

THOUGHTS ON THE MASS

“Do this in memory of me.” Was ever a command so obeyed? For century after century, spreading slowly to every continent and country and among every human race on earth, this action has been done in every conceivable human circumstance for every conceivable human need, from infancy and before it, to extreme old age and after it, from the pinnacles of earthly greatness to the refuge of fugitives in the caves and dens of the earth. Men have found no better thing than this to do for kings and queens at their crowning and for criminals going to the scaffold; for armies in triumph or for a bride and groom in a country church; for the proclamation of a dogma or for a good crop of wheat; for the wisdom of the parliament of a mighty nation or for a sick old woman afraid to die; for a school child sitting an examination, or for Columbus setting out to discover America; for the famine of a whole province, or for the soul of a dead lover; in thankfulness that a friend did not die of pneumonia; for the repentance of a sinner or the settlement of a strike; on the beach in Dunkirk; while the hiss of scythes in the thick June grass came faintly through the windows of the church, by an old monk on the 50th anniversary of his vows; by an exiled Bishop who had hewn timber all day in a prison camp – one could fill many pages with the reasons people have done this and not tell a hundredth part of them. And best of all, week by week and month by month, on a hundred thousand successive Sundays, faithfully, unfailingly, across all the parishes of Christendom, priest and people continue to gather together in order to carry out this command, ‘Do this in memory of me.’

(The Shape of Liturgy – Dom Gregory Dix)



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MASS



A GUIDE FOR STAFF NEW TO
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MASS



One of the special features of all Catholic schools and colleges is the regular celebration of Mass. Staff new to Catholic education can be concerned about not knowing what is happening, and why.

The aim of this booklet is to introduce the Mass, with a little information about its history and theology, and an explanation of why it is so important in Catholic life.

It also gives some guidance on the various aspects of the Mass, and reassurance that everyone is more than welcome to participate in whatever way we can.



MASS FINAL DRAFT

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME ?

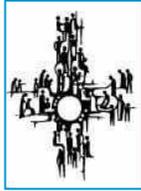
Just to reassure you: the vast majority of both students and staff gain from their participation in the Mass.

We talk about 'celebrating Mass' and it is indeed a celebration.

At Mass everyone is welcomed to join in the prayers and the singing, as well as offering the Sign of Peace. During the distribution of Communion, although only Catholics can receive the Host, everyone is invited to receive a blessing from the minister of Communion.



Service sheets are usually provided, with the prayers and responses that we say together. No one is compelled to say or do something that they don't believe in. However, there is an expectation that everyone is respectful.



Mass is celebrated at various times of the year, when the whole school or college community gathers together:

- at the beginning and end of the school year
- on special occasions
- on Holy Days of Obligation that occur during the school year
- year groups or class groups might celebrate Mass together

Teaching staff are usually expected to be present in any Mass attended by their students – either a Mass for the whole school/college, or for your year group or tutor group.

Many schools and colleges have a regular weekly Mass for staff.

A Mass can be celebrated indoors or outdoors, it can be small and intimate, or have 100s in the congregation. Mass can be quiet and reflective, or full of music and singing.



HISTORY

From the earliest time in Christian history the followers of Christ have been gathering together to 'break bread'. The Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament, in the Bible, tells of the first disciples meeting in each others' houses to share this symbolic action – and they did so because Jesus told them to. The earliest Christian writings pass on his instruction at the Last Supper with his disciples ... 'the Lord Jesus took some bread, after he had given thanks, he broke it, and he said: "this is my body, which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, with the cup...'

THEOLOGY

The essential theology of the Mass is the 'sacramental presence of Christ'. The concept of sacrament is vital in understanding why the Mass is so important for the Catholic community. A sacrament is about making visible something that is invisible. The Mass makes visible the love of God in the form of bread and wine – the offering and sacrifice of Christ on the cross is made present at Mass.

The Mass is also called 'Eucharist', which is Greek for thanksgiving. At Mass bread and wine are offered by the priest. During the Eucharistic prayer at the centre of the Mass these become the sacramental presence of Christ – because they are no longer bread and wine but the real presence of Christ himself.

COMMUNITY

The presence of Christ is also celebrated in the community itself. Jesus said: "where two or three are gathered, there I am in the midst of them." The Mass is a celebration **by** the community and **of** the community. By sharing faith, by feeding that faith, and by celebrating that faith, the Mass brings the community together.

UNDERSTANDING THE MASS

The Mass has 4 distinct parts.

1. INTRODUCTORY RITES

GREETING – we start (and finish) Mass with the sign of the cross, and the priest usually greets us and introduces the theme of the Mass

PENITENTIAL RITE – this is the section of the Mass when we seek reconciliation with God for the times we have failed to love God by failing to love our neighbour, saying sorry for what we have and have not done.

(GLORIA – because we know we can be forgiven, we praise our God with joy. The Gloria is usually only used on Feast Days and on Sundays.)

2. LITURGY OF THE WORD

THE WORD – we listen to God's word given to us through the Old and New Testament books of the Bible, all inspired by God.



CREED – having heard the word of God we can confidently proclaim the basis of our faith. The Creed is one of the oldest statements of the Church – we are maintaining the central components of the faith that has sustained the Church for 2000 years. The Creed is followed by the Bidding Prayers for our community and for the wider world, usually written and led by students.

3. LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

OFFERTORY – gifts of bread and wine are brought to the altar, and we symbolically offer ourselves.

HOLY, HOLY – composed of verses from both Old and New Testaments, in the most solemn part of the Mass this response reminds us that we are participating in the eternal sacrifice of the Lord, a quiet and reflective moment

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER - the most solemn part of the Mass as the priest echoes Jesus' words over the bread and wine at the Consecration, where the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ.

OUR FATHER – we have been made a community within Christ's sacrifice, and we now pray using the words that he taught us.

SIGN OF PEACE AND COMMUNION – we are about to receive the Lord and we seek to be transformed into the body of Christ, but first we need to recognise that we must be at peace with the world, beginning in our own community. This peace is a special grace from the Lord. It will permeate the world through our actions.



At Communion we become united in the most special way with the Lord.

4. CONCLUDING RITE

DISMISSAL – we have heard the word of God and received the Lord in Holy Communion. We are now tasked to go out to be disciples in our community and in the world, renewed to live joyfully in the peace of Christ.



To sum up the Mass: in the Liturgy of the Word Jesus feeds us with his Word, and we respond in faith and action. And in the Liturgy of the Eucharist Jesus feeds us with himself, and we then go out into the world, nourished with Christ and his Word, to live out the Gospel in our communities.