

## THE MASS AND EVANGELIZATION

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In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence; I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

We've been praying about St. Paul's admonition, "put on Jesus Christ." A key phrase, in early Christianity that needs very much to be reinstated. That's what it means to "put on the face of Jesus." And an essential way of doing that is to have an intimate connection with Jesus' Eucharistic sacrifice. We contemplate Jesus' True Presence. The tabernacle also is a wonderful instruction in the teachings of Jesus. We see Jesus' True Presence. And what is our vocation, but that He be fully present in his followers? Isn't that what St. Paul said about himself? That, "it is no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in me." That's the goal of all of us- that there's so much of Christ in us that we approach the wisdom, the joy, and the affection of Our Lord with our own personal shortcomings and our own personal sentiments and character traits.

How does Jesus make Himself Truly Present? He needs to die on the Cross. That's how the bread turns into the resurrected Christ. Only the properties of bread remain, and those properties hold the resurrected Christ. And only through this ultimate, colossal- *colossal* act of self-giving love do we find His True Presence. Analogously, as I join in Jesus' self-emptying, His self-gift, He makes me Eucharistic. He leaves, in a certain sense, His True Presence in me. That's what a saint is: where the Church proclaims that Christ has been fully present in this follower of Christ; analogous to the Eucharist.

Since we've been looking at these different topics with regard to evangelization, let's read this first point of *The Way* under the chapter, Holy Mass. And I say this with respect. At face value, the point seems to be a platitude stating the obvious. St. Josemaria has 999 points and maybe he was trying to figure out, "how do I get one more point to make it 999?" And it reads- not very insightful and reads almost as filler. Good stuff, but perhaps superfluous. But if you look into it, the opposite is true. I don't want to keep holding you in suspense: "A very important characteristic of the apostolic man or apostolic woman is his or her love for the Mass." Okay, fine. I'm not going to argue with that. But let's look at that. And since- let's use our American practicality or pragmatism as we dwell on this point: the meditations on the Holy Mass.

I'm gonna do a little bit of supernatural bragging. I guess the Lord's gonna reserve extra purgatory for me because I exchanged words with three saints. And my father attended Mass of a saint who happens to be a stigmatist, Padre Pio. Who are those three saints? Mother Teresa, Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, St. John Paul II. Why this supernatural bragging? Because it has something to do with the Mass. In my younger days, in the 80s, before many of you were born, I was invited, maybe "urged" is a better word, to say Mass for the Missionaries of Charity at their community center in the West Side of Chicago- not exactly a safe place.

And I would say Mass for them once a month. And the sister in charge pulled me aside and said, "Don't tell anybody, but Mother Teresa is going to visit this shelter. And we'd like you to meet her." I go, "Wow, what an honor." "But don't tell anybody." So, I didn't. So, I guess that secret was transmitted to 999 other ones. We're about 1000 people, including the Cardinal. So the nun encouraged me, "well, you wait in line because we want you to meet her."

So I waited in line- wasn't very long. And one of the few instances when anybody reaches my chest in stature. And she was a hunched over little old lady. And not being very sentimental myself, you could have a big heart and not be sentimental or touchy feely, you know, it's neither here nor there. But I did have an experience of the joy of Christ. Nothing mystical. I just knew this woman was very close to God and expressed the smile and joy of Christ. And she told me, she looked at me with love, she looked up at me and said, "Father, I will pray for you," which carried, carried- meant a lot to me, obviously. "But you've got to pray for me." I said, "Sure." "And I want you to pray for me at a specific time." I go, "okay, when do you want me to pray for you?" "During the Offertory at Mass, when you pour water into the wine at the Offertory, between the offering of the bread and the offering of the chalice." And my immediate reaction was, "oh, sure, of course." And I was just wondering, "why that part of the Mass? "Why not at the Consecration or Communion?" I'm sure she wanted that as well. But she didn't indicate that.

