

Chapter 1

Understanding the Mass

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding the basic meaning of the Mass
- ▶ Getting to know the different forms of the Mass around the world
- ▶ Chronicling the changes to the Mass
- ▶ Participating in the Mass

What Catholic Christians believe and how they worship are integrally connected. Those beliefs are efficiently expressed in the worship service known as the Holy Mass, also sometimes called Divine Liturgy and Sacred Worship. In this chapter we look at how the keystone of Catholic doctrine is celebrated in Mass around the world.

Introducing the Catholic Mass

Catholicism is a Christian religion. It professes the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, and therefore we are to worship him with the same adoration given to God.

With its roots in Judaism, Catholicism shares many steadfast beliefs and traditions with that religion; most prominently, the belief in one God (monotheism) and the use of sacred texts divinely inspired by God. Both faiths perform certain rituals, such as praying, giving blessings, reading the texts from God, and offering some sort of sacrificial offering. In ancient times an animal was sacrificed as a symbolic rite for the purification of sins.

Christian worship, and Catholic Mass in particular, is rooted in both word and ritual. Its followers consider Mass to be the ritual reenactment of the Last Supper and the unbloody reenactment of the Sacrifice of Calvary when Jesus died on the cross.



The Mass is the heart and soul of Catholic worship and belief. It is rooted in the Bible, and this sacred text is read aloud during Mass. The Church has foundations in both parts of the Bible, the Old Testament (the Hebrew Scriptures) and the New Testament. Both testaments show the enormous value of ritual sacrifice as signs of *covenant*. The Old Testament is the covenant between God and his Chosen People, the Jews; the New Testament is the covenant between God and the whole human race, which is at the core of Catholicism.

The Hebrew word for covenant is *berit*, in Greek it is *diatheke*, and in Latin it is *testamentum*. All three biblical and ancient translations refer to a sacred oath and agreement, much more permanent, personal, and profound than a mere legal contract. Covenants are not temporary and cannot be dissolved. Covenants can be broken insofar as one party may neglect to fulfill its obligations, but even that neglect doesn't destroy the relationship it created. Catholicism believes in and celebrates in Mass the covenant between God and his faithful followers.

Honoring God every week on a special day is very important to Catholics. Jews have observed the Sabbath day, Saturday, since the time of Moses and the giving of the Ten Commandments, but Christians worship on Sundays. The Church didn't change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday, as some people claim; rather, it considers itself bound by the New Law of the New Testament, not the Old Law of the Old Testament, so the day of worship became the day of Resurrection, which was Sunday.



Christian Churches, including the Catholic Church, remember the Last Supper on Holy Thursday when Jesus celebrated the Passover (the annual Jewish sacred feast) with his Apostles. Bread and wine are used during the Mass, and the words Christ spoke at that event are repeated by the ordained priest: "this is my body" (over the bread) and "this is my blood" (over the wine).

What Mass Means to Catholics

Latin, or Western, Catholics are familiar with the word *Mass*, from the Latin word *missa*, which is said by the priest or deacon at the end of the liturgy. *Ite missa est* has been inaccurately translated over the years as "Go, the Mass is ended." Literally, however, it should read "Go, [the congregation] is sent." In other words, the command is to go, because the people are now sent (*missa est*) into the world.



These last words of the Mass, *missa est*, were used to describe the entire sacred liturgy that is the heart and soul of Catholic divine worship. Why the last and not the first words? Well, every Catholic prayer and sacrament begins with the same words: *in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. Each sacrament and prayer have different endings. Latin is also a language where the verb and/or the most important word of the sentence appears at the end and not the beginning.

A Communion service is not the same as a Mass. Only a priest or bishop can celebrate Mass, but any deacon or designated layperson (called an *extraordinary minister of Holy Communion*) may preside at the distribution of Holy Communion outside Mass. A Communion service has Scripture readings, meditation, prayers, the Our Father (Lord's Prayer), and concludes with Holy Communion. These services are common in places where no priest is available for weekly Mass but the faithful are in need of the sacraments.



