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Ginder, Richard
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For the

Visitor at Mass

By
Richard Ginder

A QUEEN'S WORK
PAMPHLET

FOR THE VISITOR AT MASS

by

Richard Ginder



THE QUEEN'S WORK
3115 South Grand Boulevard
St. Louis 18, Missouri



SUMMARY

"Catholics have never told me about the Mass" is a common complaint of non-Catholics. Should they happen to attend Mass, seldom if ever is it explained to them. Here Father Ginder explains briefly and simply what the Mass is, what the actions of the priest signify, and why Catholics regard the Mass as the highest and the greatest act of worship.

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THE QUEEN'S WORK

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For the Visitor at Mass

by

RICHARD GINDER

YOU are about to witness what is to a Catholic the most sublime act on earth. The Catholics around you believe that Jesus Christ will shortly be present on the altar and will offer Himself to the everlasting Father as He did nineteen centuries ago. In fact the Mass, which you are about to witness, is to a Catholic the bloodless repetition of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary.

Sacrifice has been the essence of all religions from the very beginning. It permeates the Old Testament. So the early Christians, who when they were Jews offered animals in sacrifice, found it easy to accept the Sacrifice of the Mass. It was only in the sixteenth century that groups of Christians began to reject the idea of sacrifice and to substitute a communion table for the altar.

The sacrificing priest exercises what we Catholics call the power of orders. The Church took Christ's words at the Last Supper literally—"Do this for a commemoration of me"—and since then has by the imposition of a bishop's hands delegated priests to offer the sacrifice of Christ in the name of the people. The power of orders comes, not from the people, but from Christ Himself through the hands of the ordaining bishop.

You may have noticed when you were coming into the church that the people on entering dipped their fingers into an urn of water and traced the sign of the cross on themselves. The water has been blessed and is known as holy water; the holy-water urn at the church door is the last relic of the washing of the feet which early Christians performed before they entered a church.

Visible in the center of the altar is a curtained door. Beyond this door is a little compartment — called a tabernacle — in which is kept consecrated altar breads (unleavened bread) — called Hosts or the Blessed Sacrament—which Catholics believe is the body and blood of Jesus Christ. These are for the devotion of the faithful and for the Holy Communion of those at Mass and those who are sick and those who are dying. A light is kept burning always before the tabernacle, which contains the real presence of Jesus Christ, and people entering and leaving the Church always touch one knee to the ground—genuflect—toward the altar. The fact of the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Catholic Church explains why those of the faith kneel for a moment at their place and look so intently at the altar and why they never speak in church—even when no services are being conducted—except in a whisper.

In front of the tabernacle and on either side of the altar are printed cards framed and covered with glass. On these altar cards are some of the prayers which the

priest says while he is performing more or less complicated ceremonial actions during the Mass. Ordinarily the priest stands at the center of the altar and reads most of the prayers from a large Mass book—called the missal—but now and then his hands are occupied, for instance in blessing or in holding the chalice. At such times he cannot easily turn his head or manipulate the pages of the missal, so he reads from the card in the center. The cards at the sides supply the prayers for those times when the missal is not within convenient reach.

On either side of the tabernacle are candles—two or six. Two are lighted for a low Mass, which is read, and six for a high Mass, which is sung. Originally candles on the altar served the very practical purpose of providing light—for example in the catacombs. Today the candles are largely ceremonial.

In the sacristy—a room adjacent to the enclosure which contains the altar — the priest puts on the special ceremonial robes—vestments—that are worn during Mass. These robes are essentially the ceremonial adaptation of the everyday dress of the ancient Romans. In the early Christian churches, which were unheated, the priest wore a skullcap in order to keep warm. Later three flaps were added to the skullcap to facilitate its removal (for example the priest takes off his hat at the mention of the name of Jesus). The priest will be wearing such a three-cornered hat (biretta)

when, vested, he will enter the sanctuary—the enclosure which contains the altar—from the sacristy.

