

CATECHESSES
ON
THE MASS

(8 November 2017 – 4 April 2018)

POPE FRANCIS

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— CHAPTER I —

The “Heart” of the Church

Wednesday, 8 November 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Today we begin a new series of catecheses, which will direct our gaze toward the “heart” of the Church, namely, the Eucharist. It is fundamental that we Christians clearly understand the value and significance of the *Holy Mass*, in order to live ever more fully our relationship with God.

We cannot forget the great number of Christians who, throughout the world, in 2,000 years of history, have died defending the Eucharist; and how many, still today, risk their lives in order to participate in Sunday Mass. In the year 304, during the Diocletianic Persecution, a group of Christians from North Africa was surprised as they were celebrating Mass in a house, and were arrested. In the interrogation, the Roman Proconsul asked them why they had done so, knowing that it was absolutely prohibited. They responded: “Without Sunday we cannot live”, which meant: if we cannot celebrate the Eucharist, we cannot live; our Christian life would die.

Indeed, Jesus said to his disciples: “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his

blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (Jn 6:53-54).

Those Christians from North Africa were killed because they were celebrating the Eucharist. They gave witness that one can renounce earthly life for the Eucharist, because it gives us eternal life, making us participants in Christ’s victory over death. This witness challenges us all and calls for a response as to what it means for each of us to partake in the Sacrifice of Mass and approach the Lord’s Table. Are we searching for that wellspring that “gushes forth living water” for eternal life?; that makes of our life a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving and makes of us one body in Christ? This is the most profound meaning of the Holy Eucharist, which means “thanksgiving”: thanksgiving to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who engages us and transforms us in his communion of love.

In the forthcoming catecheses I would like to answer some important questions about the Eucharist and Mass, in order to rediscover, or discover, how God’s love shines through this mystery of faith.

The Second Vatican Council was deeply inspired by the desire to lead Christians to understand the greatness of faith and the beauty of the encounter with Christ. For this reason it was necessary first of all to implement, with the

guidance of the Holy Spirit, an appropriate renewal of the Liturgy, because the Church continually lives of it and renews herself thanks to it.

A central theme that the Council Fathers emphasized was the liturgical formation of the faithful, indispensable for a true renewal. It is precisely this renewal as well as the purpose of this series of catecheses that we are beginning today: to grow in our understanding of the great gift that God has given us in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is a wondrous event in which Jesus Christ, our life, makes himself present. Participating in the Mass “is truly living again the redemptive passion and death of Our Lord. It is a visible manifestation: the Lord makes himself present on the altar to be offered to the Father for the salvation of the world” (*Homily at the Domus Sanctae Marthae*, 10 February 2014). The Lord is there with us, present. So often do we go there, look at things, talk amongst ourselves while the priest is celebrating the Eucharist ... and we do not celebrate close to Him. But it is the Lord! If today the President of the Republic were to come, or some very important world personage, it is certain that we would all be close to him, that we would want to greet him. But think: when you go to Mass, the Lord is there! And you get distracted. It is the Lord! We have to think about this. “Father, it’s that the Masses are dull” — “But what are you saying,

that the Lord is dull?” — “No, no. Not the Mass, the priests” — “Ah, may the priests convert, but it is the Lord who is there!” Do you understand? Do not forget it. “Participating in Mass is living again the redemptive passion and death of Our Lord”.

Now let us try asking ourselves a few simple questions. For example, why do we make the sign of the Cross and perform the Penitential Rite at the beginning of Mass? And here I would like to add another side note. Have you seen how children make the sign of the Cross? You do not know what they are doing, whether it is the sign of the Cross or an outline. They do this [*gesturing*]. Children must be taught how to make the sign of the Cross properly. This is how the Mass begins; this is how life begins; this is how the day begins. This means that we are redeemed by the Lord’s Cross. Watch the children and teach them how to make the sign of the Cross properly. And those Readings, during Mass, why are they there? Why are there three Readings on Sunday and two on the other days? Why are they read? What do the Readings at Mass mean? Why are they read and what is their purpose? Or, why does the priest presiding at the celebration say at a certain point: “Lift up our hearts”? He does not say: “Lift up your cell phones to take a photo!”. No, that’s bad! I tell you, it makes me sad when I am celebrating here in Saint Peter’s Square or in the Basilica to see

many cell phones lifted up, not only by the faithful but also by some priests and even bishops! But please! Mass is not a spectacle: it is going to encounter the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord. This is why the priest says: “Lift up our hearts”. What does this mean? Remember: no cell phones.

