and action. Yet adoration is distinct from praise and thanksgiving because of its passivity -- it arises out of *being* absorbed into, *being* fulfilled by, and being *enthralled* by the beauty, goodness, and majesty of God's action and nature. When we attend to the awesome goodness, love, and majesty of the Lord in creation, redemption, our personal lives, and above all in the Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine transformed into the body and blood of Christ, we are not only struck or moved by this goodness, love, and majesty, but lifted up and fulfilled by it -- we are quite literally edified (built up) by God's presence -- not by any action of our own.

The mass presents several occasions during which we are given the opportunity to adore the sheer goodness, love, and majesty of the divine presence in our midst:

- The elevation of the host and chalice at the consecration,
- The elevation of the host and chalice at the solemn doxology (at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer), and

- The elevation of the host prior to the reception of communion (“Look, this truly is the Lamb of God...” followed by “Lord, I am not worthy...”).

Saint Augustine recognized that these “opportunities for adoration” help us to focus on the incredible goodness, love, and majesty of Jesus’ presence which we are about to receive in Holy Communion.⁷⁶ If we do not focus on the divine goodness during these opportunities for adoration – if we do not take the opportunity to be moved and filled by the goodness of God in our midst – we lose the contemplative grace coming through it – our loving and awe-filled response to the unconditional goodness, love, and beauty of the Lord Himself. Failure to adore the Lord decreases the contemplative grace – the loving communication with God – embedded in the simple act of allowing ourselves to be moved and fulfilled by divine goodness.

Though the mass is oriented toward communal prayer and adoration, there are opportunities to petition the Lord for *personal needs*. The most common place to present these needs to the Lord is during or after the general intercessions (after the creed). After the priest may close these prayers with “Heavenly Father we ask you to answer these prayers, *the prayers within our hearts that go unmentioned*, and the prayers of your universal church through Jesus Christ Our Lord.” Another point at which prayer can be personalized is during the Our Father. Though the Lord’s Prayer uses the first person plural (“we,” “us,” and “our”), it is also a prayer of deep personal significance, for we are praying for *ourselves* within the Church community and the world.

A sixth way of relating to and communicating with the Lord at mass is through *repentance* and *forgiveness*. During the mass, there are three major opportunities for this. The first opportunity occurs during the penitential rite at the beginning of the mass – “Lord have mercy; Christ have mercy; Lord have mercy.” This is followed by a virtual rite of absolution – “May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.” The second opportunity for repentance occurs during the fractioning rite when the congregation says or sings together, “Lamb of God you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us...” The third opportunity for repentance occurs when the priest raises the host for the third time, saying, “Look this truly is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, blessed are we to be called to His supper,” to which the congregants respond with the words of the Centurion, “Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” The priest responds by saying, “May the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring us altogether into life everlasting.”

There are many other prayers of repentance and forgiveness throughout the mass – during the Gloria, the congregants say, “You take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; you are seated at the right hand of the Father,

⁷⁶ Saint Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos (Explorations of the Psalms)* 98, 9.

have mercy on us.” After the gospel, the priest prays, “May the words of the gospel wipe away our sins,” to which the congregation responds, “Amen.” There is another profound expression of repentance during the mass, though it focuses on the priest before he initiates the Eucharistic Prayer – the “lavabo” or “handwashing.” As the priest pours water over his hands, he says, “Lord, wash away my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”

Though modern audiences may think that these multiple expressions of repentance and forgiveness are excessive, they represent opportunities for the congregants to bring their sins and imperfections to God for forgiveness and healing. The more we take advantage of them, the more we interiorize the healing and forgiving love of Christ and the Father which not only prepares us to receive the Holy Eucharist, but also to let go of our spiritual burdens before we return to work on Monday.

A seventh way of relating to and communicating with the Lord during the mass is through *Lectio Divina* – prayerful listening to the word of God. Being attentive to God’s inspiration in the gospel, the New Testament epistles, and the Old Testament readings is a profound way of connecting with God in the heart. The mass moves between active praise and thanksgiving and passive (receptive) adoration and listening. Not only does God fill us with His love in our acts of adoring His goodness and majesty, He also speaks to our hearts through the words of scripture. As with adoration, prayerful listening to the word requires both focus and openness to what God is trying to tell us through the scriptures of the day. It may help to say a little prayer for this focus and openness before the first reading, such as, “Lord, what are you trying to tell me in these readings?” Or, “Lord, make your intentions known to my heart,” or “Lord, send your Spirit to guide me toward your will in these readings.” The objective of the prayer is to ask for God’s grace to hear what he wants us to hear – to galvanize an insight about Him, about ourselves, about the direction of our lives, or about His plan of salvation.