The vestments of the priest at Mass will be in a color expressive of the event commemorated by the Mass:

Gold—on occasions of solemn joy.

White—on occasions of joy; feast days (special days of commemoration) of Our Lord, the Virgin Mary, and the saints.

Rose—on one Sunday in Advent (the more than three weeks preceding Christmas) and one Sunday in Lent (the forty days preceding Easter).

Red—at Masses of the Holy Spirit or feast days of the martyrs.

Green—in seasons expressive of hope: on the Sundays after the Epiphany (the coming of the Magi) and after Pentecost (the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles).

Violet—in seasons of penance: Holy Innocents' day, at Masses for peace, on vigils (days preceding special feasts), and throughout Advent and Lent.

Black—on Good Friday and at Masses offered for the souls of the dead.

Mass will be read or sung in Latin, the language of the Roman Empire in the early days of the Church. The great advantage of the use of the Latin is that it is a dead language, and therefore its words are not subject to changes in meanings. Many of the people around you have English translations of the missal. Others will recite the rosary. Still others will

simply meditate on the significance of the action taking place on the altar before them. It is not necessary for a person at Mass to understand Latin. God understands it, and the first purpose of sacrifice is honor to God.

MASS BEGINS

The priest enters the sanctuary, carrying the sacrificial cup (explained later). He is preceded by one or more altar boys, each of whom wears a cassock and a surplice. The cassock is a long loose robe which was a common over-all garb in Europe, as may be seen in Renaissance paintings. The surplice is a short white linen garment devised by the monks to cover the furs which they had to wear for warmth during the early-morning services in their chapels. These altar boys, who respond to the prayers of the priest, represent the people.

The people stand—through respect and politeness—when the priest enters. The priest gives his biretta to an altar boy, genuflects toward the altar, mounts the steps leading to the altar, and puts the chalice (the sacrificial cup) with its pall (cover) upon the altar. The chalice and pall are covered with a veil (napkin) of the same color as the vestments.

The priest goes to the right and puts bookmarks in those places in the missal to which he will refer during the Mass.

He descends to the foot of the altar. The people kneel. Here he recites Psalm 42—“Judge me, O God . . .”—(Psalm 43 in most of the non-Catholic versions of the

Bible). Then he bows low and according to a formula called the confiteor makes a general confession of his sins. He stands erect again, and then the altar boys make the same confession on behalf of the people. The priest begs God's forgiveness for all.

He slowly goes up to the altar and kisses it through respect for Jesus Christ, whom the altar represents.

He goes to the right, reads a verse from the Scriptures, then the doxology (a short prayer in honor of the holy Trinity), and then the verse again.

Returning to the center, he and the altar boys alternate in reciting nine verses of a prayer in Greek whose translation is "Lord, have mercy on us; Christ, have mercy on us."

At this point he may, depending on the rank and nature of the feast, recite the angelic hymn or greater doxology, which begins, "Glory be to God in the highest..." This prayer dates from the second century. At a high Mass the prayer is intoned by the priest and sung by the choir. At the conclusion of this prayer...

The priest kisses the altar, faces the people, extends his hands, and says, "*Dominus vobiscum*"—"The Lord be with you," to which the altar boys reply, "*Et cum spiritu tuo*"—"And with thy spirit."

Going to the right, the priest bows to the cross in the center and says, "*Oremus*"—"Let us pray." Then he reads one or several prayers—called collects—of varying lengths,

at the end of which the altar boys reply, "Amen." The priest reads these prayers with his hands extended—an early Christian attitude of prayer—perhaps because of the beseeching character of the posture, perhaps to represent Christ's arms extended on the cross.

Lowering his hands to touch the missal, the priest then reads the epistle. This is a lesson from the Old Testament, from the Acts of the Apostles, from the epistles, or from the Apocalypse (Revelation). After this . . .

One of the altar boys takes a place near the celebrant (the priest who is offering the Mass), who reads a few selected verses from the Scriptures, verses appropriate to the feast.

