

## **The Mass Catholicism's Unbloody Sacrifice**

The Mass is probably the least understood of all of Catholicism's sacraments. Almost all of us know the title of the sacrament, but have little other knowledge of it. This session covers the ceremony and its spiritual claims, as well as the implications of the Mass as it impacts on the gospel.

The Mass is constituted of a series of steps in a pre-established sequence. There are various prayers and hymns. The key element of the Mass is the Eucharist. Many denominations partake of the "Lord's Supper", which is superficially similar to the Eucharist. But the Eucharist has key elements which differentiate it from the Lord's Supper. Where the Lord's Supper is a commemoration of the Lord's death, the RCC declares the Eucharist to be a re-presentation of the sacrifice of the cross. Please note that the term is "re-presentation", not "representation".

Immediately prior to the presentation of the bread and wine, the priest says, "HOC EST CORPUS MEUM [This is my body]", at which time the bread is claimed to be transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus, an event called transubstantiation. The penitent then eats the wafer, "sacrificing" Jesus again, but in an unbloody manner.

Certain elements of the dogma of the Mass must be made absolutely clear. These are not simply statements of opinion, but are direct official statements of the RCC.

- "(I)n obedience to the words of His priests - HOC EST CORPUS MEUM [This is my body] - God Himself descends on the altar, that He comes wherever they call Him, and as often as they call Him, and places Himself in their hands, even though they should be His enemies."
- "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.'"
- "(T)he holy council teaches that this is truly propitiatory." i.e. the Mass pays the penalty for sin.
- "The fruits of that bloody sacrifice, it is well understood, are received most abundantly through this unbloody one."
- "(A)ppeased by this sacrifice, the Lord grants the grace and gift of penitence and pardons even the gravest crimes and sins."

If this sounds strange to a Protestant, it should, since this teaching is diametrically opposed to conventional Protestant teaching. The key things for us to consider are that in the Mass Jesus' sacrifice occurs over and over again. God is an angry god, and is appeased by this sacrifice. This latter statement is repeated in the Marian doctrines. We will consider it in detail there.

The first five questions recap what we have just said, emphasizing the literal re-sacrificing of Jesus in RCC dogma. In Matt 26:26-28 (Q6) we find Jesus saying that the bread and wine are his body and blood. Then, in John 6:54-56, Jesus says that anyone who eats His flesh and drinks His blood has eternal life. When we then look at Lev 6:24-27 (Q7), we find that sacrifices are to be eaten, and anyone who touches them becomes holy! This sounds like a slam dunk in favor of the RCC dogma. Not only do we have more than one statement by Christ, we find a direct confirmation in the OT. Or do we? We will return to this later.

The story of Cain and Abel (Q8) is well known. Abel sacrificed the firstborn lamb as God had directed. Cain rebelled and offered the fruit of his gardening. God counseled Cain about rebellion and sin. Cain persisted, killed Abel, and was banished. But why do we even look at this?

All sacrifices require a death. Blood has to be shed. Prior to the cross, the blood of animals was shed to show the horrible consequences of sin. A perfect animal was the only acceptable sacrifice, pointing forward to the sacrifice of our perfect substitute on the cross. Cain's offering was not acceptable precisely because it was unbloody. (Q9) Lacking the blood of a pure substitute, Cain's offering amounted to an offering of works alone. It was a rejection of his need for a redeemer. Since Cain's offering lacked the blood of a lamb, it was not a sacrifice at all. After the cross, Jesus sacrifice, one time for all (Heb 9:12), made all other sacrifices worthless or obsolete (Heb 8:13). We will come back to this point.

The sin offering which made all who touched it “holy” did not make them sinless. In fact, the priest who took the sacrifice from the penitent actually carried the sin personally from the sinner to the tabernacle. He was holy in his function, although sinful in person. This contrast with RCC dogma continues as we examine atoning sacrifices. While sin offerings were to be eaten, an atoning sacrifice (Q10) which entered the “tent of meeting” (tabernacle) was not to be eaten. When we realize that Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was the ultimate atoning sacrifice (Q11) (see Rom 5:11 in the KJV and Heb 9), it becomes clear that, even if transubstantiation were true, the sacrifice of Jesus is NOT to be eaten. RCC dogma stands in direct opposition to biblical proscription.

