

5. The Miracle of Holy Communion



and uncaring towards others.
And I know that there are times
when I have pushed your love away
and done wrong things.

Please forgive me, Father God,
so that I am ready
to receive Jesus in Holy Communion
and be brought closer
to all my brothers and sisters
in the family of your Church.

Thank you, Father God,
that you never forget any of your children.
During this Mass I ask you to take care of those I love;
I pray for those who have died.
I ask you to bless
those who are suffering from pain or sorrow.
I pray for Christians everywhere
and all other people in the world.

Father God, I am filled with wonder and praise
when I see what you do for your people
through Jesus your Son.

Thank you for calling me to gather at this altar
with my brothers and sisters
together with the Blessed Virgin Mary,
and all who have ever served you.

Thank you for your love.

Help me to go out from Mass today
strong enough to share your love with others.

Amen.

A PRAYER TO SAY BEFORE MASS BEGINS

Father God,
thank you for this world that you have made
and for my life which comes from you.

Thank you for your Son Jesus,
whose love is so great
that he came into this world
to suffer and die on the cross to save his people.

Thank you that after he rose again,
he poured the Holy Spirit into their hearts.

Father God, thank you for making me
part of this people, your special family, the Church,
when I was baptized.

Thank you for the times
when the family gathers
to hear your Word and praise your name.

Thank you for your greatness,
for all the wonderful things you have done,
and for your love.

Thank you, Father God,
that when Jesus had supper with his friends
on the night before he died,
he took bread and wine,
and said, "This is my Body"
and "This is my Blood."
Thank you for this special way
that he is with us until the end of time.

Help me to be ready
to meet with my brothers and sisters.
I know that I am often selfish

Section Five: The Miracle of Holy Communion



GIVING GIFTS TO EACH OTHER

**A gift can say:
"You are great"**

When an important person visits our school or our country we give them gifts. This is our way of saying how great we think they are.

**A gift can say:
"I love you"**

Parents give gifts to their children to show how much they love them. Children show their love for their parents in the same way - especially at Christmas and on Birthdays.

**A gift can say:
"I am sorry"**

Everyone knows what it is like to do something bad, and then bring a gift to our mother or father (or whoever it was that we hurt). It is a way of saying "sorry" and trying to make up for what we did.

GIVING A GIFT TO GOD . . . LONG AGO

From one side of the world to the other, people of different races and backgrounds have wanted to honour God by giving him gifts.

They have wanted to show their love for God. It is natural to feel like that!

And they have wanted to make up for their sins - for saying "NO" to God and his love.

A gift
we
offer
to God
is called
a
sacrifice



People who grew crops, like barley, wheat or oats gave the "firstfruits" to God.

Those who had sheep gave their very best lambs to God.

Whatever kind of work people did, they gave some of it to God.

By doing this the people praised God for his greatness; they showed their love for God; and they said that they were sorry for their sins.

Men whose job it was to offer the gifts or sacrifices of the people were called

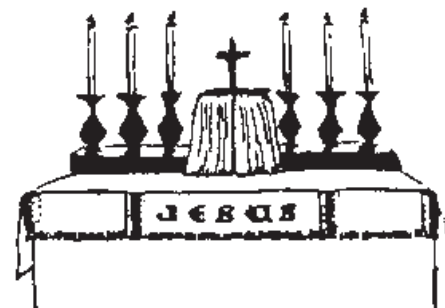
priests

The priests would burn the gifts on a heap of stones called an

altar.

This showed that the people no longer owned what they had given God.

THE TABERNACLE



In many churches you will find an Altar that has on it a cupboard, usually white or gold, called the Tabernacle.

Here, at the end of Mass, the priest places some of the Holy Bread which is Christ's body to be kept all week.

A white light is burning and the curtains are drawn as a sign that Jesus is here.

We show our love for Jesus by kneeling down on one knee for a moment when we pass in front of the Tabernacle. This is called **genuflecting.**



HOW OFTEN SHOULD I RECEIVE HOLY COMMUNION?

That's a funny question - like asking how often should people who are married kiss each other!

Every Sunday the first Christians gathered with the Risen Jesus and with one another. The Church expects us to do the same today. And we will always look forward to receiving Jesus in Holy Communion!

[But - because people DO sometimes ask funny questions, our Church has said that we should receive Jesus in Holy Communion at the very least on Easter Day and two other times each year.]