Holy Mass, on the other hand, is more than the giving of Holy Communion. It is foremost a sacrifice (of Jesus to his heavenly Father) and then a sacrament (a source of divine grace) and sacred banquet (spiritual food for the soul). The Sacred Liturgy is the worship of God, so the focus is on the Lord and not on mankind.

In Catholicism, Holy Communion (also called the Holy Eucharist) is not only believed to be the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ, but also the intimate union of God and believer. Simultaneously, it is also the union of all the members who partake of the same Body and Blood of Christ. The analogy used by St. Paul is that the Church is like a human body with many parts but is one whole, unified being. Each part is distinct but connected to the whole.

People often refer to the Mass using other terms. Here are a few examples:

- ✓ **Breaking of Bread:** The *breaking of bread* is the first reference to the unique form of Christian worship rooted in the Last Supper, commemorating the moment Jesus took the loaf of bread, broke it into pieces, and handed it to the apostles.
- ✓ **Liturgy:** *Celebrating the liturgy*, a phrase common in Apostolic times, is what Latin or Western Catholics call the Holy Mass. Liturgy is a public service or ministry, and the *Divine Liturgy* was the public worship of God. Catholicism used the term *liturgy* to refer to the Mass and the other sacraments as well as the Divine Office or Breviary (also known as the Liturgy of the Hours).

- ✓ **Lord's Supper:** The *Lord's Supper* was a term coined by St. Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians (11:20) to describe the sacred event. He chastises the Corinthians, however, for misbehaving at these gatherings, admonishing them that the sacred liturgy is not the place to get drunk, have arguments, or spread false teachings. (Imagine going a Mass where that happened!)
- ✓ **Sacrifice, Offering, or Oblation:** *Sacrifice, offering, or oblation* were other common terms during the time of the Apostles and Fathers of the Church to describe the main offering of Jesus the Son of God the Father to save mankind from sin. Christian priests, particularly Catholic and Orthodox, offer the sacrifice of the Son to the Father because they act in the name and in the person of Jesus Christ by virtue of their ordination.
- ✓ **Gathering or Synaxis:** Sometimes the words *gathering* or *assembly* are used to describe the congregating of people, but the many secular and nonreligious uses of the words make them not unique to worship. The Greek usage, however, is predominantly religious and sacred, hence *synaxis* is used to refer to the Divine Liturgy and also to Vespers, Matins, Lauds, and for commemorating several saints in one service.
- ✓ **Eucharist:** The word *Eucharist*, meaning *thanksgiving*, can be traced to the ancient church. It was used by Justin Martyr in the second century as a means of describing the attitude of thankfulness the faithful must present when participating in the divine worship of God. Christians then adopted the word, and the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist refers not only to the Holy Communion but to the worship service in which it occurs.

Different Catholics, Different Masses

The substance of the Mass is the same everywhere in the world. Sacred Scripture is read, prayers are offered, and the Last Supper is commemorated. Wheat bread and grape wine are used, and only ordained priests or bishops perform the celebration of Mass, the holiest ceremony and service in the Catholic religion.

The word *catholic*, however, comes from the Greek word *katholikos*, meaning *universal*. “Unity among diversity” is the definition St. Thomas Aquinas (a 13th-century Catholic theologian) gave for beauty, and it is the description he gives to the Church. While Catholicism professes unity of doctrine (teachings), discipline (law), and divine worship (sacraments), the Church still has a lot of diversity. The language of worship ranges from ancient Greek and Latin to modern-day English, Spanish, Italian, Polish, Vietnamese, Korean, and so on.



The Church's liturgical division between East and West predates the division of the Roman Empire in the fourth century. Christianity began in Jerusalem then spread to Antioch (Syria) and Alexandria (Egypt) and finally found its way to Rome. This is how Constantine's mother, St. Helena, embraced the Christian religion. While no specific date is evident, over time the Christian communities in the East (at Antioch, Alexandria, and Constantinople) had profound influence over liturgical practice.

