

The First Mass (# 13)

How does the Roman Catholic Church regard the mass today? Let us look at five unimpeachable Roman Catholic references.

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) declared:

The sacrifice [in the Mass] is identical with the sacrifice of the Cross, inasmuch as Jesus Christ is a Priest and Victim both. The only difference lies in the manner of offering, which is bloody upon the cross and bloodless on our altars.

{The sacrifice of the Mass} is properly offered not only for the sins, penalties, satisfactions, and other needs of the faithful who are living but also for the departed in Christ who are not yet fully cleansed. *Decree on the Mass*, Chapter 2.

The declarations at Trent (1545-1563) that summarize the position of the Catholic Church on the Mass can be arranged in seven statements:

- 1) There is in the Catholic Church a true sacrifice, the Mass instituted by Jesus Christ. It is the sacrifice of his Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, himself, under the appearances of bread and wine.
- 2) This Sacrifice is identical with the Sacrifice of the Cross, inasmuch as Christ is the Priest and Victim in both. A difference lies in the manner of offering, which was bloody upon the Cross and is bloodless on the altar.
- 3) The Mass is a propitiatory Sacrifice, atoning for the sins of the living and dead for whom it is offered.
- 4) The efficacy of the Mass is derived from the Sacrifice of the Cross, whose superabundant merits it applies to men.
- 5) Although the Mass is offered to God alone, it may be celebrated in honor and memory of the saints.
- 6) Christ instituted the Mass at the Last Supper.
- 7) Christ ordained the Apostles priests, giving them power and the command to consecrate his Body and Blood to perpetuate and renew the Sacrifice. *The Catholic Almanac*, 1998, p 213.

The Creed of Pope Pius IV (pope 1559-1565) reads:

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 of 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.

According to the New York Catechism:

Jesus Christ gave us the sacrifice of the Mass to leave to His Church a visible sacrifice which continues His sacrifice on the cross until the end of time. The Mass is the same sacrifice as the sacrifice of the cross. Holy Communion is the receiving of the body and blood of Jesus Christ under the appearance of bread and wine. NY Catechism circa 1960.

The following declaration was made at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965):

At the Last Supper, on the night when he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of his Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the Sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.--*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, No. 47

...As often as the Sacrifice of the Cross in which "Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7) is celebrated on an altar, the work of our redemption is carried on. At the same time, in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 10:17) is both expressed and brought about. All men are called to this union with Christ... *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, No. 3.

In The Catholic Catechism by John A Hardon, S.J. (1974) we read:

The sacrifice of the altar, then, is no mere empty commemoration of Calvary, but a true and proper act of sacrifice, whereby Christ the high priest by an unbloody immolation offers himself a most acceptable victim to the eternal Father, as he did on the cross. It is one and the same victim; the same person now offers it by the ministry of his priests, who then offered himself on the cross. Only the manner of offering is different.

The priest is the same, namely, Jesus Christ...

The victim is also the same, namely, the Savior in his human nature with his true body and blood.

The Mass and Calvary are interrelated in three ways: as re-presentation, as memorial, and as effective application of the merits gained by Christ by his death on the cross.

To the twenty-first century Roman Catholic, the importance of the Mass might be lost in the theological statements offered above. It is a sacrifice performed by a priest in an elaborate ritual with specific motions and an assortment of prescribed vestments during which the host is transformed into the Holy Eucharist by the priest in an act of

transubstantiation. The Eucharist is a sacrament, which in a Catholic sense is mediatorial, i.e., instrumental for salvation. And the Mass, the overarching ritual at which all this takes place, must be attended under pain of mortal sin each Sunday and on Holy Days of Obligation.

Perhaps the main mistake Christian Protestant apologists make is to argue that the Mass is not a sacrifice. In this regard, the Mass is whatever the Catholic Church says it is and represents whatever they say it represents. By decree, the Mass is intended to be a sacrifice of the same victim, Jesus Christ.