It is important to keep in mind the principle of non-reciprocal hermeneutics given in Volume 7 (Chapter One, Section IV) when listening to the Old Testament reading in relationship to the New Testament. Recall that we should not interpret the New Testament through the lens of the Old Testament’s view of God and religion; we can only go in one direction – interpreting the Old Testament through the lens of the New Testament. Thus if there is an apparent incongruity or contradiction between a teaching (about God, salvation, morality, suffering, or other doctrines) in the Old Testament and the New Testament, we must always err in favor of the New Testament – not vice-versa. The same holds true for viewpoints expressed in the Responsorial Psalm – if these present apparent incongruities or contradictions with New Testament teachings, we must mitigate the former in favor of the latter.

At this juncture, the reader will notice the “give and take” or the “acting and receiving” dynamic within the mass:

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- The penitential rite (the *act* of repentance), is followed by a formula of absolution (*receiving* the grace of forgiveness).
- The Gloria (an *act* of praise and thanksgiving) is followed by the word of God inspiring us within our hearts (*receiving* God's word).
- The profession of faith and the *acts* of praise and thanksgiving in the preface and *Sanctus* are followed by adoration (being moved and fulfilled by God's presence) when the host and the chalice are elevated.
- The prayers of intercession (within the Eucharistic Prayer) and the Our Father and Lamb of God are followed by the *reception* of the Holy Eucharist.
- The prayers after communion are followed by the *reception* of a blessing.

We are not sole participants in the liturgy. The Lord is constantly responding – through absolution, His inspirational presence in scripture, His unconditionally good and majestic presence in adoration, His unconditionally loving presence in the gift of the Holy Eucharist, and His grace bestowed on us through blessing.

An eighth way of relating to and communicating with the Lord during mass is through the *profession of faith* (the *creed*). At first glance, this may seem more like a profession to the congregation rather than a prayer to the Lord because the creed speaks about God and Jesus in the third person (instead of the second person). Yet the creed should be viewed in the same way as the public profession of our baptismal vows (in which the creed is contained). Such vows are made before God – and are addressed to God within the congregation. When we profess the creed in this way, it is like Peter answering Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" To which Peter responds, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God" (Mt. 16:16). In a way, the creed is a response to an essential question from the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit -- "Who do you say that we are?" When we respond positively with the revelation of Jesus as set out through the creed, we *unite* ourselves with them through the truth they have revealed about themselves – and this too is a profound form of prayer.

A ninth way of relating to and communicating with the Lord is through *intercessions* – *prayers of petition*. These prayers are expressed in the general intercessions after the creed, and often include prayers for particular members of the congregation. Intercessory prayers are also offered up as part of the Eucharistic prayer. They are more formal than the general intercessions during the liturgy of the word and are focused on the local church, the Church throughout the world, the deceased, and the congregants. Since they are part of the Eucharistic prayer, they are united with the prayers of all churches throughout the world.

A tenth way of relating to and communicating with the Lord is through the *benediction* -- the *blessing* at the end of mass. Blessings impart God's strength, favor, and holiness upon people and objects (to be used for sacred purposes). God infuses the sacred gift or grace upon particular people or objects through the mediation of a person – generally a priest or prophet. The Old Testament does not restrict such mediation to those presiding over liturgy or having a prophetic

charism -- anyone is allowed to invoke the favor of God upon another person. However, the blessing of objects seems to be restricted to priests, prophets, or other chosen religious officials. This restriction also extends to public blessings, such as liturgical blessings.

Since the 4th century, blessing has been an integral part of the sacred liturgy in the Christian Church. Following Old Testament precedent, this blessing (inasmuch as was public) was restricted to bishops. As noted above, this power was extended to priests in the 11th century due to public pressure.

Today we take it for granted that benediction (blessing) is a fitting way to conclude liturgies as well as other religious – or quasi-religious – ceremonies. Yet we should not do so, for it is a profound form of relating to God. At the moment of blessing, the priest invokes the Lord to come upon each individual in the congregation to bestow his strength, favor (toward salvation), and holiness on them. The final act of the liturgy, then, is the reception of another gift of God – in addition to the Eucharistic gift and the gift of His word. This special concluding blessing is focused on helping the congregants throughout the week. The new Roman Missal provides a variety of different blessings for all occasions – specifying specific gifts and graces for the congregants.