The Church's liturgical division led to the development of different rites. A *rite* is a tradition of how the seven sacraments are celebrated. In other words, rites are ways in which sacred liturgy is said and done. According to Canon 28 of the Code of Canon Law for the Eastern and Oriental Churches, a rite is "the liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary patrimony, culture and circumstances of history of a distinct people."

The Catholic Church has four major liturgical rites: Western (also called Latin) and three Eastern branches: Antiochian, Alexandrian, and Byzantine. Within the four rites, numerous ritual churches are associated within Catholic Christianity. A ritual church is a group of Christian faithful united by a hierarchy and, especially among the Eastern (sometimes called Oriental) Catholics, with its own patriarch or metropolitan.

Western Rite

Some small liturgical traditions exist in the Western, or Latin, Church, from religious orders like the Dominicans to new converts from the Protestant Anglican Church. But the most predominant form by far is the Roman Rite, which originated in Rome, the diocese of the pope. The Roman Rite takes two forms: Ordinary and Extraordinary.

Celebrating Mass regularly in the Ordinary form

Mass in the Ordinary form is celebrated according to the *Missale Romanum* of 1970, promulgated by Pope Paul VI, currently in its third edition (2002). The vernacular editions of this Missal, as well as the rites of the other sacraments, are translated from the Latin typical editions revised after the Second Vatican Council. As its name suggests, the Ordinary form is the typical and most common form of the Mass celebrated in the Western Catholic Church.

Preserving the traditional Mass as the Extraordinary form

The Extraordinary form of the Mass is celebrated according to the *Missale Romanum* of 1962, promulgated by Blessed Pope John XXIII. It is sometimes inaccurately referred to as the Tridentine Mass (after the Council of Trent from the 16th century) or the

TLM (Traditional Latin Mass), but technically it is different. Pope Benedict XVI clarified that the Extraordinary form was never abolished and has remained valid and allowable at all times since the Second Vatican Council established the Ordinary Mass. Any priest is allowed to celebrate the Extraordinary form of the Mass without special permission from his bishop.

The Extraordinary form is exhibited in different ways:

- ✓ **Anglican Use:** Since the 1980s, the Holy See (the pope) has granted some former Anglican and Episcopal clergy converting with their parishes the right to celebrate the sacramental rites according to the Book of Common Prayer.
- ✓ **Mozarabic:** The rite of the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) dates from the sixth century. Beginning in the 11th century it was generally replaced by the Roman Rite, although it has remained the Rite of the Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Toledo, Spain, and six parishes that sought permission to adhere to it. Its celebration today is generally semiprivate.
- ✓ **Ambrosian:** The Rite of the Archdiocese of Milan, Italy, consolidated by St. Ambrose, continues to be celebrated in Milan, though not by all parishes.
- ✓ **Bragan:** The Rite of the Archdiocese of Braga, the Primatial See of Portugal, dates from the 12th century or earlier. It is occasionally used in the United States and Brazil but is very rare.
- ✓ **Carmelite:** The Rite of the Order of Carmel was founded by St. Berthold around 1154.
- ✓ **Carthusian:** The Rite of the Carthusian Order was founded by St. Bruno in 1084.
- ✓ **Dominican:** The Rite of the Order of Friars Preacher (OP) was founded by St. Dominic in 1215.

Eastern Rite

The Eastern Rite is made up of the Churches that developed in Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch and all the Rites that stem from those patriarchates. The East-West Schism of 1040 separated many of the Eastern Churches, subsequently called *Orthodox*, from the Western Church and Rome. The Eastern Catholic Church of today is comprised of the formerly Orthodox Churches that later reunited with Rome and the other Churches in the Eastern part of the world that didn't separate in the schism.

The largest number of Eastern Catholics practice the Byzantine Rite. This rite developed in Constantinople, which was established by Emperor Constantine as the second capital city of the Roman Empire in the fourth century AD. (The name *Byzantine* comes from the

city's original name, which was also given to the whole region.) But many other Eastern Catholics use rites that stem from the Churches of Antioch and Alexandria. In this section we explore some of the smaller rites within the Eastern Church as well as the Byzantine.