Although the Mass is a sacrifice, the Last Supper (Lord's Supper to Protestants) definitely was not a sacrifice. Paul quotes Jesus as saying: *After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying: "This cup is the New Testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."* 1 Cor 11:25-26. Continuing further we read: *Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.* 1 Cor 11:27-28. This proves that there was no change in the elements because after what Catholics call the consecration (1 Cor 11:25), the bread and wine are still referred to in their elemental forms. Furthermore, eating blood was prohibited by Leviticus 17:10 and Deuteronomy 12:16.

Since the doctrine of the transubstantiation was not declared until the issue was addressed by Pope Innocent III at the Lateran Council in 1215, Masses that were celebrated prior to that time probably viewed the Last Supper as a memorial rather than a celebration of the Holy Eucharist with its contemporary meaning. The rite of the Mass is said by some sources to have begun in 394 [Boettner, 1962]. Ritualism including an entrance rite, prayers at the foot of the altar, readings from Scripture, responses, candles, incense, the creed, and intercessory prayers began to be included in the Mass. In the ninth century, the preparation of the gifts was introduced and after that the Eucharist itself.

But where did the first Mass take place? Was it at on 1 November 609 when the Pantheon in Rome dedicated to "Jove and all the gods" was rededicated by Pope Boniface IV to the "Virgin Mary and all the saints"? Was it at the Hagia Eirene (Divine Peace) which was the meeting place of the Second Ecumenical Council in 381 in Istanbul? Or was it at the dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary in Ephesus in 320? This magnificent church was 857-feet long with 471-feet of enclosure and was formerly dedicated to the Nine Muses. This church was actually longer than the famous Temple of Artemis (called Diana in Rome) (425 feet), which is also in Ephesus and would compare favorably with Saint Peter's in the Vatican, which was 610-feet long when completed in 1666. It is no wonder, then, that the Third Ecumenical Council, the Council of Ephesus was held at this site to coronate *theotokos* in 454. Or was the first Mass held at Aqaba, Jordan, where the earliest known Christian church dating back to 250 was recently excavated?

Actually, the first Mass supercedes all the sites mentioned above. Since it is by Catholic definition an "unbloody immolation" of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, it cannot be Calvary itself. In fact, the first preceded Calvary and weighed heavily on the officiating priest.

The prelude to the first Mass took place circa 1450 B.C. in the Sinai Peninsula in the Wilderness of Sin near Rephidim. The Children of Israel had with God's help emigrated from the Land of Goshen in Egypt and escaped from Pharaoh's (Thutmoses IV) army at the Red Sea. They numbered 600,000 men on foot (Exodus 12:37) which meant that the total lot was about two million people. This large group moved progressively from Rameses (the Land of Goshen) to Succoth, Etham, Pihahiroth, Migdol, the Red Sea¹, Baal-zephon, the Wilderness of Shur (Etham), Marah, Elim, the Wilderness of Sin², Rephidim, Sinai, Taberah, Kibroth-battaavah, Hazeroth, Wilderness of Paran, Kadesh-barnea, the Wilderness of Zin, Elath, Edom, Moab, and finally Mount Nebo in modern Jordan before invading Jericho after having spent forty years in the desert. Two generations were spent in migration as judgement for the ten times (Numbers 14:22) that the Children of Israel put God to the test:

- 1) Red Sea (Exodus 14:11-12)
- 2) Marah (Exodus 15:23-24)
- 3) Wilderness of Sin (Exodus 16:2)
- 4) Manna (Exodus 16:20)
- 5) Manna (Exodus 16:27)
- 6) Rephidim at Horeb [Massah, Meribah] (Exodus 17:1-7)
- 7) Sinai [Horeb] (Exodus 32:1-10)
- 8) Taberah (Numbers 11:1-3)
- 9) Mixed Multitude (Numbers 11:4)
- 10) Kadesh-barnea (Numbers 14)

This judgment followed God's second attempt to destroy the nation of Israel³. Both times Moses intervened and both times God relented. Despite the judgement, this was not the last time the Children of Israel strove with the Lord.