As can be seen, the mass truly is a blending of a multitude of prayer experiences – ways of relating to and communicating with God. Each form of prayer brings out dimensions of the others -- much like each note in a symphony brings out the beauty of the others. If we are to enter into this symphony of prayer, we must remain focused not only on what God is trying to give us, but also on His goodness, love, and beauty in so doing. The more we attend to the grace of each part of the mass, and the benevolent Lord who is bestowing those graces on us, the more deeply we will enter into a contemplative relationship with Him through the many gifts and experiences he offers through the 2000 year old ritual -- the mass.

Chapter Six

The Five Graces of the Holy Eucharist

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The Catholic Church, since the time of Jesus, made the ritual celebration of the Eucharist the center not only of its worship, but its spiritual life (precisely as Jesus instructed – “Do this in remembrance of me”). For centuries, Catholics have experienced the fulfillment of Jesus’ promises through the reception of His body and blood. They have experienced a deep peace beyond themselves, a healing of their inner being reflecting Jesus’ act of forgiveness, a gradual transformation of their hearts toward the heart of Christ, and a unity with others in the mystical body of Christ.⁷⁷ These transformative graces are sometimes incisive and powerful, and sometimes subtle and gradual. In my case, they have been mostly the latter, but over the course of time, they have become radically transformative. I interpret this to be God respecting my

⁷⁷ See Spitzer 2006 *Five Pillars of the Spiritual Life* (San Fran: Ignatius Press)Ch. 1.

freedom to go along with His loving plan – at my pace. He is careful not to push me beyond where I am able to go. Slowly but surely He entices me into imitating His heart ever more deeply which brings about peace, healing, and greater unity with other believers. For this reason the Church, and certainly I, recommend receiving the Eucharist as often as possible. For some, this might mean daily mass and for others it might mean Sunday mass. Whatever we can do, God will honor with His presence and grace – and in the long run, it will be transformative – leading to His loving eternity.

What did Jesus intend this total gift of Himself to bring?

1. Spiritual Peace,
2. Forgiveness/healing,
3. Transformation in His image,
4. Unity within the mystical body, and
5. Everlasting life.

Let us briefly examine each.

With respect to the first gift -- spiritual peace, the prayers of the mass petition the Lord to grant us this grace along with His grace of mercy (forgiveness): “Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world...Lamb of God you take away the sins of the world, *grant us peace*.”

This association of Jesus’ body and blood with the gift of peace is also found implicitly in the Gospel of John. During Jesus’ final discourse, Jesus explains the purpose of His passion and the gift of the Spirit that will come through it. He then tells the disciples the specific gift or fruit of His passion, resurrection, and the Spirit:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.
I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your
hearts be troubled and do not be afraid (Jn. 14:27).

I can certainly attest to this gift of peace in my own life. I can remember going to Mass with very disturbing thoughts in my mind (having received bad news, or having been criticized or irritated by someone’s actions). I carried the “tape-playing” and emotional discharge associated with those things right into the Mass with me – which sometimes provoked an intensification of internal disturbance during the Mass. But many have been the times when a deep calm (beyond myself) replaced that disturbance as I approached and received the Holy Eucharist. I have difficulty attributing this change of condition to mere self-delusion, because wishful thinking has never overcome “intense disturbance” in other circumstances in my life.

With respect to the second gift -- forgiveness and healing, Jesus taught that His body and blood were for *the forgiveness of sins* (Mt. 26:28). He meant this not only in a general sense – the forgiveness of the sinfulness of people throughout the world for all time – but also in a specific sense – the forgiveness of the recipient of His body and blood. Jesus made Himself a sin offering for all people, and specifically for those who would participate in the reenactment of His

Eucharistic meal. Therefore, it seems likely that He intended to bring about reconciliation and healing through the consumption of His body and blood.

How does this square with Paul's admonition not to receive the Holy Eucharist unworthily? Paul is concerned about the Corinthians conduct toward each other prior to and during the Eucharistic meal. Recall that in the Early Church there was a meal between the rite of the bread-body and the rite of the wine-blood – and during this meal, some of the Corinthians were getting drunk and others would not share their lavish portions with the poor who had next to nothing for the meal (1 Cor. 11: 17-21). Since the Eucharistic sacrifice is a sacrament of unity, Paul believes that the conduct of the Corinthians during the meal was scandalous – and therefore, that the Corinthians were receiving the Lord's body and blood unworthily.⁷⁸ He tells them that they must repent and act like true disciples of Jesus – refraining from drunkenness at the meal and sharing their goods with the poor.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that we should not receive communion after we have committed a mortal sin.⁷⁹ Thus if we have committed a mortal sin, we should go to the sacrament of reconciliation before receiving communion. In Volume X (Chapter 3), we will discuss the definition of mortal sin in some detail. It should be noted here that mortal sin requires sufficient reflection and full consent of the will (no impediments to the free use of the will). There are many such impediments, both interior and exterior, described in that Chapter.