Jesus is with us in this special way for two reasons:

*** For our prayers**

The Tabernacle is the focal point of the special presence of Jesus. So it is good to go into church during the week and find a place near the Tabernacle to pray.

*** To be taken to the sick**

The Blessed Sacrament is ready to be taken to the sick or the dying at any time for them to receive strength and blessing from Jesus in Holy Communion.

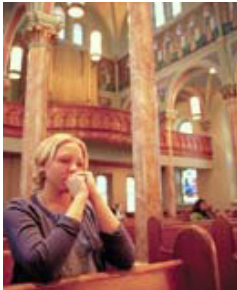
GETTING READY FOR JESUS

If we knew that someone important was about to visit us, we would take time to make sure that everything was ready. Most likely we would clean up the house, get rid of any rubbish, and cook a special meal.

It is natural, then, that we should want to take time to get ready for the special coming of Jesus in Holy Communion. The best way to do this is:

1. The night before we go to Mass:

- * think of our sins and ask God to forgive us
- * make up any bad quarrels
- * think of someone to pray for at Mass
- * spend time being quiet and still with God



2. Before the service begins:

- * show special honour to Jesus by not eating or drinking anything for at least an hour before Mass begins
- * get to church early so as to spend time praying before Mass begins.

When should we NOT receive Holy Communion?
Jesus longs to bless us with his love in Holy Communion. But there are two reasons for staying in our seat and not going up to receive:

- (1) If we are **REALLY DETERMINED** in our hearts to go on **NOT** trying to forgive someone who has hurt us;
and
- (2) If we are **REALLY DETERMINED** in our hearts to keep doing serious sins that push Jesus away from us.

A name we often use for the Body and Blood of Christ is:
the Blessed Sacrament

GIVING GOD A GIFT . . . TODAY

The Bible tells us that all these sacrifices could never make up for our sin - for saying "NO" to God the Father. The Bible tells us that their REAL purpose was to help us understand what Jesus would one day do.

So Jesus, full of love for God the Father and for us, came to earth. For thirty-three years he always did what God the Father told him to do. He always said "YES" to God the Father.

When Jesus died on the cross, he offered himself to God the Father, to make up for the sins of all people, to BRIDGE THE GAP that our sins had opened up between us and God.

This was the BEST GIFT that had ever been offered to God . . . the Gift of his Own Son . . . the greatest sign of love ever given.

Jesus - the PERFECT Sacrifice

On the night before he died, Jesus made a way for his special family to offer this BEST GIFT to the Father until the end of time.

Jesus gave us the Mass in which bread and wine become his Body and Blood. In other words, Jesus becomes present on the altar as *the* perfect sacrifice we offer to God the Father.

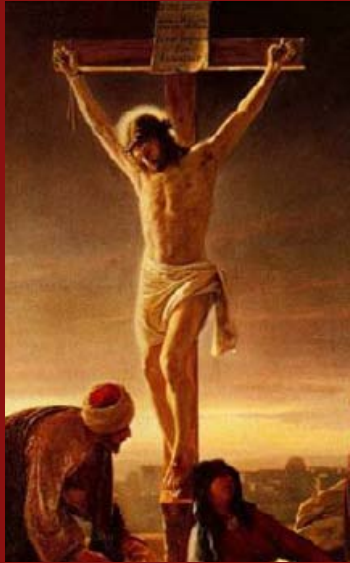
The Mass is exactly the same sacrifice that Jesus offered to God the Father on the Cross

We can imagine his sacrifice being like a long piece of elastic that can be stretched out, right down to our time, so that we can offer it as our own gift to the Father.

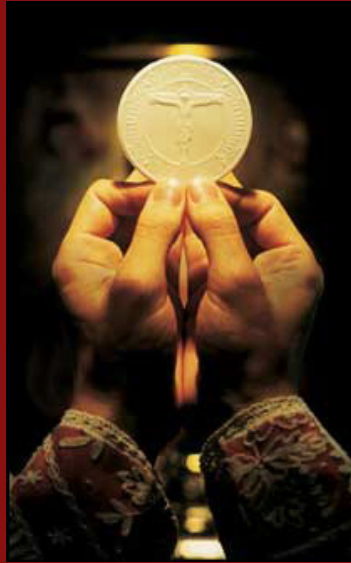


Jesus is called the **LAMB OF GOD** because he is the **PERFECT SACRIFICE** we offer to God the Father

Once for all . . .