It is really important to return to the basics, to rediscover what is essential, through what we touch and see in the celebration of the Sacraments. The question of the Apostle Saint Thomas (cf. Jn 20:25), seeking to see and touch the nail wounds in Jesus’ body, and the desire to be able in some way to “touch” God in order to believe in him. What Saint Thomas asks of the Lord is what we all need: to see him, to touch him so that we may be able to know him. The Sacraments meet this human need. The Sacraments, the Eucharistic celebration in a particular way, are signs of God’s love, the privileged ways for us to encounter him.

Thus, through these catecheses that we are beginning today, I would like to rediscover with you the beauty that is hidden in the Eucharistic celebration and that, once revealed, gives full meaning to each person’s life. May Our Lady accompany us on this new stretch of road. Thank you.

— CHAPTER II —

Mass is Prayer

Wednesday, 15 November 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

We are continuing with the catecheses on the Holy Mass. To illustrate the beauty of the Eucharistic celebration, I would like to begin with a very simple aspect: Mass is prayer; rather, it is prayer *par excellence*, the loftiest, the most sublime, and at the same time the most “concrete”. In fact it is the loving encounter with God through his Word and the Body and Blood of Jesus. It is an encounter with the Lord.

But first we must answer a question. What truly is prayer? It is first of all a dialogue, a personal relationship with God. Man was created as a being in a personal relationship with God who finds his complete fulfillment only in the encounter with his Creator. The path of life leads toward the definitive encounter with the Lord.

The Book of Genesis states that man was created in the image and likeness of God, who is the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, a perfect relationship of love which is unity. From this we can understand that we were all created in order to enter a perfect relationship of love, in the continuous giving and receiving of ourselves so as to be able to find the fulfillment of our being.

When Moses, before the burning bush, receives God's call, he asks Him His name. And how does God respond? "I am who I am" (Ex 3:14). This expression, in its original sense, expresses *presence and favour*, and indeed, immediately afterwards God adds: "the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob" (cf. v. 15). Thus, when Christ calls his disciples, he, too, calls them so that they may be *with Him*. This indeed is the greatest grace: being able to feel that the Mass, the Eucharist, is the privileged moment to be with Jesus and, through him, with God and with brothers and sisters.

Praying, as every true dialogue, is also knowing how to be in silence — in dialogues there are moments of silence — in silence together with Jesus. When we go to Mass, perhaps we arrive five minutes early and begin to chat with the person next to us. But this is not the moment for small talk; it is the moment of silence to prepare ourselves for the dialogue. It is the moment for recollection within the heart, to prepare ourselves for the encounter with Jesus. Silence is so important! Remember what I said last week: we are not going to a spectacle, we are going to the encounter with the Lord, and silence prepares us and accompanies us. Pausing in silence with Jesus. From this mysterious silence of God springs his Word which resonates in our heart. Jesus himself teaches us how it is truly possible to "be" with the Father and he shows us this with

his prayer. The Gospels show us Jesus who withdraws to secluded places to pray; seeing his intimate relationship with God, the disciples feel the desire to be able to take part in it, and they ask him: “Lord, teach us to pray” (Lk 11:1). We heard it in the First Reading, at the beginning of the Audience. Jesus responds that the first thing necessary for prayer is being able to say “Father”. Let us take heed: if I am not able to say “Father” to God, I am not capable of prayer. We must learn to say “Father”, that is, to place ourselves in his presence with filial trust. But to be able to learn, we must humbly recognize that we need to be taught, and to say with simplicity: ‘Lord, teach me to pray’.

This is the first point: to be humble, to recognize ourselves as children, to rest in the Father, to trust in him. To enter the Kingdom of Heaven, it is necessary to become little, like children. In the sense that children know how to trust; they know that someone will take care of them, of what they will eat, of what they will wear and so on (cf. Mt 6:25-32). This is the first perspective: *trust and confidence*, as a child toward his parents; to know that God remembers you, takes care of you, of you, of me, of everyone.

The second condition, too, is being precisely like children; it is to let ourselves be surprised. A child always asks thousands of questions because he wants to discover the world; and he even marvels at little things because everything

is new to him. To enter the Kingdom of Heaven we must let ourselves be astonished. In our relationship with the Lord, in prayer — I ask — do we let ourselves be astonished or do we think that prayer is speaking with God as parrots do? No, it is trusting and opening the heart so as to let ourselves be astonished. Do we allow ourselves to be surprised by God who is always the God of surprises? Because the encounter with the Lord is always a living encounter; it is not a museum encounter. It is a living encounter, and we go to Mass, not to a museum. We go to a living encounter with the Lord.