Very early in the church's liturgy, the explicit gift or grace of mercy – i.e. forgiveness – is explicitly mentioned twice in the acclamation of the communion rite:

Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

Evidently, this request of the Lord before communion pertains to the individual congregants who are asking for it.

Saint Ambrose (375 A.D.) in his work on the sacraments emphasizes this grace:

If we proclaim the Lord's death, we proclaim the forgiveness of sins. If, as often as his blood is poured out, it is poured for the forgiveness of sins, I should always receive it so that it may always forgive my sins. Because I always sin, I should always have a remedy.⁸⁰

This theological viewpoint has been reinforced throughout the last 2000 years, and is found today in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

The body of Christ we receive in Holy Communion is 'given up for us', and the blood we drink 'shed for the forgiveness of sins'. For this reason the Eucharist

⁷⁸ See Jerome Murphy O'Connor 1990 "The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians" in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 810.

⁷⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Section 1385.

⁸⁰ Saint Ambrose *On The Sacraments* IV

cannot unite us to Christ without at the same time cleansing us from past sins and preserving us from future sins”.⁸¹

Yet the reconciling power of Christ’s body and blood is not limited to forgiveness and cleansing of sin. It also heals souls which have been adversely affected by sin. It is as if Christ’s healing power (manifest in his extensive ministry of healing) is personally present within us, helping us to overcome the habits and effects of past darkness.

Very early on in the liturgy, the Church recognized the healing power of the Eucharist by citing the words of the centurion prior to the reception of Holy Communion, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the words and *my soul shall be healed*” (see Lk. 7:7). The healing power of the Eucharist has been long attested by those who have benefited from it emotionally, physically, and spiritually.⁸² This healing power has truly helped the sick, the depressed, the anxious, those who are recovering from addictions and those who are recovering from spiritual illness – particularly those who have been away from God, Christ, and the Church.⁸³ I would recommend reading the many online testimonials to this healing power.⁸⁴ The key to healing through communion is our awareness of the presence and power of the Lord’s body and blood – accompanied by fervent prayer for healing.

With respect to the third gift – transformation in the Lord’s image, Jesus says:

He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood,
abides in Me and I in him (Jn. 6:56).

The term “abiding” (“menei/meno”) in Greek means “remaining” or “staying” or “dwelling” – “to take up one’s abode” – “to live.”⁸⁵ The more typical preposition to combine with “menei” would be “with,” which would signify “staying with,” “living with,” or “abiding with.” But Jesus uses a somewhat unusual preposition with “menei” -- “in” (“en” in Greek). This would signify “living in” or “taking up one’s abode in.”

The idea of one person living *in* another is the highest possible form of intimacy – far exceeding living *with* another. Jesus intended that we enter into this highest possible intimate relationship with Him by receiving Him in His body and blood -- the Holy Eucharist. If He did not intend this, the expression “living in” would be virtually inexplicable.

Why did Jesus use this expression of highest intimacy? He wanted to signify not only the highest unitive state we could have with another, but also the *transformative effects* that come from this intimate union. For example, when we live with another human being whom we respect, like and love, it is quite typical for them to “rub off on us.” We can’t help it – we assimilate not only their good characteristics, but also some of their personality attributes, their

⁸¹ CCC #1393.

⁸² See for example John Hampsch 1999, *The Healing Power of the Eucharist* (Welland Ontario, CA: Servant Book Publications).

⁸³ See Ibid.

⁸⁴ See for example, the many Eucharistic healings recounted by Jeanne and Ken Harrington 2006 “Healing Through Communion.” <http://sidroth.org/articles/healing-through-communion/>

⁸⁵ See Strong’s Online Concordance: <https://billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/meno>

feelings, and even their mindset. If this can occur by merely living *with* another, we can only imagine what could happen when we live *in* another, and another lives *in* us. Perhaps the best way of conveying this is through the mottos of Saint Francis de Sales and Blessed John Henry Newman – “cor ad cor Loquitor” – “heart speaking directly to heart.”