Antiochian family of liturgical rites

The Church of Antioch in Syria was founded by St. Peter, and its liturgy is attributed to St. James and the Church of Jerusalem. This branch of liturgical churches is primarily divided by Eastern or Western Syriac language (dialect of Aramaic) usage, and then each of those branches is further subdivided by language and tradition.

Following are the rites categorized as West Syriac:

- ✓ **Maronite:** Under the jurisdiction of the Maronite Patriarch of Antioch, this Church never separated from Rome. Three million Maronites in Lebanon (the place of origin), Cyprus, Egypt, Syria, Israel, Canada, the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and Australia are members of the Maronite Church. The liturgical language is Aramaic.
- ✓ **Syriac:** Under the jurisdiction of the Syriac Patriarch of Antioch, the Syriac Orthodox Church reunited with Rome in 1781 from the Monophysite heresy. About 110,000 Syriac Catholics live in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Canada, and the United States. They use the Liturgy of St. James.
- ✓ **Malankarese:** Under the jurisdiction of the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, this Church was started in the south of India by St. Thomas, using the West Syriac liturgy. The Church reunited with Rome in 1930. Liturgical languages are West Syriac and Malayalam. India and North America are home to 350,000 Malankarese Catholics.

The following rites fall under the umbrella of East Syriac:

- ✓ **Chaldean:** Under the jurisdiction of the Katholikos Patriarch of Babylon in Baghdad, Babylonian (Chaldean) Catholics returned to Rome in 1692 from the Nestorian heresy. Liturgical languages are Syriac and Arabic. There are 310,000 Chaldean Catholics in Iraq, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, and the United States.
- ✓ **Syro-Malabarese:** Under the jurisdiction of the Major Archbishop of Kerala for the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, this church was started in southern India using the East Syriac liturgy. It never severed ties to Rome and has 3.5 million members worldwide, mostly in India.

Alexandrian family of liturgical rites

The Church of Alexandria in Egypt was one of the original centers of Christianity; like Rome and Antioch, it had a large Jewish population

that was very open and amenable to early Christian evangelization. Its liturgy is attributed to St. Mark the Evangelist and shows the later influence of the Byzantine Liturgy in addition to its unique elements.

- ✓ **Coptic:** This Church was started by Egyptian Catholics who were separated from the pope but returned to communion with Rome in 1741. The Patriarch of Alexandria leads the 200,000 faithful of this rite, who are spread throughout Egypt and the Near East. The liturgical languages are Coptic (Egyptian) and Arabic.
- ✓ **Ethiopian/Abyssinian:** Comprised of Ethiopian Coptic Christians who returned to Rome in 1846. The liturgical language is Ge'ez. The 200,000 faithful are found in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and Jerusalem.

Armenian liturgical rite

The Armenian Apostolic Church formally broke from Rome in the fifth century, and despite the early efforts of some Armenian bishops to reestablish unity with Rome, unity wasn't established until the Crusades in the 15th century. That reunion was short-lived, though, and only in 1742 was full communion achieved when Pope Benedict XIV formally established the Armenian Catholic Church.

Considered either its own rite or an older version of the Byzantine (see the following section), the exact form of the Armenian Rite is not used by any other Byzantine Rite. It is composed of Catholics from the first people to convert as a nation, the Armenians (north-east of Turkey), and who returned to Rome at the time of the Crusades. Under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Cilicia of the Armenians in Lebanon, the 350,000 Armenian Catholics are found in Armenia, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt, Greece, Ukraine, France, Romania, the U.S., and Argentina. The liturgical language is classical Armenian. Most Armenians are Orthodox, not in union with Rome.

