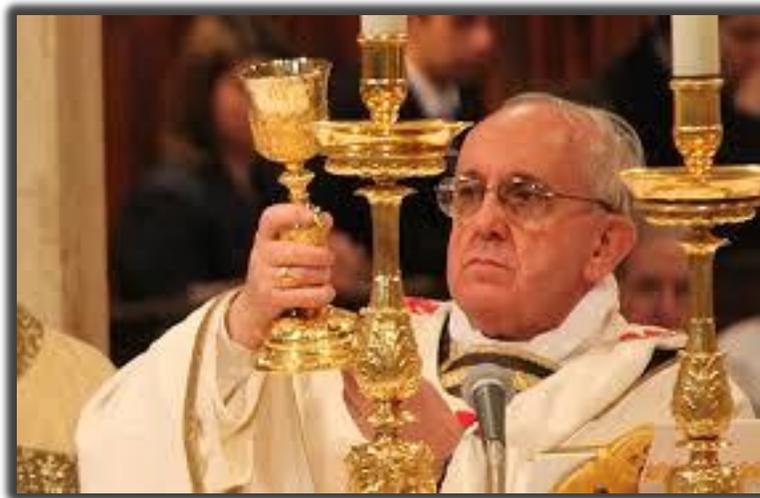


Understanding the Mass: The General Context

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also 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 death of the Lord until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:24-26)



Introduction:

In his book, “What Happens at the Mass,” Fr. Jeremy Driscoll, OSB, writes, “Something happens at Mass. God is acting! He acts to save us. It is a huge event. In fact there is nothing bigger.” True Disciples of Jesus know that we will never fully understand the “Mystery of Faith.” “But there is a deeper entry into it and a way of learning to move within its spaces.”¹ Moreover, the Mass is a ritual, and this means that it requires initiation, repetition, a sense of performance. There is a gradual deepening of its sense. A right attitude toward it is needed and must be learned.”² The Vatican II document the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy “Sacrosanctum Concilium,” states, “the liturgy is the summit toward which the church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows.” True Disciples of Jesus that “in order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects it is necessary that the

faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds be attuned to their voices, that they cooperate with heavenly grace lest they receive it in vain.”³

Ultimately,

“It is very much the wish of the church that all the faithful should be led to take that full, conscious, and active part in the liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people, ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people’ (1 Pet 2:9, 4-5) have a right and to which they are bound by reason of their baptism. In the restoration and the development of the sacred liturgy the full active participation by all the people is of paramount concern, for it is the primary, indeed the indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit. Therefore, in all their apostolic activity, pastors of souls should energetically set about achieving it through the required site formation.”⁴

Hence, the reason for this teaching on “Understanding the Mass” is to form True Disciples of Jesus so that they may enter more profoundly into the prayer and ritual action of the Mass so much so that the True Disciples of Jesus gain enough of an understanding of the Mass that they will in turn share the Good News with others inviting them into the Mass. *Sancrosanctum Concillium* drives home the importance of teaching about what happens at the Mass demanding that

“Pastors of souls must, therefore, realize that, when the liturgy (the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ) is celebrated, their obligation goes further than simply ensuring that the laws governing valid and lawful celebration are observed. They must also ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by it.”⁵

True Disciples of Jesus can clearly see the importance of knowing “What Happens at the Mass,” because it is what fosters a spiritual life when we leave the church making Christ present to others by our lives. Jesus told his disciples a parable:

Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? No disciple is superior to the teacher; but when fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher. Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove that splinter in your eye,' when you do not even notice the wooden beam in your own eye? You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye. (Luke 6:39-42)

Ultimately, sitting at the feet of Jesus and learning just like Mary and the other disciples did eventually led to the celebration of the Eucharist where we get our theology. Jesus instituted the Eucharist for our benefit. Remember the Latin phrase *lex orandi-lex credendi*, meaning the law of prayer, or how we pray is the law of what we believe or profess. In his book, "Theology at the Eucharistic Table," Fr. Jeremy Driscoll writes, "*lex orandi-lex credendi*, expressing the dynamic relationship between the dynamic relationship between liturgy and doctrinal expression...is considered a foundational description of the way things are and ought to be in relationship. What the Church celebrates in liturgy is the foundation for whatever is articulated in doctrinal pronouncements." ⁶ True Disciples of Jesus know that our theology comes from the Mass. Moreover, True Disciples of Jesus know that sitting at the feet of Jesus and learning both at Mass, the scriptures, and all the documents of the Church, because they are coming from the movement of the Holy Spirit through the members of the Church over time have meaning for us today. What can we learn?