The Gospel speaks of a certain Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-21), an elderly man, an authority in Israel, who goes to Jesus to get to know him; and the Lord speaks to him of the need to “be born anew” (cf. v. 3). But what does it mean? Can one be “reborn”? Is it possible to return to having the zest, the joy, the wonder of life, even in the face of so much tragedy? This is a fundamental question of our faith, and this is the longing of every true believer: the longing to be reborn, the joy of beginning anew. Do we have this longing? Does each of us have the wish to be born ever anew in order to meet the Lord? Do you have this wish? Indeed, one can easily lose it because, due to so many activities, so many projects to implement, in the end we are short of time and we lose sight of what is fundamental: the inner life of the heart, our spiritual life, our life which is the encounter with the Lord in prayer.

In truth, the Lord surprises us by showing us that he loves us even in our weaknesses. “Jesus Christ ... is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn 2:2). This gift, the source of true consolation — but the Lord always forgives us — this consoles; it is a true consolation; it is a gift that we are given through the Eucharist, that wedding feast at which the Bridegroom encounters our frailty. Can I say that when I receive communion during Mass, the Lord encounters my frailty? Yes! We can say so because this is true! The Lord encounters our frailty so as to lead us back to our first call: that of being in the image and likeness of God. This is the environment of the Eucharist. This is prayer.

— CHAPTER III —

The Memorial of Christ's Passover

Wednesday, 22 November 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Continuing with the catecheses on the Mass, we can ask ourselves: what essentially is the Mass? The Mass is the *memorial of Christ's Passover*. It makes us participants in his victory over sin and death, and gives full meaning to our life.

For this reason, to understand the value of the Mass, we must first understand the biblical significance of “memorial”. It is “not merely the recollection of past events but makes them in a certain way present and real. This is how Israel understands its liberation from Egypt: every time Passover is celebrated, the Exodus events are made present to the memory of believers so that they may conform their lives to them” (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1363). Jesus Christ, with his passion, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven brought the Passover to fulfillment. And the Mass is the memorial of *his* Passover, of *his* “exodus”, which he carried out for us, so as to lead us out of slavery and introduce us to the promised land of eternal life. It is not merely a remembrance, no. It is more: it is making present what happened 20 centuries ago.

The Eucharist always leads us to the pinnacle of the salvific action of God: the Lord Jesus, making himself Bread broken for us, pours out upon us his mercy and his love, as he did on the Cross, thus renewing our hearts, our existence and our way of relating to him and to our brothers and sisters. The Second Vatican Council said: “As often as the sacrifice of the cross[,] in which Christ our Passover was sacrificed, is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried on” (Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 3).

Every celebration of the Eucharist is a ray of that never setting sun that is the Risen Jesus. Taking part in the Mass, particularly on Sunday, means entering the victory of the Risen One, being illuminated by his light, warmed by his compassion. Through the Eucharistic celebration the Holy Spirit makes us participants in the divine life that is able to transfigure our whole mortal being. In his passage from death to life, from time to eternity, the Lord Jesus also draws us with him to experience the Passover. In the Mass we celebrate Passover. We, during Mass, are with Jesus, who died and is Risen, and he draws us forth to eternal life. In the Mass we unite with him. Rather, Christ lives in us and we live in him: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ”, Saint Paul states, “who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who

loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). This is what Paul thought.

Indeed, his Blood frees us from death and from the fear of death. It frees us not only from the dominion of physical death, but from the spiritual death which is evil, sin, which catches us each time we fall victim to our own sin or that of others. Thus our life becomes polluted; it loses beauty; it loses meaning; it withers.

Instead, Christ restores our life; Christ is the fullness of life, and when he faced death he destroyed it forever: “By rising he destroyed death and restored life” (cf. *Eucharistic Prayer* iv). Christ’s Passover is the definitive victory over death, because he transformed his death in the supreme act of love. He died out of love! And in the Eucharist, he wishes to communicate this, his paschal, victorious love, to us. If we receive him with faith, we too can truly love God and neighbour; we can love as he loved us, by giving our life.