The book of Hebrews discusses the tabernacle services at length. In the sacrifice of Jesus, we have a “better” sacrifice (Q12) which was offered only one time. The old system of sacrifices which had to be offered had been superseded and was now obsolete. Sacrifices which had to be offered again and again could never truly cleanse the sinner from guilt like the cross (Heb 10:11-12). The RCC claims that it is presenting the cross again and again. This is supposed to be the method of applying the benefits of the cross to the sinner. No scripture is (or can be) quoted to support this idea. Further, the RCC claims that this re-presentation of a once for all perfect sacrifice does not in any way diminish that sacrifice. If the cross is perfect, no other sacrifice can do anything but detract from it.

A review of the context of John (Q13) shows us what has happened. The RCC has taken statements out of their proper context to support ideas which are not envisioned in scripture. Jesus has stated in John 6 that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood. But in other places in John Jesus describes Himself as the “light of the world” (8:12), the “door of the sheep” (10:7), the “good shepherd” (10:11), and the “true vine” (15:1). If we are to take these statements as literally as the RCC takes John 6, then in 10:7 we would see Jesus with a doorknob, hinges, and so on. In 15:1 He would have roots, branches, leaves, grapes, etc. Such an understanding is ludicrous. So it makes equally good sense to question whether John 6 is to be taken literally.

John 6, when examined carefully, confirms our suspicions. The day after the feeding of the 5,000, the people returned. Jesus told them (Q14) that they had returned for free food and that the proper thing to seek was the food that endures. Since this is a physical impossibility, this reference cannot be to literal food. As usual, Jesus is drawing a spiritual metaphor for His audience. Here He speaks of food. In John 4:10-14 His subject is living water, which prevents the one who drinks of it from getting thirsty. Then in John 4:32-34 He says that He has food the disciples do not know about. The mystery begins to become clear. This food is not food at all, but rather obedience to the will of the Father. Each time an unusual instruction is given, it is part of a metaphor designed to illustrate the goodness of God and the plan of salvation.

After being rebuked, the crowd, simply not understanding, asks for a sign (Q15, John 6:31) citing the manna in the wilderness. Jesus picks up the question and transforms it into an object lesson. Instead of manna, which filled the stomach, God has given “true bread” from heaven. This “true bread” gives life to the world. Once again, the people misunderstand, not realizing that Jesus is speaking spiritually. The people ask for this bread, thinking literally, and Jesus says “I am the bread of life”. But we should notice here that Jesus says “he who comes to me shall not hunger”. This is a far cry from saying that a person should eat His flesh. This statement points out that the hunger is spiritual, not physical.

It should come as no surprise now that Catholics get hungry and thirsty, even though Jesus’ words indicate that they will not (John 6:35). It should be even less of a surprise that Catholics die, contrary to John 6:50. The entire issue is spiritual. Jesus’ statement that He is the bread and we should eat the bread of life deals with our ultimate destiny and our spiritual health on the way. A literal understanding distorts the meaning of Christ’s teaching and is contradicted by the obvious evidence. A parallel thought comes from the expectation that the Messiah was to be a king. Yet Jesus said that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). The spiritually blind Jews did not understand, just as the RCC refuses to understand.

In Matt 26:26-29 (Q16), we see the last supper. This text is one which superficially appears to support transubstantiation. After all, Jesus says “this is my body” and “this is my blood” when presenting the bread and wine. But the RCC fails to notice the last verse in the passage. Immediately after calling the wine “blood”, Jesus reverts to literal meanings by saying that He will not drink again of “this fruit of the vine” until He comes again. RCC dogma states that the wine is totally converted into the body and blood of Christ, and that the last supper was the first time this happened. Further, anyone who suggests that any part of the wine remains with the blood is to be declared anathema. If the RCC position is true, Jesus is a liar, since He called the wine the “fruit of the vine” after he has called it His blood. Such a refusal by the RCC

to consider context allows a literal understanding to become dogma in contradiction to the plain words of our savior. The expressions "body" and "blood" are properly understood as a spiritual parable.

Now that we have shown that the basic RCC understanding is contrary to scripture, we now turn our attention to some curious consequences of the dogma of the Mass. The Mass is supposed to remit temporal punishments for sin which remain after forgiveness. Unfortunately, if a Catholic has not completed his penance and obtained indulgences for his temporal punishments, he is not in a state of grace, and cannot properly receive Communion (the Eucharist). Thus the person who needs the benefit of the Mass is forbidden to partake of the Mass!