The sacrifice of Jesus offered on the Cross, with agony and bloodshed



That very same sacrifice offered in the Mass, but without agony and bloodshed

"As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you show forth the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Corinthians 11:26)

BREAD AND WINE . . . THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

The bread used in the Mass is a round wafer called a

host



The wine which becomes the Precious Blood of Jesus is in a special cup called a

chalice



WHAT IS THE BEST KIND OF MASS?



Sometimes we go to Mass in a big church or cathedral, with grand music, an expert choir, lots of candles, incense, robes and servers.

Other times we are at a simple Mass in a living room, under a tree, or even at the beach.

Most of the time, it's in between.

The priest might face the same way as the people. Or the priest might face the people across the altar.

The different cultures of the world have given rise to many kinds of customs, ceremonies and music.

Everyone has their favourite kind of Mass. What matters most is that:

- (1) Jesus is giving us *his* sacrifice to offer the Father as *our* sacrifice, and
- (2) Jesus is coming to us in Holy Communion to fill us with his life and love.

If we concentrate on those things, we can't go wrong.

JESUS COMES TO US!

The most important part of the Mass is a long prayer with a long name

... the Eucharistic Prayer

("eucharistic" means "giving thanks")

At the beginning of this prayer all we have on the altar is **Bread and Wine**



But during this prayer, the bread and wine become **the Body and Blood of Christ**

This is a **SUPERNATURAL** event which we call the

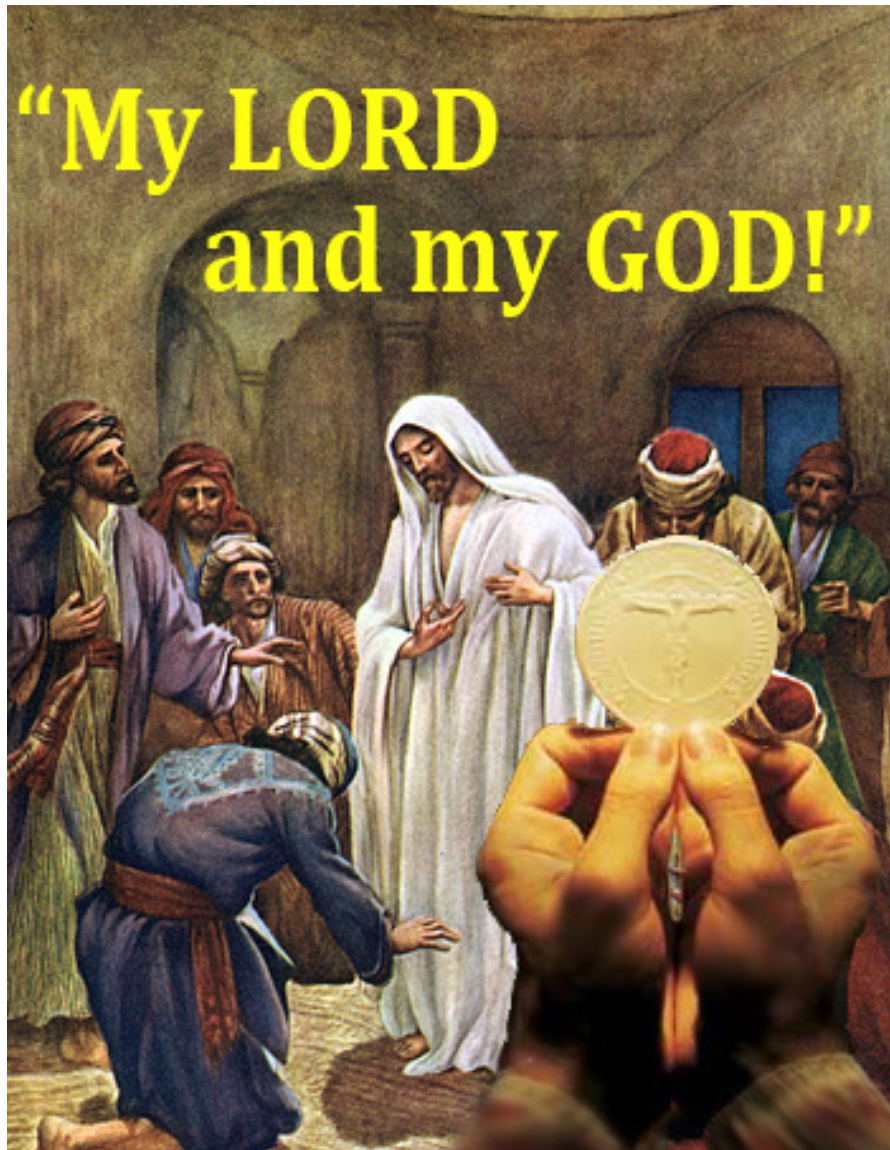
MIRACLE OF THE ALTAR



That's why we make a **big fuss** during this special prayer ...

