

The Catholic Mass... Revealed!

Study Guide

Session Four (Corresponds to Booklet Chapters 16-21)

As participants gather, play the "Sanctus" track from the soundtrack CD.

1. *Opening Prayer:*

Leader:

Heavenly Father, we come before you in thanksgiving for the gift of your Son, and particularly for his sacrifice which won the victory over sin and merited for us eternal salvation. Open our minds and hearts, Lord, so that we may learn the treasures of the Mass, in order to live each day as a preparation for our next Mass, as a thanksgiving for our last, and longing to serve You in others until we encounter You definitively and join the Liturgy of Heaven. We ask this through Christ Our Lord.

2. *Gospel Reflection:* (10-15 minutes for the Gospel to be read and each participant to share a personal insight)

Reader: Our text this evening is John Chapter 13, verses 1 to 15.

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end.

The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over. So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God, he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist.

Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Master, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later."

Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me."

Simon Peter said to him, "Master, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well."

Jesus said to him, "Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed, for he is clean all over; so you are clean, but not all."

For he knew who would betray him; for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean."

So when he had washed their feet (and) put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

Some points for reflection/discussion: Leader acts as a guide

- John's Gospel was written after the others. It does not include the institution of the Eucharist in its narration of the Last Supper, for John knew that his readers would take it for granted. He instead points out other things, Christ's words and actions during that Last Supper, to teach us what our fundamental attitudes should be at the Eucharistic table.
- Christ removes his garments and assumes the dress and task of a slave. He has taken off the garment of his divine glory in order to wash our feet from the soil of sin. This is what He is doing at every Mass as well. We have been through the Penitential Rite, and now prepare to offer ourselves to the Father with Jesus.
- Christ specifically makes the apostles realize that He has given them example. This attitude of selfless service is the proper attitude of one who wishes to participate in the table of Christ's offering.

3. **Audiovisual Presentation** Play the DVD Chapters 12,14,15 and 16

A. *The Liturgy of the Eucharist – 10 Minutes*

- As members of Christ's family, we can participate in his sacrifice. Do I realize that those not fully initiated into the Faith used to be dismissed at this part of the Mass? Do I take for granted that I am allowed to witness such a miracle as the Liturgy of the Eucharist?
- We are privileged to see the very words and actions of Christ at the Last Supper represented before us. This structure of the Liturgy of the Eucharist is beautifully explained in the General Instruction:

At the Last Supper Christ instituted the Paschal Sacrifice and banquet by which the Sacrifice of the Cross is continuously made present in the Church whenever the priest, representing Christ the Lord, carries out what the Lord himself did and handed over to his disciples to be done in his memory.

For Christ took the bread and the chalice and gave thanks; he broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take, eat, and drink: this is my Body; this is the cup of my Blood. Do this in memory of me." Accordingly, the Church has arranged the entire celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist in parts corresponding to precisely these words and actions of Christ:

1. At the Preparation of the Gifts, the bread and the wine with water are brought to the altar, the same elements that Christ took into his hands.
2. In the Eucharistic Prayer, thanks is given to God for the whole work of salvation, and the offerings become the Body and Blood of Christ.
3. Through the fraction and through Communion, the faithful, though they are many, receive from the one bread the Lord's Body and from the one chalice the Lord's Blood in the same way the Apostles received them from Christ's own hands." (GIRM, n. 69)

B. The Preparation of the Gifts – 10 Minutes

- What is meant by the expression "admirable exchange" used by the Fathers of the Church? Have I ever had this experience, of giving something to God and receiving something wonderful and disproportionate in return?
- Am I aware that the gifts are *our* gifts, that I am somehow present in the offertory?
- Do I recall that even my labors throughout the week are present at Mass, since the tithe offering I contribute is placed before God in the Offertory? We all together contribute so that God's work can continue in our parish. The most important "work" we do together is the worship of God "in spirit and in truth", honoring Him the way He has revealed He wished to be honored. All other charitable work we do as a parish stems from the Eucharist and brings us back to be nourished with the bread of life.
- The prayers at this point also teach us a special lesson: God wants our collaboration in his work. He gives us natural gifts ("which earth has given" / "fruit of the vine") but they require "work of human hands" in order to become offerings for God, who will then transform them into "our spiritual food / drink." Wheat stalks and grapes will not do. The offerings must be the result of nature and man's handiwork.
- Even though man has to work and toil as a result of the Fall, earning his bread from the sweat of his brow, God now takes that effort and transforms it! Anytime we are tired with work and toil, we can remember the Mass and unite it to Christ's offering. Putting our contribution in the basket is a moment of thanksgiving to God who allows us, at whatever hour, to work in his vineyard!