Researched it a little bit. I don't know if she did. But that symbolizes the absorption of our work and suffering into the sacrifice of Christ. It's a symbol. The Offertory is the offering of the people. And Consecration - I'll use modern parlance - is showtime. It's the real Sacrifice in union with the Offertory. And so basically, what she was saying is, "pray for me so that my life of sacrifice, serving the poorest of the poor, is effectively connected with Jesus' sacrifice of the Cross because then its value increases exponentially," even that word is inaccurate, "infinitely." So that's saint number one. Saint number two is a little bit more down to Earth.

Again, in the 80s. I was in Rome, I was chaplain for a group of university students connected with Opus Dei, the traditional UNIV pilgrimage to Rome during Holy Week; you see the Holy Father, you see the Prelate of Opus Dei, you pray at the different churches, etc. And Bl. Alvaro, who was the Prelate of Opus Dei, whom we call father, wanted to get together with chaplains for youth groups, young people. And so we have this gathering. And some of the guys there, as they used to do when I was studying in Rome, ask the Prelate, ask the father a question. Why? So people could get a good laugh on how I butcher Spanish. At least the Americans I was with had the knack of never learning the language completely, and they would usually get a pass because they were- we were hopeless. I couldn't- you know, I lost my own language because I didn't practice it, and couldn't distinguish between Italian, Spanish, and Latin. I mean, you got the Italian outside the center, Spanish in the center, and some eager beaver professor would teach in Latin, so I was having a hard time.

So, one of the guys said, "Why don't you break the ice?" I go, "Well, why do I have to break the ice?" I said, "I used to break the ice for years." "No! Come on," then a little bit of guilt trip: "Well, make the father happy? Don't you want to make the father happy and give him a little bit of a joy to hear- hear from you? You know, you know, he has a soft spot for Americans." Okay, a little guilt trip. Well, I raise my hand, "How can we

see more results- in our pastoral work with youth? What must we do to get more results?" -Didn't like that question too much because in subsequent gatherings, he said, "you know, you can't get caught up in results." So that was referred- he was referring to me. And uncharacteristic because he was an engineer. He would never answer a question immediately. He would really think it through and analyze it and elaborate where St. Josemaria would spontaneously give a quick answer. But this time it was, you could almost say, a knee jerk reaction. He said, "My son, say Mass better." So I said, "obviously, he didn't- did not understand the question. I'm not asking a question about Mass. I'm asking a question about results." And so I'm looking at him. He said, "I understood your question. And I'm answering your question. Put more love into the Mass." So I was kind of dumbstruck. And he said, "when St. Josemaria worked with youth, he relied a lot on the Mass, and the Mass was- took center stage in his work with youth." And then he went on to say, this doesn't have to be an indicator, but he said, "when they would serve Mass, the service would be reduced to tears. And it wasn't because the Mass took too long."

So anyway, fast forward 30 years later. I'm at a workshop for vicars of Opus Dei. And I'm at a meditation and a priest preaching- was preaching on the Mass and said, "you know, many years ago I think it was an American who asked this question" and- and the father immediately said, "say Mass better" then he was- then he kind of piggybacked on that, how we have to make that number one in our life. And then I'm at breakfast time, I hear within earshot, "I wonder who that guy was!" And I said, "it was me." And then I, this is germane to the topic, then I got an email from one of the guys there, "Can you give me a little bit of a transcript of that get together?" So I go back- 1985, March or April. And I noticed that Bl. Alvaro never talked about working with young people, at least directly. The other questions, there were about three questions, all had- at least the answers, all had to do with the Mass.

And so what is Our Lord asking me? The Second Vatican Council says, our plan of life says, that the focal point of my life, of my spiritual life, is the Mass. What's going on in the Mass, whether the priest is distracted, whether he is saying Mass in a nonchalant way, whether he's saying it with piety, that Mass brings to the present moment Jesus suffering on the Cross. We'll get into it a little bit and not go over time. Arguably one of the greatest evangeli- evangelizers of modern time was St. John Paul. And you keep hearing, "oh, I was fortunate enough to be at his Mass." "I was present at his private Mass." People ask me, "Have you seen John Paul?" Yes, I can say that too. I was at a Mass, a smaller Mass for university students. And in his memoirs, he said that was his focal point, everything was brought into the Mass and he'd have this ream of papers of intentions that he would bring into the Mass. And St. Josemaria in virtually all the get togethers we see in the movies. Anytime someone has a problem, anytime someone needs a favor, "I'm gonna put that in the Mass." This is not to be emulated, unless you have a mystical grace, my- my own father brought a young man with his father, died of leukemia, to see Padre Pio in 1968, his last year. And they went to his Mass. I think the Mass was literally at least two hours if not three hours. This is not to be imitated, but to be admired. Because that was the high point. And he would hear 16 to 17 hours of confessions every day. So there is a connection.