The priest goes to the center of the altar, where he bows and asks God to purify his heart and his lips for the reading of the Gospel. In the meantime an altar boy has carried the missal to the left side of the altar.

The priest goes to the missal. The people rise—through respect for the Gospel—and all make a small sign of the cross on forehead, on lips, and on heart. The priest reads from the Gospel a lesson which varies with the feast. On finishing . . .

He kisses the missal and moves it toward the center. If the day is a Sunday or a solemn occasion, the priest may pause at this point, make the parish announcements, read the Gospel of the day in English, and preach a sermon. If the priest does not

pause for this purpose, or at the conclusion of the sermon . . .

He goes to the center, where he may, again depending on the nature of the feast, recite the Nicene Creed, a profession of faith formulated in the year 325. The people stand during the recitation of the creed and genuflect with the priest at the words "*Et incarnatus est*"—"And [He] was incarnate." Following the creed or, if the creed has not been said, following the Gospel . . .

The priest kisses the altar and greets the people again with the words "*Dominus vobiscum*" — "The Lord be with you." The altar boys respond with "*Et cum spiritu tuo*"—"And with thy spirit," and the congregation sits down.

The priest faces the altar again and, remaining in the center, says, "*Oremus*"—"Let us pray." Now begins the sacrificial part of the Mass. So far the Mass has been principally instructive in order to put the people in the proper disposition for what is to follow. In the early centuries at this particular point of the Mass non-Catholics and candidates for baptism were asked to leave. What was to follow was only for the initiated.

While the priest has been saying this prayer, ushers have been taking up a collection from among the congregation. In the early days of the Church the faithful offered instead of money bread and wine for the church, the priests, and the poor.

This collection is taken up only on Sundays and holydays.

The priest takes the veil and the pall off the chalice and puts them to one side. In some churches a bell is rung at this point to mark the beginning of this more solemn part of the Mass. Now the celebrant removes the paten (sacrificial plate), which covers the chalice. On the paten rests a large round wafer of unleavened bread — the Host. This the priest elevates before him, offers it to God, and then places it on the altar. He picks up the chalice and . . .

Going to the right side, where the altar boys have been waiting with a cruet of water and one of wine, takes the wine cruet and pours into the chalice a little wine, which symbolizes the divine nature of Christ. Then he blesses the water, which symbolizes the human nature of Christ, and carefully pours a drop or two into the chalice.

He returns to the center, where he raises the chalice and, as he did with the Host, prays that almighty God will accept it “for our salvation and that of the whole world.” Then he puts the chalice down, covers it with the pall, and, bending low, professes his own and the people’s humility before God. Standing erect again, he invokes the blessing of the Holy Spirit and makes the sign of the cross over the chalice and the Host.

Now he goes to the right side, where the altar boys have been waiting with water, a basin, and linen. He washes and dries his

fingers, reciting meanwhile six verses of Psalm 25 (Psalm 26 in non-Catholic versions of the Bible).

Returning to the center, he bows and asks the most blessed Trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) to accept this sacrifice for the honor of God and the saints and for the salvation of the people.

Turning to face the people, he says, "*Orate, fratres*"—"Pray, brethren," begging the congregation to add their prayers to his own that the sacrifice may be acceptable to God the Father almighty. The altar boys make the response in the name of the people.

Still at the center, he reads silently one or several prayers, which vary with the feast of the day, placing the offering of the sacrifice under the patronage of Our Lord.

