

The Formational and Eschatological Aspects of the Holy Mass

Not only do we receive super-abundant graces when we assist at Holy Mass, but the Mass itself with its Readings, Responsorial Psalm, Gospel, and Homily offer us an on-going education in the faith. These are the most obvious ways the Mass helps to form us in our faith, but it does so also on a more sublime level through its processions, gestures, and movements. We priests lump all of these together as the “rubrics”, as they are proscribed in the Missal in red lettering.

Through the symbology of the “rubrics” we have displayed before us at every Mass the whole History of Salvation from the moment of creation to the resurrection of Christ. The greatest part of this happens in the opening procession, which represents Salvation History from its beginning to the birth of Christ. That is why after the opening of the Mass and the penitential rite, we sing the “Gloria” which is very similar to the “Gloria in Excelsis Deo” that we sing for Christmas, because we at this moment of the Mass are thanking God the Father for sending us His Son, and then thanking Jesus for fulfilling his mission to die on the cross to save us all. Then we move onto the readings which are the public ministry of Our Lord. As he stood before crowds and explained scripture to them, so the priest stands before the congregation to explain the Gospels and the readings (i.e. homily). That is followed by the offertory procession, which should remind us of Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, but then the gifts are taken into the sanctuary and then placed on the altar—we think of his arrest and imprisonment on Holy Thursday night. Then the veil is removed from the chalice and we think of Jesus being stripped of his garments before the scourging and crowning of thorns. The priest washes his hands, as did Pilate after he had condemned Jesus to death. Three times during the Eucharistic prayer, the priest genuflects at the altar as three times Our Lord fell with the cross, after each genuflection there is an elevation of Host, Chalice, or both. Each time Our Lord fell, he got back up. Three times he shows his willingness to fulfill his mission, “drink the cup to the last drop,” and three times he shows his love for us. This repetition of the three, for the Hebrews meant it was to the maximum extent, the absolute superlative. Christ’s sacrificed himself to the maximum to show God’s maximum love for us. The bells ring in three sets, first to call our attention to the three principle moments of the consecration as Our Lord is made present on the altar. He also suffered the hammering of three huge spikes through his two hands and one through his two feet. As we hear the bells we think of the hammers hitting the spikes. The elevation where the priest says “through him, with him...” is Jesus being raised on the cross and the moment of his death. Now we have three sessions of prayer: the Our Father, the Sign of Peace, and the Lamb of God. These mark the three days that Our Lord was in the tomb: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday morning. The final elevation is the Resurrection of

the Lord, and then we are called into union with him as we have the opportunity to receive Holy Communion.

The Holy Mass also involves Sacred Time. It has three “time zones”: the first is *Aeternitas* (eternity), the second is *Aevum* (everlasting), and *Tempus* (time, the temporal sphere, our world). This part of theology that deals with the relationship between the three and the end of time is called Eschatology. The first is the realm of God. *Aeternitas* has no beginning or end. *Aevum* is the realm of the angels and saints; they were created and have a definite beginning, but now are everlasting—they will live on indefinitely. *Tempus* is our realm, our world, that which we are conscious of. Everything in this area is finite, and has a beginning and an end. In the Holy Mass we are in Sacred time and as the triumphant and purgative Church join our celebration so the chasm from *Tempus* to *Aeternitas* is bridged through *Aevum*. We open a window to eternity and the second person of God is made present on our altar within time. So the reception of communion is then truly a “little piece of heaven.” Everything that Christ did on this earth he did as God and man, thus it was done within time but also in eternity. So it is his person then that actually forms the bridge between the “time zones”. As I mentioned above, within time we are reenacting the Passion, Death, & Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ, but simultaneously experiencing the eternal sacrifice of Jesus on the cross before the Father. In the large crucifix on the front wall of the Church we see what God the Father sees. We are sitting at the foot of Calvary Hill.

There a flow or interchange to the Mass, between God and us. Our prayer ascends to him through the entrance antiphon (or processional hymn) the Kyrie (Lord have mercy) the Gloria, and the collect (opening prayer). God’s truth descends to us through the readings, responsorial psalm, Gospel, homily, and Creed. By baptism we have all received a participation in the priesthood of Christ. We exercise this by offering to God in the Holy Mass our sacrifices and the things that we have done well, at the time of the offertory procession and the first elevations. These then go to the Father in heaven attached to the eternal sacrifice of Christ, and as the bread and wine are converted into the body and blood of Christ, so our sacrifices and good works offered up, are converted into graces and merits for us and our salvation. Our offerings ascend to God through the Offertory prayer (prayer over the gifts), the offering of the bread and wine, the preface, and the consecration. God’s love and grace descend to us through the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ, the breaking of the bread, communion, the prayer after communion, and the final blessing. It is because of all of this amazing richness, that Holy Mother Church asks that we be present at least once a week on Sundays for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.