If Christ’s love is within me, I can give myself fully to others, in the interior certainty that even if the other were to wound me I would not die; otherwise I should defend myself. The martyrs gave their own lives in this certainty of Christ’s victory over death. Only if we experience this power of Christ, the power of his love, are we truly free to give ourselves without fear. This is

the Mass: to enter this passion, death, resurrection, ascension of Jesus; when we go to Mass it is as if we were going to Calvary itself. But consider: whether at the moment of Mass we go to Calvary — let us ponder this with the imagination — and we know that that man there is Jesus. But will we allow ourselves to chat, to take photographs, to put on a little show? No! Because it is Jesus! We certainly pause in silence, in sorrow and also in the joy of being saved. As we enter the church to celebrate Mass, let us think about this: I am going to Calvary, where Jesus gave his life for me. In this way the spectacle disappears; the small talk disappears; the comments and these things that distance us from something so beautiful as the Mass, Jesus' triumph.

I think that it is clearer now how the Passover is made present and active each time we celebrate the Mass, which is the meaning of *memorial*. Taking part in the Eucharist enables us to enter the Paschal Mystery of Christ, giving ourselves to pass over with him from death to life, meaning there, on Calvary. The Mass is experiencing Calvary; it is not a spectacle.

— CHAPTER IV —

Why Go to Sunday Mass?

Wednesday, 13 December 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Resuming the series of catecheses on the Mass, today we ask ourselves: *why go to Sunday Mass?*

The Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2177). We Christians go to Sunday Mass to encounter the Risen Lord, or better still to allow ourselves to be encountered by him, to hear his Word, to nourish ourselves at his table, and thus to become the Church, that is, his mystical living Body in the world.

From the first hour, Jesus' disciples understood this; they celebrated the Eucharistic encounter with the Lord on the day of the week that the Hebrews called "the first of the week" and the Romans called "day of the sun", because *on that day Jesus rose from the dead* and appeared to the disciples, speaking with them, eating with them, giving them the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 28:1; Mk 16:9, 14; Lk 24:1, 13; Jn 20:1, 19), as we have heard in the Gospel reading. The great outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost also happened on a Sunday, the 50th day after Jesus' Resurrection.

For these reasons, Sunday is a holy day for us, sanctified by the Eucharistic celebration, the living presence of the Lord among us and for us. Thus, it is the Mass that *makes* Sunday Christian. The Christian Sunday revolves around the Mass. For a Christian, what is a Sunday in which the encounter with the Lord is lacking?

There are Christian communities which, unfortunately, cannot enjoy Mass every Sunday; they too, however, on this holy day, are called to reflect in prayer in the name of the Lord, listening to the Word of God and keeping alive the desire for the Eucharist.

Some secularized societies have lost the Christian sense of Sunday illuminated by the Eucharist. This is a shame! In these contexts it is necessary to revive this awareness, to recover the meaning of the celebration, the meaning of the joy, of the parish community, of solidarity, of the rest which restores body and soul (cf. ccc, nn. 2177-2178). Of all these values, the Eucharist is our guide, Sunday after Sunday. For this reason the Second Vatican Council wished to emphasize that Sunday “is the original feast day, and it should be proposed to the piety of the faithful and taught to them so that it may become in fact a day of joy and of freedom from work” (Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 106).

The Sunday abstention from work did not exist in the early centuries: it is a specific contribution of Christianity. According to biblical tradition

Jews rest on the Sabbath, while in Roman society a day of the week was not provided for abstention from servile labour. It was the Christian awareness of living as children and not as slaves, inspired by the Eucharist, which has made Sunday — almost universally — the day of rest.

Without Christ we are condemned to be dominated by everyday weariness, with its worries, and by fear of the future. The Sunday encounter with the Lord gives us the strength to experience the present with confidence and courage, and to go forth with hope. For this reason we Christians go to encounter the Lord on Sunday, in the Eucharistic celebration.

Eucharistic communion with Jesus, Risen and ever-Living, anticipates the Sunday without sunset, when there will be no more weariness nor pain, nor sorrow nor tears, but only the joy of living fully and forever with the Lord. Sunday Mass also speaks to us of this blessed repose, teaching us to entrust ourselves during the course of the week to the hands of the Father who is in heaven.

How can we respond to those who say that it is of no use going to Mass, even on Sunday, because the important thing is to live well, to love our neighbour? It is true that the quality of Christian life is measured by the capacity to love, as Jesus said: “By this all men will know that you

are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35); but how can we practice the Gospel without drawing the energy necessary to do so, one Sunday after another, from the inexhaustible source of the Eucharist? We do not go to Mass in order to give something to God, but *to receive what we truly need from him*. We are reminded of this by the Church’s prayer, which is addressed to God in this way: “although you have no need of our praise, yet our thanksgiving is itself your gift, since our praises add nothing to your greatness but profit us for salvation” (*Roman Missal*, Common Preface iv).