The very word disciple **Μαθητης** (from *math-*, the "mental effort needed to think something through") – properly, a *learner*, a *disciple*, a *follower of Christ* who *learns the doctrines of Scripture and the lifestyle* they require. ⁷ True Disciples of Jesus know that discipleship is a long journey in relationship with God learning about and experiencing our relationship with God. Driscoll writes, "Every relationship needs to be experienced. Mass is the



foundational experience of our relationship with God through Jesus, experienced and celebrated in its fullness. This experience renders possible all other relationship.”⁸

Our relationship with God through the Mass

Context:

Fr. Driscoll concentrates on the “ritual shape” of the Mass and offers four key definitions that give understanding to the ritual shape. They are first the distinction between mystery and sacrament. Second, “the significance of people gathering for Mass.” Third, “the overarching shape or movement of the entire rite.” Fourth, “imagining an ideal celebration.”⁹

Mystery and Sacrament:

Mystery:

Driscoll writes, “From the time of the Apostles, the Christian community celebrated the Eucharist in commands therefore; Luke gave thanks.”) century these mysteries.” But answers, “The rites of Baptism and obedience to the Lords (Matthew 28:19 “Go 22:19, “He took bread and from as early as the second rites were referred to as why asks Fr. Driscoll. “He theology of St. Paul, who used the word *mystery* as a key concept in his whole understanding of what happened to Christ. For St. Paul the central mystery is the cross of Christ.” St. Paul expresses “that something was hidden in the Cross which we cannot understand without its being revealed.” Fr. Driscoll says St. Paul explains



I know what I am talking about in speaking of the mystery of Christ, unknown in former ages but now revealed by the Spirit to the holy apostles and prophets. It is no less that this: in Christ Jesus the gentiles are now co-heirs with the Jews, members of the same body and sharers of the promise through the preaching of the Gospel.” (Eph 3:4-6)¹⁰

Moreover,

In him we have redemption by his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions, in accord with the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will in accord with his favor that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth. (Eph 1:7-10)

Fr. Driscoll, then, concludes that **“a mystery is a concrete something that when you bump into it, it puts you in contact with a divine reality.** The cross is a concrete something; in it is the Lord of Glory.” He adds, Applying the same logic to Baptism and Eucharist, we could say that being plunged into water and brought again up three times is a concrete something; in it is a believer’s dying and rising with Christ.” In a similar way, Fr. Driscoll adds, “The bread and wine of the Eucharist are concrete something’s; in them are hidden the Body and Blood of Christ. All these things then are called mysteries.”¹¹ To clarify the use of the word mystery singular or mysteries plural Fr. Driscoll reveals that “If we use a phrase like ‘the mystery of the Eucharist,’ this does not mean that which cannot be understood about the Eucharist. It means that the Eucharist is a concrete reality in which the divine reality is hidden.” Moreover, Fr. Driscoll clarifies “if we use the word in the singular, (mystery) it refers to the rite as a whole. But the Eucharist was and is also called “mysteries,” and here is reference to the various dimensions working together. The gestures, the words, the bread and wine, the members of the assembly in their various roles—all of these are mysteries. In them is hidden the Lord of Glory. This is why at the beginning of the Mass, the bishop or priest urges the assembly ‘Brethren (brothers and sisters) let us acknowledge our sins and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysaries.’ Or in the very center of the intensity of the Eucharist Prayer, he exclaims ‘the mystery of faith.’ And all the people proclaim what is hidden in the consecrated bread and wine ; namely, that by his cross and resurrection he has set us free.” Hence, Fr. Driscoll concludes that without solving the mystery “there is a deeper entry into it and a way of learning to move within its spaces.” Fr. Driscoll is offering a “deeper

entry and a certain grace of movement within the mysteries.”¹² True Disciples of Jesus know that we are participating in the mysteries through the actions of the ritual while focusing not on our movements and actions but also on the Mystery itself. Participation in the mysteries requires preparation and attitude.