The prelude to the Mass begins with the sixth time the Children of Israel put God to the test. The numerology of the number six is significant here. It indicates that the act was incomplete and something was to follow. The pericope at Rephidim was written by Moses who testifies to having written the Pentateuch in Exodus 24:4, Deuteronomy 4:13, 9:10, and 10:2,4. The full account using the King James Version is as follows:

¹ Red Sea: Under Thutmoses IV, the children of Israel left the Land of Goshen and staged at Succoth. Succoth was called Tharu and Takut (Josephus II:X) by the Egyptians and was located at the terminus of the Gulf of Suez. They then proceeded to Ethan (the area around modern Elat) but were "turned back" (Ex 14:2) to Wadi Watir, a 14-mile long wash leading to Nuweiba Beach. This is the only place where a sea-bed crossing of the Red Sea on foot would not exceed a 6% slope and the place where 18 Dynasty chariot wheels, axles, and soldiers armor have been found in the sea. Solomon defines this as being the Red Sea in 1 Kings 9:26 and erected two granite Phoenician-style pillars commemorating the crossing with the words: Mizraim (Egypt), Solomon, Edom (Red Sea), death, pharaoh, Moses, Yahweh.

² Wilderness of Sin: Pronounced "sine" as Sin is a contraction of Sinai

³ Destroy Israel: 1)Exodus 32:10, 2) Numbers 14:12, 2) Numbers 16:20, 3) Numbers 16:45.

*And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD? And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me. **And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink.** And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?--Exodus 17:1-7*

From this account, quite plainly, the Lord is the Rock and with New Testamental knowledge, that Rock is Jesus Christ. (When used metaphorically, the Hebrew words *sur* and *sela* in the Old Testament and the Greek word *petra* in the New Testament refer to God.) In fact, one would have to be very obtuse to miss the metaphor for God was actually standing on top of the very rock that Moses was to smite. The rock symbolized God. Although Moses received revelation directly from God concerning this event, it is obvious that he did not understand God's full design. In Roman Catholic theology this is called *splen*, which is short for *sensus plenior* meaning that the recipient of revelation although faithful to God's command may not completely understand the intent. That was certainly the case here. Moses obeyed God but did not understand that he was creating a Type. (By definition a "type" is a shadow cast on the pages of Old Testament history by a truth whose full embodiment or antitype is found in the New Testament revelation.)

And so, although the Children of Israel were saved by the living waters of the Rock, the incompleteness of that event stretched like desert landscape before the wandering tribes. Twice more God was bent on killing all the Jews (Numbers 16:21 and 16:45), but twice more Moses and Aaron, his older brother, fell to their knees interceding on their behalf. Finally in the Wilderness of Zin, the sequel to the sixth act of defiance was played out at Meribah-Kadesh when the Children of Israel put the Lord to the test for the eleventh time. The Bible relates the following:

*Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there and was buried there. And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink. And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, **Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.** And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him. And Moses*

*and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? **And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also.** And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them.--Numbers 20:1-13*

To recount, the Lord told Moses to take his rod, the same rod he had used to strike the Nile and turn its waters into blood (Exodus 7:20), the same rod he had used to raise over his head and divide the Red Sea (Exodus 14:16), the same rod he had used to smite the Rock in Horeb (Exodus 17:6). This time, however, the rod was merely to be in his hands while he spoke to the Rock. But Moses did not heed the Lord's words to the letter. He was told to speak to the Rock. Instead, he spoke to the people and hit the Rock. Out of pride, perhaps like a television evangelist today, he dramatically wacked the Rock twice before the eyes of the rebellious crowd. Living water did flow forth for man and beast, but it was not what the Lord wanted for his immediate response was as follows:

And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them. Numbers 20:12-13.

