

Why Does the Mass Change?

By Fr. Dave Heney

Who decides? What is the purpose of Mass? Well, we believe Jesus is the true personification of God's unconditional love for us. By following Him we receive God's love. His life revealed the three commands to love God, love our neighbor, and to love ourselves. Well, what is love? It is our mature and total dedication of our life for the good of others, as revealed in the words of the consecration at Mass; "This is my entire self, (body and blood) given for you." Jesus loved us with that total dedication, even on the cross, and that image of Jesus on the cross is the center of St. Paschal's Church.

Nothing would stop His expression of God's love for us and His total offering of His life for our good, once and for all time. At Mass, this event happens for us, and we can join ourselves to Jesus in His offering of Himself in love to the Father. At the Last Supper, the first Mass, Jesus said "Do this in remembrance of me." We have the privilege of joining with Our Lord in His offering of Himself to the Father. This is what we do at every mass.

At Mass, Jesus offers Himself: "This is my body and blood for you." (My entire self for you) Once spoken, it cannot be undone, so the Eucharist is reserved in the tabernacle after Mass. It remains the enduring Presence of Our Lord, a continual commitment of love for us. That is why the tabernacle has a central focus at St. Paschal's.

Why does the Mass Change?

While the nature and purpose of the Mass never changes, how it is done changes from time to time, because people and cultures change. Therefore, how the Mass is conducted evolves over time. No Mass ceremony can ever perfectly capture the action of Our Lord. For that reason, the motto of the Church is "semper reformanda" which means "always reforming."

History of Mass Changes

The Last Supper was a First Century Greco-Roman-Jewish banquet. That means Jesus and the Apostles

did not sit in chairs but rather reclined on pillows around a u-shaped table for a Jewish Passover meal that Jesus changed into a new rite. They spoke Aramaic, a form of Hebrew. Mass continued in this semi-circular style for decades. Later, as the faith spread throughout the eastern Mediterranean, they prayed in Greek. The New Testament was written in Greek to take advantage of that more popular language. Sadly, Christians were occasionally persecuted for their faith, so Mass was held secretly, at times, usually in people's homes. There, they would gather around a centrally placed altar.

At that time, the Roman Empire had brutally conquered the known world through military and political aggression. However, in just a few more decades, and because the early Christians were so courageous, most of the Roman Empire had converted to Christianity! Seeing the numbers, a new Roman Emperor, Constantine, in the year 303 AD, decided to favor our faith. He converted long rectangular pagan temples into Christian Churches by removing the pagan statue at one end of the temple and replacing it with an altar and tabernacle. Christians no longer worshipped around a home altar. Churches now had an altar and tabernacle at one end of a long rectangular building.

The faith quickly moved throughout the Roman Empire; from Italy to Africa to England, where Latin was the more universal language, so Latin became the language of Mass. In these formerly pagan

temples, now Christian churches, priest and people faced the same direction, towards the presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist in the tabernacle.

Because priest and people looked in the same direction, the personality of the priest was not a focus. His function as presider was very important but the emphasis was on both priest and people actively participating in their prayers while facing God together. Even though people hardly spoke, they were certainly involved, just as we are when we see a compelling opera, movie, or play. We can experience a profound involvement, even though we do not sing, speak, or act in the event. If our mind and heart are engaged, our whole self is. The Mass profoundly moved people, and they got involved!

The impact was spectacular. The commandment to love God, our neighbor, and our self that was affirmed at every Mass was actualized in these medieval centuries with the development of the very first high level Universities, the largest hospital and healthcare systems in the world, and the largest social services system the world had ever seen to that day. As the nations of Europe developed, the Roman Empire and Medieval societies gradually faded as did Latin, even though the Latin Mass continued. Gradually, people could no longer understand the language of the Mass.

In the 20th Century, Pope Pius the XII deeply felt the trauma of two world wars, with Catholics fighting on both sides, plus the evil of both Chinese and Soviet communism that together cost the lives of several hundred million people. Clearly the Mass needed to change again to produce the same effect that had converted an equally perverse Roman Empire.

Pius XII wrote a series of documents calling on Christians to get more involved in the Mass, through singing, responses, and prayers. Only by reconnecting with our role at Mass of joining ourselves with the offering of Our Lord to the Father could people finally be at peace with God and each other, sorely needed in that very cruel 20th century! Pope John XXIII continued that goal by launching the Second Vatican Council, which dedicated its first efforts to the reform of the Mass, in such a way that

the original commands to love God, to love our neighbor, and to love ourselves *would be more easily expressed and clearly understood*. The Mass would be in clear and concise English (for Americans) and would include a sign of peace, and other dynamic changes. Latin was translated into the more general sense of expressions we use in English.

Why the Latin Mass Now?

Both John Paul and Benedict have affirmed that the Latin Mass and the Vatican II Mass are both from the same ancient tradition that continues the very nature and purpose of Mass, which is to connect Catholics to the person of Jesus, for the purpose of receiving God's love and to empower us to courageously transform the world to Him. They each have a special emphasis that, when prayed respectfully, they together inform us of our heritage and enrich our faith with authentic teaching.

The Newest Changes

Recently, the Church approved a new English translation that more closely follows the original Latin word for word, and uses a more exalted and poetic style for expressions we use in English. Al most all of the changes are in the prayers only the priest says. There are also a few small changes in the Gloria and the Creed as well as other prayers the people say.

The word "Mass" comes from the final Latin words "Ite, Missa Est" which means "Go, you are sent!" These words *send us forth* to transform the world to the love of God. If we leave Mass without this grace of unconditional love, then it can be said that perhaps we have not really been at Mass. But if we burst out of Church with a deeper faith and eager to bring the love of God to all people, *then truly we have received Our Lord in the Eucharist as He intended, and in every language, whether Aramaic, Greek, Latin, or English.*

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