Byzantine family of liturgical rites



Although all Byzantine Catholics are Eastern Catholic, not all Eastern Catholics are Byzantine. Many Roman or Latin Rite Catholics erroneously identify all Eastern Catholic Churches as “Byzantine,” when in reality the term is specifically used to identify mainly those formerly Eastern Orthodox communities that independently reestablished union with Rome in the 17th and 18th centuries. Orthodox (non-Catholic) Churches use some of the doctrine of the Catholic Church:

- ✓ **Oriental Orthodox Churches** refer to those traditions that only accept the first three Ecumenical Councils (Nicea in 325, I Constantinople in 381, and Ephesus in 431).

✓ *Eastern Orthodox Churches* refer to those traditions that embrace those three councils and the four that followed (Chalcedon 451, II Constantinople 553, III Constantinople 681, II Nicea 787), thus making the first seven councils their source of doctrinal authority.

Both the Oriental Orthodox and the Eastern Orthodox Churches are separated from Rome and exist as independent religions. However, Eastern Catholic Churches, including the Byzantine Rite, are in full communion with the Bishop of Rome (also known as the pope) while retaining their own autonomy in terms of local jurisdiction.

Changes to the Mass Over the Years

The Eastern Liturgical Rites have not had significant changes over the past few centuries. The Roman Rite, however, has gone through a few modifications of significance.

No matter what changes take place, the substance of the Mass has remained the same from the time of the Last Supper. What Jesus used (wheat bread and grape wine) and what he said over them (“this is my body . . . this is my blood”) have been repeated in the Mass by an ordained minister for two millennia.

The early days

The first changes took place when the language of the Sacred Liturgy went from Aramaic (the dialect of Hebrew spoken by Christ and his Apostles) to Greek (the proper and eloquent tongue of the educated) and finally to Latin (the common and official language of the Roman Empire). After Christianity spread throughout the Empire, those parts that spoke Greek (the Eastern Empire) used Greek for the Sacred Liturgy, and those parts that spoke Latin (the Western Empire) used Latin for public worship.



At that time, the Romance languages, like French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian, and the Germanic tongues, like German and English, were just starting to be formulated with rules of grammar and syntax. Latin and Greek, however, were ancient languages that had vast vocabularies and had been around long enough to have set rules and defined meanings. In that time, if you were literate, you could read and write in Latin and/or Greek. The other European languages weren't developed enough to use at any scholarly or liturgical level.

After 300 years of illegality and persecution by the Roman Empire, Christianity was legalized in AD 313 by the Edict of Milan, issued by Emperor Constantine. Five centuries later, when Charles the Great was crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the pope on Christmas Day in AD 800, he sought to solidify Christendom in the West under one faith and one sword. The Roman Rite became the predominant liturgical way of worshipping God just as the Byzantine did for much of the Eastern Empire.

The Middle Ages and Renaissance

When Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation appeared in the 16th century, the vernacular was more sophisticated and formalized. Some people were concerned, however, that because of all the new languages then spoken, mistranslations of Sacred Scripture and liturgical texts used for Divine Worship could easily happen. For the sake of uniformity and accuracy, liturgical and biblical language remained the fixed and structured Latin in the West and Greek in the East.



The use of Latin, therefore, was not intended to make the Bible's contents difficult for people to understand, but rather to keep the structure and form in a uniform language. Latin ensured accuracy, formality, and, most of all, universality in a religion that used the very word (*catholic* means *universal*) as one of its names.

When the Protestant Church openly embraced vernacular language, the Catholic response was to even more vigilantly maintain the use of Latin in the Western Church. This difference helped Catholicism maintain a unique identity distinct from Protestant Christianity and from Eastern Orthodoxy (which separated from Rome in 1054).

Adapting in the 20th century

The modern world of the 1960s saw another change in the celebration of the Mass as a result of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), also called Vatican II. After two world wars, depression, and globalization, the Catholic bishops of the world were called by Pope John XXIII to see how the Church could adapt its methods while retaining its content.

