

What Is The Roman Catholic Mass

Bible Answers About Denominations

At the very center of the Roman Catholic Church lies the Mass. The creed of Pope Pius IV, which is one of the official creeds of the Roman Church, says: "I profess that in the Mass is offered to God a true, proper, and propitiatory sacrifice [that is, a sacrifice which satisfies the justice of God and so offsets the penalty for sin] for the living and the dead; and that in the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist there is truly, really, and substantially, the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ; and that there is a conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body, and of the whole substance of the wine into the blood, which the Catholic Church calls Transubstantiation."

Turning to the New Testament, we find first century Christians engaging in five acts of worship. (There are a number of articles dealing with this subject in our tract rack). These acts of worship consisted of singing, preaching, praying, contributing of their means and partaking of the Lord's Supper. We know that this worship continued into the second century because Justin Martyr, a second century writer gives us a full account of a second century worship service (Apology I, 67).

Recognition that this worship of the New Testament has been changed is seen even in the New Catholic Encyclopedia. "The Mass of today differs greatly from the very simple ceremony followed by Christ and His apostles" (p. 419). Since it is admitted that the Mass does differ so dramatically from the practice of the Church of the first century then it must be recognized as a man-made doctrine and is another apostasy in doctrine and practice.

Many Protestants do not understand the real significance of the Roman Catholic Mass. Some think of it as merely a church ritual and dismiss it as just another form of the Lord's Supper. But that is far from being the case. For Roman Catholics it is a sacrifice, performed by a priest. In fact, the sacrifice of the mass is the central point in their worship, while even the preaching of the gospel is assigned a subordinate role and is not even held to be an essential of the priestly office. The Council of Trent declared: "The sacrifice [in the Mass] is identical with the sacrifice of the Cross, inasmuch as Jesus Christ is a priest and victim of both. The only difference lies in the manner of the offering, which is bloody upon the cross and bloodless on our altars."

Lorraine Boettner in his book, Roman Catholicism describes the Mass (pp. 170-171): "The elaborate ritual of the mass is really an extended pageant, designed to re-enact the experiences of Christ from the supper in the upper room, through the agony in the garden, the betrayal, trial, crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. It is a drama crowding the detailed events of many days into the space of one hour or less. For its proper performance the priest in seminary goes through long periods of training and needs a marvelous memory. Witness the following: he makes the sign of the cross sixteen times; turns toward the congregation six times; lifts his eyes to heaven eleven times;

kisses the altar eight times; folds his hands four times; strikes his breast ten times, bows his head twenty-one times; genuflects (bends the knee) eight times; bows his shoulders seven; blesses the altar with the sign of the cross thirty times; lays his hands flat on the altar twenty-nine times; prays secretly eleven times; prays aloud thirteen times; takes the bread and wine and turns it into the body and blood of Christ; covers and uncovers the chalice ten times; goes to and fro twenty times; and in addition performs numerous other acts." His bowings and genuflections are imitations of Christ in His agony and suffering. The various articles of clothing worn by the priest at different stages of the drama represent those worn by Christ; the seamless robe, the purple coat, the veil with His face was covered in the house of Caiaphas, a girdle representing the cords with which He was bound in the garden, the cords which bound Him to the cross, etc. If the priest forgets even one element of the drama he commits a great sin and technically may invalidate the mass. (The liturgy of the mass was considerably simplified in 1965, and can now be said in the colloquial language."

The celebration of the mass is the chief duty of the Roman priesthood. Yet, the New Testament gives no instruction as to how to offer mass, and in fact there is not so much as one line on the subject in the Scriptures. It staggers the imagination to realize that a merely human pantomime so absurd and so contradictory to the Scriptures could be accepted and slavishly attended day after day and week after week by thinking men and women.

As Greg Litmer in his book *Catholicism Examined* Vol. 1-3 pp. 185-186 points out the following: "Is the Mass a continuation of the sacrifice of Calvary? Is it the repeated oblation of the victim once sacrificed? Is it truly Christ offering Himself, by the ministry of the priest, hundreds of times a day across the globe? Let's allow the Word of God to answer those questions for us.

In Hebrews 7:26, 27 we find, 'For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the {sins} of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.' According to Catholic doctrine Christ offers Himself on a daily basis, hundreds of times everyday wherever a Mass is being offered, through the ministry of the priest. God's Word says of Jesus that He "does not need daily" to offer up sacrifice. This He did once.

Whatever the Roman Catholic Mass is, it is not the continuation of Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary, and it is not a propitiatory sacrifice atoning for sins. God's Word tells us that happened only once, that Christ does not offer Himself often (as Catholic doctrine teaches), and that when Jesus shed His blood on Calvary it was to put away sin. Jesus was "once offered to bear the sins of man." (Heb. 9:22-28).

If there could still be any question, notice Hebrews 10:10-14. "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified."

Roman Catholic teaching tells us that Christ instituted the Mass at the Last Supper, wishing to endow His church with a "visible sacrifice." This would necessitate Jesus having offered Himself at the Last Supper, before the crucifixion. If the Mass is an actual sacrifice instituted at the Last Supper, then the Last Supper had to be an actual sacrifice as well. How could it possibly have been the identical

sacrifice as Calvary when that sacrifice had not taken place yet? How could it have been the continuation of that sacrifice when as yet, that sacrifice had not been offered? The answer to both questions is that it couldn't. My friends, God's Word makes it clear, the Roman Catholic Mass, as a true sacrifice, as a continuation of the sacrifice of Calvary, is a figment of man's imagination.

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