



Boston Catholic Journal

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THE MOST HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS:

A Primer for Clueless Catholics

Part I

Admit it.

You haven't the foggiest idea what is going on during Mass.

You may not even know why you're there.

The reasons are many:

- **It's what Catholics do and I am Catholic.**
- **I want my kids to grow up in this tradition that comes from my parents, grandparents, and forbears throughout the 2000 years preceding my coming into this world through them.**
- **It is something good to do and it is holy ... although why it is good and why it is holy remains a mystery to me.**
- **My friends go ... although they do not know why either.**
- **I need God's help, and if I go to Mass He will look favorably on me.**
- **God is there ... although just how He is there, I do not understand – after all, God is *everywhere*, right? – so why is this place so special?**

Do not be ashamed. It is not your fault. There *are* answers – good answers – for all the questions this short list brings up.

You were never taught.

It is really that simple. No one took the time to sit down and talk with you about what is ***the most important event in your life*** – and it occurs every 7 days. In fact, whatever else you do during the other 167 hours of the week (job, school, charity – in fact, every *other* responsibility, necessity, or good work) however good, kind, lofty, noble, pales in significance to the Mass.

The Basics:

Before you go further in this brief study – and it *is* a study that we invite you to – of the single most important thing in your life, we must make a promise to *you* first: it will not be dry or boring, nor will it be fraught with meaningless pieties. You will understand what the Mass is, why it is holy, and why you must be there. This is our promise to you.

It will not be "socially *correct*", sanitized to sensitivities, or keeping in step with the passing fads that blow through the pews and across the Altars as so many shifting winds following that elusive mantra of "what is in vogue". There is perpetuity in the Church, and unchangeable elements of the Mass. Hopefully, we will enable you to see beyond the Mass so often presented as entertainment, hosted by an entertainer, to the deep and very sacred reality within it.

"**The Mass**", as we most often call it, is really short for, "**The Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass**".

Linger a moment on those 7 words, for they contain quite nearly everything that you will need to know in order to understand why you go to Church, or why you ought to.

The Mass, first and foremost, is a Sacrifice. Not a figurative sacrifice, not a mere remembrance of something done long ago, and not a metaphor. It is a real sacrifice. At Mass you are witnessing – even participating in – a sacrifice, very real and very present.

Does that surprise you?

We do not hear very much about this – but unless we understand ***this most fundamental, this absolutely central*** aspect of the Mass, nothing else makes sense. Our lack of understanding the Mass as a *Sacrifice* contributes to most of the confusion that surrounds our going there and being there.

But what is the nature of this Sacrifice, and how is it enacted. Who does the sacrificing and who or what is sacrificed? How do we ourselves participate in it?

Tomorrow we will begin to understand.

What we have learned today:

The Mass is a Sacrifice.

Part 2: The Sacred Darkness: Who is there? And where?

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