Next, we note that the measurement of punishments remitted is proportional to the degree of perfection of the individual. This means that the person who is truly perfect, and needs no remission, has great amounts of forgiveness available. But the person who is sinful, and truly needs the forgiveness is only eligible for trivial help. Further, any person who has committed a mortal sin must not receive communion without receiving absolution first! In other words, the blood of Christ, which cleanses us from all sins (1 John 1:7) cannot cleanse anyone from mortal sin in the RCC. But a human priest can cleanse the sinner when Jesus cannot! Does anyone see anything wrong with this picture?

We must again notice that "the atonement of Jesus Christ is offered as a substitute for our works of atonement". This is salvation by works. It says that we are capable of saving ourselves, but it is easier to let Jesus do it. This contradicts everything we discussed in the economy of grace. There is nothing that we can do to save ourselves. It is totally an act of God's grace, or grace would no longer be grace (Rom 11:6). To suggest that it is possible for us to atone in any manner whatsoever is to say that we are equal to God.

Contrast this with the state of the RCC penitent. He is required to do various acts to atone for his own sins, to gain indulgences, and thereby enter the state of grace. The moment he commits another sin of any character, he falls from grace. Short of an act of personal revelation from God, there is no way that he can know that he is actually in a state of grace. This means (Q17) that it is totally impossible for the Mass to actually pay for (remit) venial sins. Also (Q18), as just mentioned, since no person who has an outstanding mortal sin can receive communion, the benefits of the sacrifice of Christ cannot be applied to the sins most in need without first receiving absolution from a human priest. The Mass is useless where it would be most needed!

At this point we need to look at a Latin word invoked by the RCC in its worship. *Latria* (Q19) is the highest form of worship, reserved for God alone. (We will discuss *latria* vs *dulia* at another time.) The RCC, as its final confirmation of the dogma of transubstantiation declares that we are to worship the bread and wine, not *as if* they were Jesus, but *because* they are Jesus. As we have already discovered, the entire dogma is nonsense, since the sacrifice of Christ is "one time only". Therefore, the *latria* toward the Eucharist is worshipping something other than God. This is idolatry, contrary to the second commandment, and condemned throughout the Bible. A most severe punishment is declared for idolaters in Heb 10:28-31. God's vengeance will fall on them.

The Council of Trent (Q20) declares that *latria* toward the Eucharist is not idolatry. Obviously they are concerned with the appearance of idolatry which is so conspicuous here. Yet, such a protestation cannot change the fundamental nature of the act. The bread and wine are not the body and blood of Christ. Worship of anything other than God is idolatry. Denials are of no merit. We will see them again and again, as if saying that "it isn't so" will change something into something it is not. We should not fall for such hair splitting. With these claims, the RCC creates a distinction without a difference.

One OT reference (Q21) is sometimes proposed as a prefiguring of the Eucharist. Gen 14:17-20 describes Melchizedek, King of Salem, meeting Abraham with bread and wine. The RCC declares that this was truly sacrificial, since Melchizedek was a "priest of God Most High." If we are careful, we will once again discover the selective nature of RCC interpretation. The context is important. Abraham had won an important battle, and Melchizedek was greeting him with bread and wine. No mention is made of a sacrifice, or of anything resembling the last supper. Even the emphasis on priesthood is out of place, since the syntax links the bread and wine with his kingship. The rest of the story deals with his status as priest, including Abraham paying tithe. There is no support for the RCC position here.

Paul (Q22) makes it clear that the bread and wine are symbolic. In 1 Cor 11, he says that in partaking of communion, a believer "proclaims" the Lord's death. He does not re-present it. The Greek "*katagello*" properly translates as dealing with an announcement or proclamation. It has no relationship to re-creation. Jesus (Q23) says the same thing in Luke 22. The Lord's Supper is an act of remembrance. It is rich in symbolism and spiritual lessons, but does not contain any sacrifice. We must participate in a

worthy manner (Q24). This does not refer to being sinless, because none of us are sinless. Instead, it refers to our attitude of reverence and humility, understanding the enormous magnitude of debt we owe to our savior. We must partake as faithful believers, avoiding unbecoming conduct.

In conclusion, the RCC claims that the Mass re-offers the sacrifice of the cross, literally causing Christ to die again, but in an unbloody manner. The bread and wine are alleged to be wholly changed into the substance of Jesus. This somehow is required for the benefits of the cross to be applied to our sins.

In fact, the Mass is an exercise in idolatry, and has no merit whatever. The proper practice is of a symbolic Lord's Supper which brings us again into communion with the one to whom we owe everything.