Pope Pius XII had done tremendous work during the post–World War II era to develop more external participation by the faithful at the Mass. Vatican II suggested some use of the vernacular and offered the option of the priest facing the people while he celebrated Mass. Until then, the priest and the people both faced the same direction — either geographical east or liturgical east (facing

the tabernacle). The orientation toward the east was ancient, historical, biblical, theological, and liturgical. Christ rose at the break of day. The sun rises in the east every morning. And eastward orientation was seen as an orientation toward the Lord. But during the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, a push was made by some liturgists to have the celebrant face the people. The Missal never mandated the change in position, but because of the spreading use of free-standing altars that accommodate facing the people, the practice merely disappeared on its own.

Three generations of Catholics have known only the *Novus Ordo* of Pope Paul VI (1970), which is now called the Ordinary form of the Roman Rite. The old traditional Latin Mass (TLM, also sometimes called Tridentine Mass and now classified as the Extraordinary form) was given more opportunity for use by Pope John Paul II in 1988. Finally, Pope Benedict XVI issued his own *motu proprio*, *Summorum Pontificum*, granting universal authorization for any priest of the Latin Rite to celebrate the Extraordinary form and urging him to do so whenever requested by his parishioners. Previously, priests had to secure permission from their own bishops.

Getting the Most Out of Mass



Catholics are obligated by church law to attend Mass each and every Sunday (or Saturday evening) and holy day of obligation. And not only are they required to be physically present, but they are also expected to participate fully, actively, and consciously. When someone says “I don’t get anything out of the Mass,” the priest or deacon responds that “it is not what you or I *get out of* Mass that counts, rather, it is what we ourselves *give to* the Mass.” Being there in the church is one component, and the other is offering up yourself to God. Spending time each weekend in the House of God is a sign of love for God.

The job of the priest and his crew

When a priest celebrates Mass without a congregation, he is united with all the believers around the world (called the Pilgrim Church or the Church Militant) as well as with all the saints in heaven (called the Church Triumphant) and all the faithful departed, deceased souls in purgatory (called the Church Suffering). The priest-celebrant prays for and with the Universal as well as local Church.

Acolytes and/or lectors are men installed in these offices by the local bishop who are in the process of formation to later be ordained deacons or priests. The lector reads the Scripture readings of the Mass (except the Gospel), and the acolyte assists the

deacon during Mass and can help distribute Holy Communion (only in the Ordinary form of the Roman Rite, however).

Laymen and laywomen — that is, the non-ordained and non-religious (meaning not monks or nuns) common folk — can also help in the Ordinary form as readers and as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion in those dioceses where the local bishop authorizes them to do so. Most parishioners who attend Mass, however, do not have any liturgical office. Nevertheless, their participation is still real and valid.

The role of the congregation

The clergy in the sanctuary have specific things to do and say, but so does the congregation in the pews. The Ordinary form requires the whole congregation to sit, stand, and kneel at specified times. They are required to make the proper responses to the priest or deacon, sing hymns, and say aloud prayers and creeds.

Participation doesn't mean everybody does or says the same thing. In parts of the Mass, the congregation and the celebrant jointly pray together (for the Gloria, Creed, Sanctus, Our Father, and Agnus Dei), and other parts are reserved for one or the other. For example, the priest says, "the Lord be with you," and the people respond, "and with your spirit."

Body gestures and positions are the same for the entire congregation. Everyone kneels during the Consecration while the priest stands at the altar and says the Eucharistic Prayer (which is reserved for the priest alone). The harmony of combining the separate actions and words of the people and the celebrant is like the different sections of a symphony orchestra coming together to make a song.

The highest form of external participation by the faithful is the physical reception of Holy Communion at Mass. Holy Communion is available only to people in full communion (meaning that they accept all Catholic doctrine-teachings, discipline-laws and worship-sacraments and in fact are members of the Catholic Church). They must also be properly disposed, which means they are validly married or single, have fasted for one hour, and are in the state of grace (free from mortal sin).

Internally, people participate by listening and meditating on what is happening. Making a deliberate and conscious intention to give glory and praise to God is internal participation at the Sacred Liturgy. Spiritually uniting with the Sacrifice on the Altar is internal participation. Asking Jesus to come into your heart and soul, especially when you are unable to receive physical Holy Communion, is called making a Spiritual Communion.