kneeling
ringing bells
swinging incense
singing bits of the prayer





When Jesus died, his followers were very afraid. They hid away and, as much as possible, stayed behind locked doors. They felt empty and hurt. When Jesus died, their hopes and dreams died, too.

The
**OUTWARD
SIGN**
in
HOLY COMMUNION
is
bread and wine



The
INWARD GRACE
in **HOLY COMMUNION**
is
**The body and blood
of Jesus**
(in other words, his life)

When we receive the life of Jesus
in this way . . .

* our union of love with him
and his special family, the Church,
grows stronger

* we receive forgiveness and healing
to help us on our journey to heaven



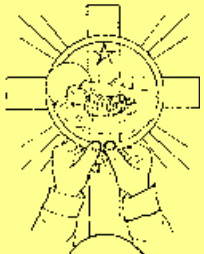
RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION

**"Communion" means "common union"
or "being joined together"**



**When we receive Holy Communion,
Jesus comes into us
in a special way.
He joins himself to us;
he gives us his love
he gives us his help;
and he makes us strong.**

**EVERY MASS IS
ANOTHER
CHRISTMAS**



**The stable is the Altar.
Here Jesus comes to us.
The Crib is the Tabernacle
in which Jesus is placed.
Like the shepherds of old
we pour out our love
and our praise to him.**

**EVERY MASS IS
ANOTHER
EASTER**



**The sacrifice of Jesus
on the cross
is made real for us.
And we receive
his risen life
in
Holy Communion.**

They were together on the first Easter Sunday night. But one of the Apostles, Thomas, was not there.

Later on, the others told him that Jesus had appeared to them. They had seen the holes that the nails made in his hands and the hole in his side where the spear went in. They told Thomas that Jesus spoke to them. They were so excited!

But Thomas just couldn't believe it. In fact, he even said "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I won't believe it."

The next Sunday they were in the same room. They were still frightened, so they locked the doors.

Suddenly Jesus was standing in the room. He said to them: "Peace be with you."

Jesus turned to Thomas and held out his hands. "Come, Thomas, put your finger here, see my hands. Put your hand into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas then knew that Jesus had come back from the dead, so he fell to his knees and said . . .

"My Lord and my God."

(See John 20:19-29)

For many hundreds of years it has been a custom to use these words of Thomas as a prayer of love when we come to Mass.

When the bells ring during the Eucharistic Prayer we look up at the Host and then at the Chalice, saying in our hearts to Jesus, "My Lord and My God!"

We do this because we know that in his love, Jesus, our risen Lord, comes to us as he came to Thomas.

He comes to us in this special way to keep on sharing his RISEN LIFE with us.

At Mass, Heaven and Earth are Joined Together



When we come to Mass we meet with Jesus in a special way. We also meet with our brothers and sisters in God's family, the Church.

Of course, that means the people we can SEE with our eyes, those who belong to our parish.

But there are others, too. BEING AT MASS IS LIKE GOING THROUGH HEAVEN'S DOOR because we also meet with our brothers and sisters who have died and who now worship God there. At Mass we also pray for those who have died and are still on their journey to heaven. All these people are part of the great family we joined when we were baptized.

Many churches have pictures of heaven near the altar to remind us that at Mass millions of Angels and Saints are crowding around the altar with us worshipping God the Father and Jesus the Lamb of God.

Some people like to say that the Mass takes us through that door into heaven.

Other people like to say that at Mass heaven comes down to earth.

Whichever way we think about it, we celebrate the joining together of heaven and earth. That is what the picture is trying to teach us.

And that is why just before the main part of the Mass the priest says:

**therefore with angels and archangels
and with all the company of heaven
we laud and magnify thy glorious name
ever praising thee and saying:**

and we join in:

**Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts,
Heaven and earth are full of thy glory,
Glory be to thee, O Lord Most High.
Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest!**

**That is also why some people call the Mass
"the gate of Heaven"**