He concludes the last prayer aloud so that the faithful may ratify it:

V. "*Per omnia saecula saeculorum*"—"World without end."

R. "*Amen.*"

V. "*Dominus vobiscum*"—"The Lord be with you."

R. "*Et cum spiritu tuo*"—"And with thy spirit."

V. "*Sursum corda*" — "Lift up your hearts."

R. "*Habemus ad Dominum*"—"We have lifted them up unto the Lord."

V. "*Gratias agamus Domino Deo nostro*"—"Let us give thanks to the Lord our God."

R. "*Dignum et justum est*"—"It is meet and just."

The priest continues aloud with the preface, a prayer developing the idea of thanksgiving in the light of the feast of the day and of the season, asking that with his prayer and those of the people all may be permitted to join the heavenly choirs praising God face to face: "And therefore with the angels and archangels, the thrones and dominions, and the whole host of the heavenly army we sing the hymn of thy glory, saying again and again. . ." Bowing humbly before the altar, he continues in the sublime words of Isaias the prophet and of the Psalms: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." This is called the Sanctus.

A bell is rung three times by one of the altar boys at the words "Holy, holy, holy." This is the signal for the people to kneel, since the action on the altar now begins to penetrate more deeply into the mysteries of the heavenly court.

The priest is no longer free to turn and beg the prayers of his congregation. He is preoccupied with the approaching sacrifice.

He kisses the altar and makes the sign of the cross three times over the bread and the wine. He prays now for the universal Church, for the Holy Father, for the bishop, for those who need his prayers or to whom he has promised a remem-

brance, and finally for those who are assisting at the Mass (a Catholic never merely attends Mass; he assists at Mass). The celebrant goes on to unite himself and his people with the Virgin Mary and the saints, adoring God, with Christ, in heaven.

The bell is rung once as the priest extends his hands over the bread and the wine—called the oblation. This ringing of the bell is to warn the people that the consecration (the changing of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ) is about to take place.

The priest prays again for the acceptance of the offering. Again he makes the sign of the cross three times over the bread and the wine together; then he makes the sign of the cross separately over the Host and over the chalice. The Church is now very still, the people around you intent on the altar. In an instant—according to the belief of those around you—the priest will transform the bread into the body of Christ and the wine into His blood. The change will not be visible, but we have Christ's word for it that the change will take place.

The celebrant bends over the Host and pronounces the sacred words: "Take and eat ye all of this; *for this is my body.*"

He genuflects in adoration before the Host, which has become God between his fingers, and the bell is rung. He raises the Host high so that the faithful may adore their Savior, and the bell is rung again. He genuflects again, and the bell is rung a third time.

Without pausing, he goes on to the consecration of the wine in the chalice: "*Take and drink ye all of this; for this is the chalice of my blood, of the new and eternal Testament: the mystery of faith: which shall be shed for you and for many unto the remission of sins.* As often as ye do these things, ye shall do them in remembrance of me."

Again he genuflects, adoring the blood of Christ before him, and the bell is rung. He raises the chalice for the adoration of the people, and the bell is rung again. He genuflects again, and the bell is rung the third time.

This is the essence of the sacrifice—this mystical separation of Christ's body and blood. The priest has with the sword of his miraculous words made a cleavage, as it were, yet Christ lives whole and entire under the appearance of the bread and the wine. Christ the victim rests immolated (sacrificed) on the altar before him. This is a mystery whose roots are in eternity. We accept this mystery on the word of God Himself.

The priest continues to pray, his hands extended. Through reverence for the body of Christ he keeps the thumb and the forefinger of each hand pressed together until they have been washed over the chalice after he has received Holy Communion. (This will be explained later.)

Now he can present to the divine majesty "a pure Host, a holy Host, a spotless Host, the holy bread of eternal life, and

the chalice of everlasting salvation." In his prayers he associates this offering of the sacrifice with the sacrifices of Abel, Abraham, and Melchisedech, which in the Old Testament found acceptance with God.

Bowing again in humility, he prays that "these things [this sacrifice] . . . be carried up by the hands of thy holy angel to thine altar on high, in the sight of thy divine majesty. . . ." He kisses the altar, which is hallowed now by the divine presence of Christ, blesses the sacrifice, and then makes the sign of the cross on his own person.