C. The Prayer over the Gifts – 10 Minutes

- This short prayer is often overlooked at Mass. Do I realize that it is a prayer, like the Collect and the Prayer after Communion, that varies each Sunday?

- We have already reflected that we profit more from our time with God when we have the right dispositions. In this prayer, we pray to be worthy of the offering we are about to make. Christ offers Himself to the Father and bids us participate. We must pray to lead a life worthy of having this awesome opportunity!
- Do I say grace before meals at home? Do I need to renew that family tradition? We pray that our food benefit us and be for our good, even as we thank God for it. This is what we do in the Prayer over the Gifts.

D. The Eucharistic Prayer – Preface – 10 Minutes

- We are approaching the central act of the Mass as a sacrifice. The General Instruction breaks up the Eucharistic Prayer into nine sections. Each text of the prayer (the four most common ones and others which may be used) includes these sections, though in varying length.
- The Preface includes new invocations by the priest. Do I respond to them with renewed faith? Do I internally “lift up my heart”?
- Most of the prefaces contain a reference to the liturgy of heaven.¹ Am I aware that at Mass, I am united to the angels in heaven who sing praise to God and gaze upon the true Lamb of God, sacrificed for me?

E. The Eucharistic Prayer – Acclamation – 10 Minutes

- Isaiah has a vision of God’s throne, the same reality we contemplate with faith as we approach God the father to make our offering. The hymn we sing echoes the angels’ hymn. (What other hymn at Mass echoes an angelic hymn? the *Gloria*) Do I believe in angels and their action in my life?
- The Catechism has this to say about angels in the life of the Church:

334 In the meantime, the whole life of the Church benefits from the mysterious and powerful help of angels.

335 In her liturgy, the Church joins with the angels to adore the thrice-holy God. She invokes their assistance (in the funeral liturgy's *In Paradisum deducant te angeli*. . .["May the angels lead you into Paradise. . ."]). Moreover, in the "Cherubic Hymn" of the Byzantine Liturgy, she celebrates the memory of certain angels more particularly (St. Michael, St. Gabriel, St. Raphael, and the guardian angels).

¹ For an explanation of the Mass as the Liturgy of Heaven, following the Book of Revelation, see Scott Hahn’s *The Lamb’s Supper*.

336 From its beginning until death, human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession. "Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life." Already here on earth the Christian life shares by faith in the blessed company of angels and men united in God.

- We also praise God for his power and might. He is "Lord of the armies" (literally what "Lord of hosts" means.) Do I feel strengthened in the face of life's adversities knowing that my All-powerful Father is looking out for me?

F. The Eucharistic Prayer – Invocation – 10 Minutes

- Do I realize how awesome is the power given to a priest who can "call down" God's power?
- For Christ to come into the world, God chose the power of the Holy Spirit in collaboration with the will, the "yes" of a teenage girl, who became at the moment of her "yes" the Mother of God. Do I have faith that I too am called to bring Christ into my own heart and through my life to others, albeit with a different mission from Mary's, and a different calling, perhaps, than a priest? And yet, both of the same elements are required: God's power, and an honest and open-ended "yes" to God's love. At this point of the Mass, I must renew this decision, this offering of myself, so that God, descending upon the altar in the consecration, can transform me as well.
- Do I believe in God's power to transform me? What can I do to say "yes" with my whole life?

4. Closing Prayer

Leader:

Lord, we have come here to reflect together on the great memorial You left us, the most powerful means You have given us to be fed and strengthened in the struggle for your Kingdom on earth. May this time together unite us as your family, and unite us to You, in Your Eucharist, the source and summit of our Christian life. In Your name we pray, Amen.