When we receive the Holy Eucharist and call to mind that Jesus has entered into this most intimate relationship with us and in us, His heart will begin to affect – indeed transform -- our hearts. He will not do this in a way that undermines or overpowers our freedom, but in a way that respects our freedom – seizing every opportunity He can to transform our hearts – ever so patiently – into the unconditionally loving heart He has for us. Sometimes this is so subtle that we barely notice the transition taking place within us. This happened to me.

I decided in college to begin attending daily Mass because of the encouragement of some friends. I was not at the same level of humility and generosity as those friends (indeed, I had some deep-seated utilitarian, egotistical, and materialistic tendencies). Nevertheless, I felt attracted to the prospect through my faith. After about a year of attending daily mass, my friends began to comment that I “had really changed.” I told them (quite sincerely) that I had not – I was “the same old person.” It seemed I was the only one who had not noticed the gradual but cumulative change that had occurred in my heart. I had always said that rationality could be trusted but the emotions could not. This had the unfortunate effect of delaying affective and emotional maturity. In retrospect, I attribute my discovery and re-appropriation of my heart to the gradual transformative influence of the Holy Eucharist. I do not consider this incredible life-giving discovery to have arisen out of normal maturation (I was anything but normal); nor do I attribute it to something desired or willed (because I really did not want a heart – I did not trust my emotions); nor do I attribute it to appropriating the emotional conditions of the people around me (because I did not “hang around” the daily Mass group). Rather, I believe that the Eucharist battered my heart, or perhaps better, prepared my heart for the simple exposure to the Word of God, and to the love of God manifest through others at Mass. Slowly but surely Christ’s presence and love turned me toward the grace to which I could not bring myself. I received a heart, not a completed heart, but a “foundational heart” opening upon a deeper and deeper appropriation of the unconditional Love which is the purpose of my life.

With respect to the fourth gift of the Holy Eucharist – *unity with the mystical body*, Saint Paul says that we are all united in the mystical body of Christ:

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored,
all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and
individually members of it (1 Cor 12:26-27).

Saint Paul is telling us that we share in and derive strength from the grace, love, and joy of the whole communion of saints both past and present – and that we also share in the tribulations of the mystical body on earth. The more we receive the Body of Christ, the more we become unified with Him and every member of the Church and the Communion of Saints. As we receive the Eucharist, we become more tightly bound to the community living in and through Christ. This has a two-fold effect – first, the joy, love, strength, tribulation, and challenge of the Church community affects our minds and hearts – our conscious and subconscious psyche. Secondly, we

affect and contribute our gifts and challenges to the same community. It is like living with family members – the more time we spend with them, the more their joys, loves, and concerns and sufferings affect us – and our joys, concerns, and sufferings affect them. We can feel – or perhaps better, sense – the liturgical seasons – the sorrow and repentances of Lent, the joy and redemption of Christmas and Easter, and the joyful expectation of Advent. We become more attune to the ways in which the Spirit is working – not just in our lives, but in the lives of members of our local Church, and even in the universal Church. I have had several concrete experiences of this, but the most memorable one occurred on Christmas Eve when I was about 12 or 13 years old.

On that Christmas, my family had just finished our “present opening” and my siblings and I were going to Mass with my mother. I felt an unusually pronounced happiness that I could not ignore, and so I told my mother, “Mom, I’m feeling very happy, but I’m not sure why.” She said in reply, “Well, you probably received all the presents you wanted.” For some reason, I knew that what I felt was not the happiness coming from material things (coming from possession of a gift, consumption of food, playing games, etc.), and so I told her, “Mom, I did get all the presents I wanted, but that’s not what’s making me *this* happy.” She thought about that for a while, and then, with a great deal of hope, said, “Well, maybe you’re growing up and thinking of things beyond presents. Maybe you’re happy because you’ve grown to appreciate your family and you had a really intense experience of them this evening.” I said in reply, “Uhhh, family? – Well I really love our family, but I don’t think that’s it.” So my mother thought about it some more, and then said, as if inspired, “Well, maybe it’s the joy of the whole communion of saints on this Christmastide coursing through your veins.” I have no idea why she said this, or why I knew it was correct, but I said, “Yep, that’s why I think I’m happy.”

To this day, that childlike response to my mother’s deeply insightful remark seems to me to be truth. It is the truth about the communion of saints and the truth about the unifying power of the Eucharist. It is the truth about the love and joy of the whole communion of saints, past and present, coursing through our spiritual veins.