Thus, Moses did not sanctify the Lord because he did not follow his word implicitly. On the other hand, God himself was sanctified because he was true to his word by supplying water to man and beast despite Moses' indiscretion. Lastly Moses is penalized⁴ for his sin--a mortal sin--mortal in the sense that he was sentenced to die before his time and not in the sense that he was banished to Hell or was not a part of Abraham's Bosom. As recorded in Deuteronomy 34, Moses, being 120 years old with good vision and excellent health, viewed the Promised Land from Mount Nebo, which is in today's Jordan. He died shortly thereafter leaving only Joshua and Caleb with memories of the Land of Goshen.

Why the big stir over what appears to be a minor indiscretion? After all, Moses doubted the Lord previously in Numbers 11:22-23 where he found it hard to believe that the Lord could find enough meat to feed two million people in the desert for one month. And where is the Mass?

At Meribah-Kadesh, as it is called later in Deuteronomy 32:51, God had planned to create a Type or more poetically a pageant acted out by the Children of Israel. The Rock at Meribah-Kadesh represented the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The rebellious Children of Israel represented the people of the world. Moses and Aaron represented the nation of Israel and their high priests. The Messiah, the Rock, was to be struck just once, that is die once, for the sins of all mankind. (*By which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.* Hebrews 10:10.) By his death we would all be justified and privy to living water (John 4:10). The Messiah would never be struck again. To receive the living water after his death, one need only ask--not recrucify the Messiah.

⁴ Penalized: In the New Testament Paul testifies that many believers become weak, sick, and even overcome by death because of sin. See 1 Corinthians 11:30.

One needs only to speak to the Rock. (*Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you.* John 16:23.) Unbeknown to Moses, he had struck the Messiah again (recrucified him) when all he had to do was speak. The Type was broken. The pageant ended with mixed results--God was sanctified but the people were not.

Today that broken Type is reenacted every day of the year by a pageant that ostensibly and by decree is the continuation of the sacrifice upon calvary--a bloodless sacrifice just as there was at Meribah and again at Meribah-Kadesh. But the first Mass took place at Meribah-Kadesh 38 years into the wanderings of the Children of Israel in the Sinai Peninsula circa 1412 B.C. for it was here that the Rock was symbolically for the first time resmitten. Every time a priest celebrates Mass, an acolyte assists at Mass, a choir member sings at Mass, or a lay person attends Mass, that person takes Moses' rod and strikes the back of the Messiah. It is as painful for Jesus Christ today as it was 3400 years ago.

Martin Luther (1483-1546), founder of the Reformation and a former priest, described the Mass as "an unspeakable abomination, quite contrary to the principal article of justification by faith alone" and John Calvin (1509-1564), a French reformer, called it "Satan's attempt to adulterate and envelope the Sacred Supper of Christ as with thick darkness". Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) the Archbishop of Canterbury once wrote: "For these be but false doctrines, without shame devised and deigned by wicked popish priests, idolators, monks and friars, which for lucre have altered and corrupted the most holy Supper of the Lord and turned it into manifest idolatry. Wherefore all godly men ought with all their heart to refuse and abhor all such blasphemy against the Son of God."

Although it is seldom that one hears such strident outspoken views because of the one-way definition of "tolerance" in today's rush to global ecumenism, their words echo like thunder from the clouds to those who set their heart as the heart of God (Ezekiel 28:6).

There is a sequel to Moses' premature death on Mount Nebo. God's demand for justice is often balanced by his lovingkindness (*hesed*). On Mount Tabor, Moses and Elias (Elijah) appeared and talked to Jesus before the eyes of Peter, James, and John. (See Matthew 17.) This private moment is called the Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ. In marked contrast to his public humiliation (birth, baptism, trial, and death) his glorification was in private. Moses' feet in spirit form now touched the ground of the Holy Land on a mountain that he saw years ago from Mount Nebo. Together the two prophets symbolized the transferal of their role to the Messiah, the Rock who now speaks to mankind in the name of the father (Hebrews 1:2) and answers prayers in the name of the Father (John 14:14, 15:16, and 16:23).

Ron Banuk

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