Sacrament:

“In the history of theology the word *sacrament* is closely related to *mystery*.” For Fr. Driscoll, sacrament, “connotes the making holy of some concrete thing...the bread and wine was a sacrament of the Lord’s Body and Blood. (Other terms were also used: figure of His Body and Blood, type of, the mystery of...etc.) Fr. Driscoll illuminates his point stating. “That is, by means of bread and wine we come into contact with something that now would otherwise be beyond reach, namely, the risen and glorified body of Christ no longer in space and time.” Moreover he adds, “So, by means of a sacrament we come into contact in space and time with something that transcends space and time.” Ultimately, “The sacramental experience is at one and the same time concrete and transcendent, Just as Christ is concrete and transcendent.” Why this explanation of mystery and sacrament? Fr. Driscoll writes, “I said in the introduction that paradoxically, to go more deeply into the meaning of the Mass, we must remain always on the surface, never leaving behind its forms, for the very forms themselves, the bread, the wine the movements of the people—become imbued with significance, with the divine life itself. This is the sacramental perspective. The forms are not merely “weakly’ symbolic they are at the one and the same time concrete and transcendent.”¹³ True Disciples of Jesus understand that all the ritual actions that we are participating in are done in union with the divine.

The Assembly:

Fr. Driscoll writes, “Mass begins before it begins. Much has gone into its preparation, and the actual beginning of the liturgical ceremony is a culmination of many graces mysteriously at work in the lives of hundreds and even thousands of people.” Think of the. Think of the church as global, “the whole church has

gathered; the church in heaven and on earth, the church across the world and across the centuries. And in that is gathered the whole creation and the desires of every human heart.”¹⁴ Then think of the church local, e.g. “All of this happens in a particular time and place. That time and place are also significant for understanding the mystery of the Church...concretely existing in a specific culture and in a precise moment in history with all the life stories of those who come together...the church is located in time or it cannot come to be.”¹⁵ Furthermore, the local church around the world makes present the universal Church. “It is for this reason that in the

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bishop is
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Prayer the local
named, as is the
Rome, with whom
bishops across the
their communion
apostolic faith.”¹⁶
Disciples of Jesus
that we are all

connected heaven and earth past and present. In fact, “Mass begins with the creation of the world. God intended this kind of encounter with His creatures from the start...the creation of the world and the history of the human race is the largest context for the Mass, and this context is fact presupposed and expressed in many of the rituals and texts.”¹⁷ The “*mystery* of the assembly” Fr. Driscoll is expressing “the deep theological significance hidden in the arrival of many people coming from many places to celebrate the Eucharist.”¹⁸ Meditate on the mystery of the assembly as a concrete reality that when you bump into it you somehow know that you are connected to the Divine. Fr. Driscoll explains “The Mass begins as an assembly forms, and this already full of meaning. We should notice it, ponder it with wonder, and rejoice in it. In the coming together of many people into one place to pray under the headship of their bishop or a priest, we have acted out in a very concrete way of what the church is meant to be.” Furthermore, “*ekklesia*, literally in Greek means ‘a

calling out' and 'a calling together.' So *church* means those called out from somewhere by God and called together into one place by him. Every time we use the word church we should try to remember this sense of the word. The church is the gathering of those called by God. She is an assembly that God forms and keeps together.”¹⁹ Ultimately, “to do Eucharist is to be Church. To be Church, to be assembled into one, is what God intended for the whole world. The Eucharist is celebrated in thanksgiving and for the glory of God, and is done for the salvation of the whole world.”²⁰

The Shape of the Ritual:

Fr. Driscoll writes, “The broad strokes of what happen at mass can be traced in two basic movements which define its essential form, the basic melody line as it were. The first is a movement from God the Father to the world, while the second is a move from the world to God the Father.”²¹ Fr. Driscoll defines these movements. “The first in this full Trinitarian and ecclesial shape can be described as follows: the father gives Himself through the Son in the Holy Spirit...the very shape of God’s saving activity on our behalf.”²² True Disciples of Jesus understand that this can be described as the “Paschal Mystery of Christ.” “When the Father places His Son into the hand of the Church (the first movement) He does so in order that the Church may do something with His gift; namely, offer it as its own back to the Father (the second movement).”²³ Concretely,