He joins his hands thoughtfully and prays for those who have died in the faith. Then striking his breast, he prays: "And to us sinners, thy servants, hoping in the multitude of thy mercies, vouchsafe to grant some part and fellowship with . . . all thy saints. . . . Through Christ Our Lord. Through whom, O Lord, thou dost always create, sanctify, quicken, bless, and give us these good things." While he says these words, he makes the sign of the cross three times over the sacrifice.

He genuflects and raises his voice again that the faithful may ratify his prayer:

V. "*Per omnia saecula saeculorum*"—"Forever and ever."

R. "*Amen.*"

The celebrant recites the Lord's Prayer, looking at the Host before him, and concludes:

V. "*Et ne nos inducas in tentationem*"—"And lead us not into temptation."

R. "*Sed libera nos a malo*"—"But deliver us from evil."

Silently the priest paraphrases this petition of the people for deliverance from evil. Toward the end of his prayer he makes the sign of the cross on himself with the paten, kisses it, and, after genuflecting, concludes aloud:

V. "*Per omnia saecula saeculorum*" — "Forever and ever."

R. "*Amen.*"

V. "*Pax Domini sit semper vobiscum*"—"The Peace of the Lord be always with you."

R. "*Et cum spiritu tuo*"—"And with thy spirit."

The priest divides the Host into three parts, drops the smallest part into the chalice, and places the other two parts on the paten. While he is doing this, he recites the prayer: "May this mixture and consecration of the body and blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ avail us that receive it unto life everlasting. Amen."

He genuflects again, strikes his breast three times, and says:

"Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

"Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

"Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant us peace."

The celebrant bows over the altar and in preparation for Holy Communion (the partaking of the Host in the manner of food), which he is about to receive, addresses

three prayers to Christ in the Host on the paten before him. With the first prayer he asks for peace, with the second for holiness, and with the third he asks that the body and blood of Christ, which he — though unworthy — is about to receive, may heal and keep him, body and soul.

The bell is rung three times as the priest, after genuflecting, takes the Host between his fingers and recites three times the prayer of the centurion (the soldier in the Gospel who asked Christ to heal his son), a prayer beautifully adapted to Holy Communion: "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof; say but the word and my soul shall be healed."

At each ringing of the bell, the people strike their breasts in deepest humility.

The priest bows over the altar and consumes the Host (receives Holy Communion). After a moment of thanksgiving he genuflects and gathers up any little particles which may have dropped on the altar, scraping the linen with the paten. These particles he brushes into the chalice, which he now raises to his lips; he consumes the contents.

The people who intend to receive Holy Communion approach the altar rail. (If no one intends to receive Holy Communion, skip to page 19). The priest unlocks the tabernacle and takes out the ciborium (another chalice), which is covered with a lid and a veil. In the ciborium are kept a number of smaller Hosts that are consecrated at Mass as they are needed for the people's

Holy Communion. While he has been doing this, the altar boys have been reciting the confiteor for the people. The priest places the ciborium on the altar, uncovers it, genuflects, and, turning sidewise—lest he have his back to the Blessed Sacrament—asks God to absolve the people from their sins.

Turning back to the altar, he takes the ciborium and, facing the congregation, holds one of the Hosts over the chalice and repeats these words of St. John the Baptist: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who taketh away the sins of the world."

Once more there is a triple repetition of the words of the centurion: "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof; say but the word and my soul shall be healed."

The priest, followed by an altar boy, goes down to the communion rail and lays a Host on the tongue of each person there, saying each time: "May the body of Our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy soul to life everlasting. Amen." The altar boy holds a communion plate under the chin of each person in order to catch any particles of the Blessed Sacrament that might fall. When he has finished distributing Holy Communion, the priest returns to the altar and simply replaces the lid on the ciborium, covers it with its veil, and puts it back in the tabernacle. Then the Mass continues.