So now this point is- has a lot more meaning, a very important character- characteristic of the apostolic man or woman is his or her love for the Mass. What is going on in the Mass and how do I make it more the center? There's two mediums of self-emptying, self-giving, which we will celebrate in a few minutes when

we have Mass. And that's in the offertory. The prominent word when the bread is being offered is my "work." And the prominent image when the chalice is being raised is suffering. The red wine symbolizes blood. The chalice also symbolizes pain, mentioned in the Gospel, Jesus saying, "are you willing to drink of the chalice that I'm about to drink?" So, work and suffering are intimately linked with the Mass. What- the Mass is the same sacrifice of Calvary, but there's an accidental mean- accidental difference and that accidental difference is key. What's the essential similarity? The priest is the same. It's Jesus. The victim is the priest, is Jesus. The altar is His Body. It's the same. The temple is His Persona. It's the same, the sentiments are the same. What's the difference? This is the sacrifice of Jesus in union with his followers. In union with His Mystical Body. And the more that these members of his Mystical Body are connected to this sacrifice, the more they're transformed. That's why Jesus says, "you must be like the grain of wheat." It points to the Mass. And in His Gospel, when He institutes the Holy Eucharist, He says the following: "And having taken bread, He gave thanks and broke and gave it to them saying, 'This is my body, which is being given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'" He doesn't say, say this and remember- He says, "do this," it's doing pointing to the need for me to connect with his sacrifice.

In a certain sense, what does the Mass do? Jesus moves over on the Cross and leaves some room for us to get on with Him. That's what the Mass is. And so- I would say, I know we're running out of time, there's a remote connection to the Mass and a proximate one: the remote one St. Josemaria says that "everybody, by virtue of their common priesthood, says his or her own Mass, through their work and their suffering." And then they connect it. If it is, and we believe it is, it's the same sacrifice on the Cross. And we may ask the question because faith and reason have to mesh. He died 2000 years ago. Our non-Catholic sisters and brothers, our, our Chris- our non-Catholic Christian brothers and sisters sometimes say, "Well, you know, Catholics want to repeat the Redemption every time they have Mass." No, it's not a repetition, it's the same redemptive act. "Well, how does that make sense?" I mean, we're going to proclaim the mystery of faith. So we're- we have an out that way. But how does it make sense?

The naked dead man, hanging on the Cross, if we're gonna be theologically precise, is not a human person. He's a man, but he's not a human person. He's only a Divine Person. You know, they went through that for centuries in the early Church, to figure that one out. And what does that- what does that have to do with the Mass? Well, as a man had happened in time, but don't forget, he's- he has, he's God. The person is God. And God's eternal. There's no time with God. God can transcend space and time. And so yes, this- this redemptive sacrifice is eternal, and it's brought to the present moment at the moment of the Consecration. My dark nights of soul, my physical pain, my tiredness is all part of me saying Mass or bringing that to the Holy Sacrifice. My professional work, even if I make my bed out of love, it could have an infinite value when I allow it to be absorbed by Jesus' sacrifice of the Cross. Well, we conclude our prayer. Going to the Blessed Mother, the woman of the Eucharist, the title St. John Paul gave to Mary. And this oratory or this chapel has special meaning because Mary went to Mass in Ephesus, and it was celebrated by St. John. And so we ask Our Lady, the woman of the Eucharist, to teach us how to put more love in her Son's Eucharistic Sacrifice.

I thank you, my God for the good resolutions, affections and inspirations you've communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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