When the Word assumes our flesh—this is the form in which the Father gives His Son to us—He does so in order to that he may offer it to the Father as what he is and has always been. All this is accomplished in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit who molded a body for the Word in the womb of the Virgin Mary , the same Spirit who raised up Jesus from the dead—this Spirit now fills the gifts that the Church brings for transformation and makes them to be one same thing: the body formed in Mary’s body, the Body raised from the dead, Christ’s body the Church offered to God the Father in the name of the whole world. The world’s passing over to the father can take place *only* in the

Church...and the Church exists not for herself but for the sake of the world. So we have named the twofold movement of the Eucharistic liturgy, but it has not been possible without naming the Church and the world. ²⁴

The Ideal Celebration:

Fr. Driscoll encourages the faithful to “not get tangled up in questions of practical nature concerning how well or how poorly a particular celebration happens.” Rather, he encourages the faithful to “imagine the liturgy as it is meant to be celebrated, with every person and every part working at the highest level.” ²⁵ We make mistakes. “Problematic liturgies that have been poorly celebrated, are not the basis on which good theological reflections can be built. This can only be built on envisioning the liturgy ideally celebrated.” The Idea, Fr. Driscoll adds, is to deepen our understanding” of the liturgy. “It is helpful to imagine a ‘big’ liturgy...with all of its dimensions developed as in a Sunday or a major feast.” Sunday He adds, is the “preeminent day for Christians to gather in prayer, since on Sunday Christ rose from the dead, and every Sunday celebrates his Resurrection by the celebration of the Eucharist.” ²⁶

Fr. imagining faithful to ideal include the presides at the for the most experience of



Driscoll, when encourages the imagining that “this celebration should bishop as one who liturgy. I know that part the ordinary those who celebrate

mass is with a priest presiding, not the bishop. But behind every priest we need to see the bishop who has ordained him and sent to a particular community to lead the Eucharistic celebration.” Clearly, “the bishop is the head of a diocesan church; he is its leader and its chief authority.” The bishop “represents Christ as the head, Christ the leader, Christ’s the community’s only authority. The source and summit of the life

of the diocesan community is the celebration of the Eucharist...the priest...represents the bishop, who represents Christ as head of the community.”

²⁷Moreover, “The many priests of a diocese, precisely because they are in communion with their bishop, teaching the faith and celebrating the one and only Eucharist, are also sacraments of the one and only priest who leads the communities Eucharist, Christ himself. This is called by ancient tradition ‘holy order.’”²⁸

Fr. Driscoll wants to inform the faithful that they belong to Christ as well through their baptism. He writes, “It is important to remember, however, that Christ shares his priesthood with all the baptized...That is, Christ’s priesthood exists for the sake of the people. Precisely, in the Mass Christ wishes to unite all his people with himself in his priestly act of offering himself to the Father for the sake of the world.”

²⁹ Ultimately, “Christ’s people are His priests, not because they represent his one and only priesthood as bishops and priests do, but because they are united with him in his priestly act.”³⁰ True Disciples of Jesus know that they are “A Chosen race, a royal Priesthood, a holy nation...(1 Peter 2:5-9).

All of this teaching is for the salvation of souls. To be informed about the context of the mass is to help disciples to enter more profoundly into the prayer of the Mass, so you go and make disciples.

¹ What Happens at the Mass, Fr. Jeremy Driscoll, OSB v

² Ibid vi

³ Sacrosanctum Concilium 10-11

⁴ Ibid 14

⁵ Ibid 11

⁶ Theology at the Eucharistic Table, Driscoll Pg. 45

⁷ Strongs Biblical Concordance 3101

215 Cf. *Mk* 1:16-20; 3:13-19; *Mt* 13:10-17;

Lk 10:17-20; 22:28-30.□

216 *Jn* 15:4-5.□

217 *Jn* 6:56.

⁸ What happens at the Mass vii

⁹ Ibid 1

¹⁰ Ibid 2

¹¹ Ibid 3

¹² Ibid 3

¹³ Ibid 7

¹⁴ Ibid 10

¹⁵ Ibid 9

¹⁶ Ibid 9

¹⁷ Ibid 7

¹⁸ Ibid 7

¹⁹ Ibid 8

²⁰ Ibid 10

²¹ Ibid 10

²² Ibid 10

²³ Ibid 12

²⁴ Ibid 12

²⁵ Ibid 13

²⁶ Ibid 14

²⁷ Ibid 15

²⁸ Ibid 15

²⁹ Ibid 15

³⁰ Ibid 15