

Contemporary Catholicism

Lesson Four—Sacrifice or Sacrament?

The Mass

Luther's criticism of the Mass is at the heart of his criticism of the Catholic Church. Therefore, it is imperative that we correctly understand what the position of the Catholic Church is today.

1327 In brief, the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith: "Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking."

1. How important is the Mass (or the Eucharist) in the theology of the Catholic Church?

1357 We carry out this command of the Lord by celebrating the memorial of his sacrifice. In so doing, we offer to the Father what he has himself given us: the gifts of his creation, bread and wine which, by the power of the Holy Spirit and by the words of Christ, have become the body and blood of Christ. Christ is thus really and mysteriously made present.

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We must therefore consider the Eucharist as: - thanksgiving and praise to the Father;
- the sacrificial memorial of Christ and his Body;
- the presence of Christ by the power of his word and of his Spirit.

2. What does the catechism call the Lord's Supper?
3. Who is offering what in these paragraphs? To whom are they offering?
4. Why does that matter?

1362 The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the making present and the sacramental offering of his unique sacrifice, in the liturgy of the Church which is his Body. In all the Eucharistic Prayers we find after the words of institution a prayer called the anamnesis or memorial.

1364 In the New Testament, the memorial takes on new meaning. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ's Passover, and it is made present the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present. "As often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which 'Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed' is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out."

1366 The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross, because it is its memorial and because it applies its fruit:

[Christ], our Lord and God, was once and for all to offer himself to God the Father by his death on the altar of the cross, to accomplish there an everlasting redemption. But because his priesthood was not to end with his death, at the Last Supper "on the night when he was betrayed," [he wanted] to leave to his beloved spouse the Church a visible sacrifice (as the nature of man demands) by which the bloody sacrifice which he was to accomplish once for all on the cross would be re-presented, its memory perpetuated until the end of the world, and its salutary power be applied to the forgiveness of the sins we daily commit.

5. According to these paragraphs, in what sense does the Catholic Church understand that the Mass is a sacrifice?

6. Who is offering the sacrifice?

7. What does this sacrifice accomplish?

1367 The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice: "The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different." "In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner."

1368 The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church. the Church which is the Body of Christ participates in the offering of her Head. With him, she herself is offered whole and entire. She unites herself to his intercession with the Father for all men. In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. the lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value. Christ's sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering.

8. According to these paragraphs, who and what is offered in the sacrifice of the Mass?

9. Why is it false to say that the Lord's Supper continues the sacrifice of Christ?

1370 To the offering of Christ are united not only the members still here on earth, but also those already in the glory of heaven. In communion with and commemorating the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, the Church offers the Eucharistic sacrifice. In the Eucharist the Church is as it were at the foot of the cross with Mary, united with the offering and intercession of Christ.

10. What is the significance of being "at the foot of the cross with Mary"?

1371 The Eucharistic sacrifice is also offered for the faithful departed who "have died in Christ but are not yet wholly purified," so that they may be able to enter into the light and peace of Christ:

Put this body anywhere! Don't trouble yourselves about it! I simply ask you to remember me at the Lord's altar wherever you are.

Then, we pray [in the anaphora] for the holy fathers and bishops who have fallen asleep, and in general for all who have fallen asleep before us, in the belief that it is a great benefit to the souls on whose behalf the supplication is offered, while the holy and tremendous Victim is present.... By offering to God our supplications for those who have fallen asleep, if they have sinned, we . . . offer Christ sacrificed for the sins of all, and so render favorable, for them and for us, the God who loves man.

11. What is this paragraph talking about?

12. What would it mean if "the faithful departed" had "died in Christ" but were "not yet wholly purified"?

13. How does this clarify all the preceding language about the sacrifice?

1394 As bodily nourishment restores lost strength, so the Eucharist strengthens our charity, which tends to be weakened in daily life; and this living charity wipes away venial sins. By giving himself to us Christ revives our love and enables us to break our disordered attachments to creatures and root ourselves in him:

Since Christ died for us out of love, when we celebrate the memorial of his death at the moment of sacrifice we ask that love may be granted to us by the coming of the Holy Spirit. We humbly pray that in the strength of this love by which Christ willed to die for us, we, by receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, may be able to consider the world as crucified for us, and to be ourselves as crucified to the world.... Having received the gift of love, let us die to sin and live for God.

1395 By the same charity that it enkindles in us, the Eucharist preserves us from future mortal sins. the more we share the life of Christ and progress in his friendship, the more difficult it is to break away from him by mortal sin. the Eucharist is not ordered to the forgiveness of mortal sins - that is proper to the sacrament of Reconciliation. the Eucharist is properly the sacrament of those who are in full communion with the Church.

14. What is “charity”? According to the catechism, what does it do for us?

15. So, then, what is the benefit of Communion, according to the catechism? What benefit do we not receive from the Lord’s Supper?

16. How does this underline our claim that the Catholic teaching of the Mass promotes work-righteousness?

1414 *As sacrifice, the Eucharist is also offered in reparation for the sins of the living and the dead and to obtain spiritual or temporal benefits from God.*

17. This is a summary statement of the Catholic teaching on the Mass. What does it mean?

18. Do the criticisms Luther made in the Smalcald Articles still apply?