In conclusion, why do we go to Mass on Sundays? It is not enough to respond that it is a precept of the Church; this helps to preserve its value, but alone does not suffice. We Christians need to participate in Sunday Mass because only with Jesus’ grace, with his living presence within us and among us, can we put his commandment into practice, and thus be his credible witnesses.

— CHAPTER V —

The Introductory Rites

Wednesday, 20 December 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Today I would like to enter the vibrant heart of the Eucharistic celebration. The Mass is composed of two parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharistic Liturgy. They are so closely connected to each other that they form one single act of worship (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 56; *General Instructions of the Roman Missal*, n. 28). The celebration, introduced by several preparatory rites and concluded by others, thus forms a single body and cannot be separated, but for clarification I will try to explain its various moments, each of which is capable of touching and engaging a dimension of our humanity. One must know these holy signs in order to experience the Mass fully and to enjoy all of its beauty.

Once the people are gathered, the celebration opens with the Introductory Rites, including the Entrance of the celebrants or the celebrant, the Greeting — “The Lord be with you” or “Peace be with you” —, the Act of Penitence — “I confess”, with which we ask forgiveness for our sins —, the *Kyrie Eleison*, the Gloria Hymn and the Collect Prayer: it is called the “collect prayer”, not because the collection of offerings takes

place then: it is the Collect of the prayer intentions of all peoples; and that Collect of the peoples' intention rises to heaven as a prayer. Their purpose — that of these Introductory Rites — is “to ensure that the faithful who come together as one establish communion and dispose themselves to listen properly to God’s word and to celebrate the Eucharist worthily” (*General Instructions of the Roman Missal*, n. 46). It is not a good habit to look at your watch and say: “I am on time; I arrive after the sermon and this way I fulfil the precept”. Mass begins with the sign of the Cross, with these Introductory Rites, because there we begin to adore God as a community. And for this reason it is important to make sure you do not arrive late, but rather early, in order to prepare the heart for this rite, for this community celebration.

Normally, while the entrance hymn is sung, the priest, with the altar servers, approaches the altar in procession, and salutes it with a bow and, in a sign of veneration, kisses it and, when there is incense, incenses it. Why? Because the altar is Christ: it is the figure of Christ. When we look at the altar, we are looking exactly at Christ. The altar is Christ. These gestures, which could pass unobserved, are highly significant, because they express from the very beginning that the Mass is an encounter of love with Christ, who, by offering his Body on the Cross, became “the Priest, the Altar and the Lamb” (cf. *Preface v of Easter*). The altar, in fact, as a symbol of Christ,

is “the center of the thanksgiving that is accomplished through the Eucharist” (*General Instructions of the Roman Missal*, n. 296); and the whole community [gathers] around the altar, which is Christ, not to look at each other, but to look at Christ, because Christ is at the centre of the community; he is not distant from it.

Then there is the *sign of the Cross*. The presiding priest traces the sign on himself and all the members of the assembly do likewise, knowing that the liturgical act is performed “in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. And here I will mention another tiny subject. Have you seen how children make the sign of the Cross? They do not know what they are doing: sometimes they make a design, which is not the sign of the Cross. Please, mom and dad, grandparents, teach the children, from the beginning — from a tender age — to make the sign of the Cross properly. And explain to them that it is having Jesus’ Cross as protection. The Mass begins with the sign of the Cross. The whole prayer moves, so to speak, within the space of the Most Holy Trinity — “In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” —, which is the space of infinite communion; it has as its beginning and end the love of the Triune God, made manifest and given to us in the Cross of Christ. In fact his Paschal Mystery is the gift of the Trinity, and the Eucharist flows ever from his pierced Heart. When we make the sign of the Cross, therefore, we not only commemorate our

Baptism, but affirm that the liturgical prayer is the encounter with God in Jesus Christ, who became flesh, died on the Cross and rose in glory for us.

Thus, the priest offers the *liturgical Greeting* with the expression: “The Lord be with you” or something similar — there are several; and the assembly responds: “And with your spirit”. We are in a dialogue; we are at the beginning of the Mass and we must think about the significance of all these gestures and words. We are entering a “symphony”, in which various tones of voice resonate, including moments of silence, in view of creating “harmony” among all the participants, which is to acknowledge that they are animated by a unique Spirit and for the same aim. Indeed, by the priest’s “Greeting and the people’s response, the mystery of the Church gathered together is made manifest” (*General Instructions of the Roman Missal*, n. 50). In this way we express the common faith and the mutual wish to abide with the Lord and to live in unity with the entire community.