Years later, I had a flashback to that Christmas when I was sitting with my family at my sister’s house on Easter. My little niece Kristen was slightly more than a year old and she was sitting in a bouncy seat in the middle of a large dining room table at which about twelve of us were seated. Someone told a humorous story which made everybody laugh, and Kristen (who did not understand a word of it) began to laugh as well. It occurred to me that she was sharing in the delight of everyone else that she empathetically sensed – and that her union with us was so pronounced that our laughter induced her laughter – our happiness induced hers. I flashed back to the Christmas of the “joy of the communion of saints” many years before, and thought, “Her unconscious empathy with all of us was like my unconscious empathy with the mystical body of Christ at Christmas.” How did I have such a strong sense of unconscious empathy with the mystical body of Christ at such a young age? I think it was because of the Holy Eucharist – unquestionably, the Holy Eucharist.

The unifying aspect of the Holy Eucharist is not limited to the enhancement of individual believers who receive it; it is a way for each believer to participate in the universal Church – both in this world and in the kingdom of Heaven (the Communion of Saints).

There can be little doubt that Jesus intended the Eucharist to be both a universal and unifying gift. The themes of “unity of believers” and “life for the world” were picked up by the early Church Fathers where the Eucharist was considered to be the communion between the faithful and their bishop. Saint Ignatius of Antioch, for example, exhorts his followers in multiple letters to maintain unity among themselves, meeting together in the Eucharist under the bishop as their head.⁸⁶ This theme was further emphasized in later encyclicals (e.g., Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, paragraphs 19 and 51; Pope Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, paragraph 70; and Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*). Thus, the Eucharist is the occasion to pray for the local Church community, the worldwide Church community, and the life of the world.

As noted above, the Eucharist is a remarkably beautiful and efficacious gift of *personal* transformation and life. Yet It cannot be held to the domain of the personal. By the intention of Jesus, and therefore by Its nature (Unconditional Love), It reaches out to the whole world. It gives life to those in spiritual and temporal need, It unifies the Church in its life-giving nature and mission, and It moves through the Church to the rest of the world.

Thus, when we receive the Holy Eucharist, we not only pray for personal transformation; we pray for the Church, the unity of the Church, the life of the world, and the Church reaching out to the world in its spiritual and temporal need. This is why the general intercessions (prayers of the faithful) and the intercessions in the Eucharistic Prayer specify the needs of the Church, the local community, and the world.

The fifth grace of the Eucharist – eternal salvation – is the central focus of the Eucharistic discourse in the gospel of John. The repetition of “eternal life” shows not only the importance of this grace, but its centrality in John’s Eucharistic theology:

I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever (Jn. 6: 48-51, 53-58).

This gospel passage summarizes Jesus’ primary intention at the Last Supper – to secure the eternal salvation of all who receive His body and blood in faith. Recall that the words of consecration say, “The new and *everlasting* covenant which will be poured out for you and

⁸⁶ See Saint Ignatius of Antioch *Letter to the Ephesians* (4.2).

See also Raymond Johanny, “Ignatius of Antioch,” in *The Eucharist of the Early Christians*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell, 48-70 (New York: Pueblo, 1978), 59.

many (all) for the forgiveness of sins.” As noted above (Chapter Four, Section II.C.4), this formula very likely comes from Jesus Himself, even though the word “everlasting” is not used in either the Mark-Matthew or Luke-Paul formulas. With the words of Jeremiah in mind, Jesus intended to establish an everlasting covenant that would lead to the permanent and everlasting forgiveness of sins through eternal life (resurrection) with Him and the Father. This is the reason that Jesus took the place of a sin offering (for the forgiveness of sins) and the Pascal Lamb (to liberate us from slavery to evil). After Jesus gave His life in complete self-sacrifice (unconditional love) and rose from the dead clothed in the glory of God, the early church had no doubt about the significance of His body and blood – they knew that continuous faithful reception of this gift would lead to everlasting life:

If any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh...he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day (Jn. 6: 51, 54).

Jesus’ strategy now becomes clear, the first four gifts of the Holy Eucharist – peace, forgiveness of sins/healing, transformation in his heart, and unity with the church through His mystical body – all lead to everlasting life and love in Him with His Father. Ultimately, this gift is the reason not only for the Eucharist, but the mass itself, which has as its center the truth, goodness, beauty, and love of the complete self-sacrifice of Jesus leading us to eternal life.