

# The Mass

## Part 3

### Holy Communion:

The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus is to be understood as the Passover lamb that was sacrificed on Calvary for our sins. However, in order to fully understand the connection between Jesus and the Passover lamb, we must understand that it was not enough to have the animal killed. Eating the sacrificial lamb was an essential part of the Passover celebration. A shared communion meal followed the sacrifice, so that the Jews remembered the sealing of the covenant between God and His people.

A full understanding of the Jewish belief in the Passover ritual has important implications on our understanding of the Eucharist as communion. In our Catholic understanding of Jesus as the new Passover lamb that has been sacrificed once and for all, it is only fitting that we then consume the body and blood of Jesus at our Paschal meal. As a community, we gather and enjoy a communion meal which accompanies Christ's sacrifice on the cross. All of which follows the biblical pattern of a sacrifice followed by communion.

Paul took up this notion of the Paschal sacrifice of Christ in his first letter to the Corinthians. In it, he instructs the members of the Church of Corinth in Greece that Christ's sacrificial death finds its culmination in a festival meal (communion). "Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival." (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). Paul's writing is one of the earliest proofs of the early Church's understanding of the Eucharist being inseparably linked to the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary.

The Church has always seen Holy Communion as the climax of the Mass. This is because when we eat the Body and Blood of Christ we are intimately joined to God. It is the most profoundly intimate union with God that we will experience this side of Heaven. Christ is made sacramentally present to us on the altar at Mass, and then we consume him and take him with us as we go out into the world. This is how we carry Christ in our souls, as we are his living witnesses to all our brothers and sisters.

All this is why, after receiving Christ at Mass, we should go back to our pews and pour out our hearts to the Lord. It should be a time of deep prayer in which we love him, thank him, and offer him our deepest needs and petitions. After receiving Holy Communion, we should be intensely focused on who we have received, and how we can make him a greater part of our lives. This should never be a time of distraction, when we are watching other people, or running to the door to beat traffic in the Church parking lot. At that moment, we have become living tabernacles of God. Instead, we should be rejoicing with God, who has so lovingly chosen to dwell within us.

For Reflection:

“Man has a soul, as well as a body. The spiritual part of him demands a food which is above the material and the physical and the biological. Some would call a halt to the law, that all life must nourish itself, and assert that the soul can find its satisfying food here below without any appeal to a higher life. But the broken minds and tortured hearts testify to the fact that nothing can satisfy the soul hunger of man, except a nourishment suited to his soul and its aspirations for the perfect. A canary does not consume the same kind of food as a boa constrictor, because its nature is different. Man’s soul being spiritual demands a spiritual food. In the order of grace, this divine food is the Eucharist, or the communion of man with Christ and Christ with man.

This is not something contrary to the natural law, for if the animal could speak, it would say to the plant: “Unless you eat me, you shall not have life in you.” If the plant could speak, it would say to the animal: “Unless you eat me, you shall not have life in you.” If the animal, plant, and air could speak, they would say to man: “Unless you eat me, you shall not have life in you.” With the same logic, but speaking from above and now below, because the soul is spiritual, Our Blessed Lord actually says to the soul: "Except you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you shall not have life in you." The law of transformation works consistently through nature and grace. The lower transforms itself into the higher, the plant transforms itself into the animal when taken as food; man is transformed by grace into Christ when he takes Christ into his soul, for it is a quality of love to transform itself into the object that is loved.

Why should we be surprised that He gives Himself to us as food? After all, if He furnishes food for the birds and the beasts in the natural order, why should He not furnish it for man in the supernatural order? If the plant nourishes its seed before it is ripe, and if the bird brings food to its young before they can fly, shall we deny to Him that which we allow to a creature? To every infant at the breast, the mother virtually says: "Take, eat and drink; this is my body and blood." The mother would be untrue to nature if she said, "This represents my body," knowing that it is her body. So too, the Lord would be untrue to fact if He said: "This is not My Body and Blood. It is only a representation or a symbol of it." The analogy with the mother, however, breaks completely down, because here a nourishment is on the same level, that of the human with the human. But in the Eucharist, the nourishment is on two different levels: The divine and the human."

Blessed Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

"These are the Sacraments"