And this is a prayerful symphony which is being created, and it immediately presents a very moving moment, because the presiding priest invites everyone to acknowledge their sins. We are all sinners. I do not know, perhaps someone among you is not a sinner.... If someone is not a sinner, raise your hand, please, so we can all see. But there are no hands raised, okay: you have good

faith! All of us are sinners; and for this reason at the start of Mass we ask forgiveness. It is the *Act of Penitence*. It is not a matter of only thinking about the sins committed, but much more: it is the invitation to confess our sins before God and before the community, before our brothers and sisters, with humility and sincerity, like the tax collector at the Temple. If the Eucharist truly renders present the Paschal Mystery, meaning Christ's passing from death to life, then the first thing we have to do is recognize our own situation of death in order to rise again with him to new life. This helps us understand how important the Act of Penitence is. And we will return to this theme in the next catechesis.

We are going to explain the Mass step by step. But please: teach the children to make the sign of the Cross properly, please!

— CHAPTER VI —

The Penitential Act

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 3 January 2018*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Resuming the catecheses on the Eucharistic celebration, let us consider today, in the context of the Introductory Rites, the *Penitential Act*. In its sobriety, it favours the attitude with which we are prepared to worthily celebrate the holy mysteries, that is, by acknowledging our sins before God and our brothers and sisters, acknowledging that we are sinners. In fact the priest's invitation is addressed to the whole community in prayer, because we are all sinners. What can the Lord give to one whose heart is already filled with self-importance, with one's own success? Nothing, because a presumptuous person is incapable of receiving forgiveness, as he is satisfied by his presumed righteousness. Let us consider the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, where only the latter — the tax collector — returns home justified, that is, forgiven (cf. Lk 18:9-14). One who is aware of his own wretchedness and lowers his gaze with humility feels God's merciful gaze set upon him. We know through experience that only one who is able to acknowledge his mistakes and apologize receives the understanding and forgiveness of others.

Quietly listening to the voice of our conscience allows us to recognize that our thoughts are far from divine thoughts, that our words and our actions are often worldly, guided, that is, by choices contradictory to the Gospel. Therefore, at the beginning of Mass, as a community, we perform the Penitential Act through a formula of *general confession*, recited in the *first person singular*. Each one confesses to God and to his brothers and sisters to having “greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do”. Yes, even in omissions, that is, in having neglected to do the good I could have done. We often feel that we are good because — we say — “I did no harm to anyone”. In reality, it is not enough to refrain from doing harm to our neighbour; we must choose to do good, by seizing opportunities to bear good witness that we are disciples of Jesus. It is good to emphasize that we confess to being sinners *both to God and to our brothers and sisters*: this helps us understand the dimension of sin which, while separating us from God, also divides us from our brothers and sisters, and vice versa. Sin severs: sin severs the relationship with God and it severs the relationship with brothers and sisters, relationships within the family, in society and in the community: sin always severs; it separates; it divides.

The words we say with our mouth are accompanied by the *gesture of striking our breast*, acknowledging that I have sinned through my

own fault and not that of others. Indeed, it often happens that, out of fear or shame, we point a finger to blame others. It costs us to admit being at fault, but it does us good to confess it sincerely. Confess your own sins. I remember an anecdote that an elderly missionary used to tell, of a woman who went to confession and started speaking about her husband's failings. Then she moved on to talk about her mother-in-law's failings and then the sins of her neighbours. At a certain point, the confessor said to her: "But, madam, tell me: have you finished? — Very well: you have finished with the sins of others. Now start telling your own". Tell your own sins!

After the confession of sins, we ask the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Angels and Saints to pray to the Lord for us. In this too, the *communion of Saints* is valuable: that is, the intercession of these "companions and life examples" (cf. Preface of 1 November) supports us on the journey toward full communion with God, when sin will be abolished once and for all.

In addition to "I confess", the Penitential Act can be performed with other formulae, for example: "Have mercy upon us, O Lord, / for we have sinned against thee. / Show us thy mercy, O Lord, / and grant us thy salvation" (cf. Ps 123[122]:3; Jer 14:20; Ps 85:8). Especially on Sundays, the blessing and sprinkling of water may be performed as a reminder of Baptism (cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 51),

which washes away all sins. It is also possible, as part of the Penitential Act, to sing the *Kyrie eleison*: with the ancient Greek expression, we praise the Lord — *Kyrios* — and implore his mercy (*ibid.*, 52).