If no one approaches the rail for communion, the ceremonies described beginning with the paragraph "*The people who intend to receive Holy Communion . . .*" on page

18 are omitted. The priest has consumed the precious blood of Christ. Now he extends the chalice toward the altar boys, who have taken their place at the right. One altar boy pours a little wine into the chalice. The priest moves the chalice with a rotary gesture to rinse it before he drinks the contents.

Now holding the chalice, he walks to the right. One altar boy pours over the thumbs and forefingers of the priest and into the chalice a drop or so of wine; the other pours in a little water.

The celebrant returns to the center and drinks the wine and the water. He wipes the inside of the chalice and covers it with the paten, the pall, and the veil, so that it looks now as it did when the priest entered with it at the beginning of the Mass.

Meanwhile one of the altar boys has carried the missal to the right side. The priest now walks to the missal, reads an appropriate verse called the communion — it is taken from the Bible — and, returning to the center, greets the people with the familiar "*Dominus vobiscum*" — "The Lord be with you."

Returning to the right, he bows to the tabernacle and says, "Oremus!" — "Let us pray." The prayers that follow are called postcommunion prayers, which vary according to the feast of the day and the season.

The priest returns to the center and, turning to the people, says:

V. "*Dominus vobiscum*" — "The Lord be with you."

R. "*Et cum spiritu tuo*"—"And with thy spirit."

V. "*Ite missa est*"—"Go, the Mass is ended."

R. "*Deo gratias*"—"Thanks be to God."

Turning toward the altar, the priest bows low and addresses a final prayer to the blessed Trinity that the sacrifice may have been pleasing to God and fruitful for the people.

He kisses the altar, turns to the people, and makes the sign of the cross over them, saying: "May almighty God bless you; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen."

The people rise while the priest crosses to the left and reads (from the card) verses from the opening of St. John's Gospel. Everyone genuflects with him at the verse, "*Et verbum caro factum est*"—"And the Word was made flesh."

If it has been a high Mass (sung), the priest leaves the altar at once; if a low Mass, he goes to the foot of the altar and recites the prayers after Mass:

"Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus."

The people conclude with: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen." This prayer, called the "Hail, Mary," is said three times.

Then the priest and the people recite together:

“Hail, holy queen, mother of mercy. Hail our life, our sweetness, and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us. And after this our exile show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.”

V. “Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.”

R. “That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.”

The priest says, “Let us pray,” and then recites the following prayer.

“O God, our refuge and our strength, look down in mercy on thy people who cry to thee; and by the intercession of the glorious and immaculate Virgin Mary Mother of God, of St. Joseph her spouse, of thy blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and of all the saints, in mercy and goodness hear the prayers which we pour forth for the conversion of sinners and for the liberty and exaltation of our holy mother the Church. Through the same Christ Our Lord.” To which the people respond, “Amen.” Then the priest continues:

“Holy Michael Archangel, defend us in the day of battle; be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray; and do thou, prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God thrust down to hell Satan and all wicked spirits, who wander

through the world for the ruin of souls." To which the people respond, "Amen." Then is recited three times:

V. "Most Sacred Heart of Jesus,"

R. "Have mercy on us."

The late Pope Pius XI asked that these prayers after Mass be offered especially for the relief of the Church in Russia.

The priest now ascends to the altar and gets the chalice. He descends to the foot of the altar, turns and genuflects, puts on his biretta (hat), and returns to the sacristy. Until he has left the sanctuary, the people stand—through politeness.

All the Catholics will, as they leave their pews, genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle before they turn to walk out. You might genuflect too as an act of devotion, if you think it will make you less conspicuous. To know how to do this, watch your neighbor.

CONCLUSION

During the Mass you may have been puzzled by the crosses and blessings, the actions and gestures. But you must remember that Mass is the reenactment of the Last Supper in which Christ, through His priest, by the separate consecration of bread and wine, offers anew the sacrifice of Calvary.

Nineteen centuries of love and devotion have elaborated ceremonies, like a beautiful setting, around the central gem—the consecration. If you want more explanation of the Mass, ask your Catholic friends or a priest.

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