Sacred Scripture offers us luminous examples of “penitent” figures who, coming back into themselves after having committed sin, find the courage to take off the mask and open themselves to the grace that renews the heart. Let us think of King David and the words attributed to him in the Psalm: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my iniquity” (cf. 51[50]:1-2). Let us consider the prodigal son who returns to the father: “God, be merciful to me a sinner” (Lk 18:13). Let us also think of Saint Peter, of Zacchaeus, of the Samaritan woman. Measuring ourselves with the fragility of the clay of which we are molded is an experience that strengthens us: as it makes us take account of our weakness, it opens our heart to invoke the divine mercy which transforms and converts. And this is what we do in the Penitential Act at the beginning of Mass.

— CHAPTER VII —

The “Gloria”

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 10 January 2018*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!

Over the course of the series of catecheses on the Eucharistic celebration, we have seen that the Penitential Act helps us to strip ourselves of our presumptions and to present ourselves to God as we truly are, conscious of being sinners, in the hope of being forgiven.

It is in the very encounter between human misery and divine mercy that the gratitude expressed in the “Gloria” comes alive; “a very ancient and venerable hymn in which the Church, gathered together in the Holy Spirit, glorifies and entreats God the Father and the Lamb” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 53).

The beginning of this hymn — “Glory to God in the Highest” — recalls the song of the Angels at Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem: a joyful heralding of the embrace between heaven and earth. This song also engages us, gathered in prayer: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will”.

After the “Gloria” or in its absence, immediately following the Penitential Act, prayer takes on a particular form in the oration known as the “collect”, through which the very character of the celebration is expressed, with variations according to the days and time of the year (cf. *ibid.*, 54). With the invitation “let us pray”, the priest encourages the people to recollect themselves with him in a *brief silence*, so that they may be conscious that they are in God’s presence and so that all can formulate within their own heart the personal petitions with which they are participating in the Mass (cf. *ibid.*, 54). The priest says “let us pray” and then there is a brief silence, and each one thinks about the things they need, that they wish to ask for in the prayer.

The silence is not confined to the absence of words but rather to preparing oneself to listen to other voices: the one in our heart and, above all, the voice of the Holy Spirit. In the Liturgy, the nature of sacred silence depends on the moment in which it takes place: “within the Act of Penitence and again after the invitation to pray, all recollect themselves; but at the conclusion of a reading or the homily, all meditate briefly on what they have heard; then after Communion, they praise and pray to God in their hearts” (*ibid.*, 45). Thus, before the opening prayer, silence helps us to recollect ourselves and to contemplate why we are there. This, then, is the importance of listening to our heart, so as to then

open it to the Lord. Perhaps we have experienced days of toil, of joy, of pain, and we want to tell the Lord about it, to invoke his help, to ask that he be at our side; we may have relatives and friends who are ill or who are undergoing difficult trials; we may wish to entrust to God the future of the Church and the world. And this is the purpose of the brief silence before the priest; *collecting everyone's petitions*, he expresses aloud to God, on behalf of all, the common prayer, which concludes the Introductory Rites by offering the "collect" of the individual petitions. I strongly recommend that priests observe this moment of silence and not rush: "Let us pray", and let there be silence. I recommend this to priests. Without this silence, we run the risk of neglecting the recollection of the soul.

The priest recites this plea, this collect prayer, with outstretched arms. It is the prayerful manner practiced by Christians ever since the first centuries — as attested in numerous frescoes in the catacombs in Rome — to imitate Christ with his arms outstretched on the wood of the Cross. And there, Christ is both the One praying and also the Prayer! In the Crucifix, we recognize the Priest who offers God the worship He cherishes, namely, filial obedience.

Prayers in the Roman Rite are concise but rich in meaning. One can have beautiful meditations on these prayers. Very beautiful! Returning to meditate on these texts, even outside the Mass,

can help us understand how to address God, what to ask and which words to use. May the Liturgy become for all of us a true school of prayer.

— CHAPTER VIII —

**Liturgy of the Word:
The Readings**

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 31 January 2018*

Dear Brothers and sisters, Good Morning!

Today we continue the catechesis on the Holy Mass. After pausing to reflect on the Introductory Rites, let us now consider the Liturgy of the Word, which is an integral part because we gather precisely to listen to what God has done and still intends to do for us. It is an experience which occurs “live” and not through hearsay because “when the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 29; cf. Const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7, 33).

And how many times, as the Word of God is being read, are comments made: “Look at him... look at her; look at the hat she is wearing: it’s ridiculous...”. And the comments begin. Isn’t that true? Should comments be made while the Word of God is being read? [*They answer: “No!”*]. No, because if you are chatting with others, you are not listening to the Word of God. When the Word of God is being read from the Bible — the First Reading, the Second Reading,

the Responsorial Psalm and the Gospel — we must listen, open our heart because it is God himself who is speaking to us, and we must not think about other things or talk about other things. Do you understand? I will explain to you what takes place in this Liturgy of the Word.

The pages of the Bible cease to be writings and become living words, spoken by God. It is God, who through the reader, speaks to us and questions us, we who listen with faith. The Spirit “who has spoken through the prophets” (*Creed*) and has inspired the sacred authors makes the Word of God that “we hear outwardly have its effect inwardly” (*Lectionary*, Introduction, 9). But in order to listen to the Word of God, we also need our heart to be open to receive the Word in our heart. God speaks and we listen to him, in order to then put into practice what we have heard. It is very important to listen. At times perhaps we do not fully understand because there are a few somewhat difficult Readings. Yet God speaks to us in another way; [we must be] silent and listen to the Word of God. Do not forget this. During Mass, when the Readings begin, let us listen to the Word of God.

We need to listen to him! It is in fact, a question of life, as we are reminded by the profound expression that “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). Life which gives us the Word

of God. In this sense, we are speaking of the Liturgy of the Word as a “meal” that the Lord prepares in order to nourish our spiritual life. The meal of the Liturgy is a lavish one which draws largely from the treasures of the Bible (cf. SC, 51), both the Old and the New Testaments, because in them, the Church proclaims the one and the same mystery of Christ (cf. *Lectionary*, Introduction, 5). Let us think about the richness of the Bible readings offered by the three Sunday cycles, which in the light of the Synoptic Gospels, accompany us throughout the Liturgical Year: a great richness. Here I wish to also recall the importance of the Responsorial Psalm whose function is to foster meditation on what was heard in the reading that precedes it. It is preferable that the Psalm be enriched by song, at least in the response (cf. GIRM, 61; *Lectionary*, Introduction, 19-22).

The Liturgical proclamation of the very same readings with the songs derived from Sacred Scripture expresses and fosters ecclesial communion by accompanying the journey of each and every one. It is thus understandable that some subjective choices such as the omission of readings or their substitution with non-biblical texts are forbidden. I have heard that when there is a news story, some people read the newspaper because it is the news of the day. No! The Word of God is the Word of God! We can read the newspaper later. But there, we are reading the Word of God. It is the Lord who is speaking to

us. Substituting that Word with other things impoverishes and compromises the dialogue between God and his people in prayer. On the contrary, the dignity of the pulpit and the use of the Lectionary, the availability of good readers and psalmists [are required]. But we must look for good readers! Those who know how to read, not those who read [distorting the words] and nothing is understood. This is how it is. Good readers. They must be prepared and rehearse before the Mass in order to read well. And this creates a climate of receptive silence.

We know that the Word of the Lord is of indispensable help so as not to get lost, as is clearly recognized by the Psalmist who, speaking to the Lord, confesses: “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119[118]:105). How can we face our earthly pilgrimage with its difficulties and its trials without being regularly nourished and enlightened by the Word of God which resounds in the Liturgy?

Of course it is not enough to listen with our ears without welcoming into our heart the seed of the Divine Word, allowing it to bear fruit. Let us remember the Parable of the Sower and of the results achieved by the different types of soil (cf. Mk 4:14-20). The action of the Holy Spirit which renders the response effective needs hearts that allow themselves to be fashioned and cultivated in such a way that what is heard at

Mass passes into daily life, according to the admonishment of the Apostle James: “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (Jas 1:22). The Word of God makes a pathway within us. We listen to it with our ears and it passes to our hearts; it does not remain in our ears; it must go to the heart. And from the heart, it passes to the hands, to good deeds. This is the path which the Word of God follows: from our ears to our heart and hands. Let us learn these things. Thank you!

— CHAPTER IX —

**Liturgy of the Word:
The Gospel and the Homily**

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 7 February 2018*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Let us continue with the catecheses on the Holy Mass. We had reached the readings. The dialogue between God and his people, developed in the Liturgy of the Word of the Mass, culminates in the proclamation of the Gospel. It precedes the chanting of the *Alleluia* — or, during Lent, another acclamation — with which “the assembly of the faithful welcomes and greets the Lord who is about to speak to it in the Gospel”.¹ As the mysteries of Christ illuminate the entire biblical revelation, likewise, in the Liturgy of the Word, the Gospel constitutes the light for understanding the meaning of the biblical texts which precede it, both of the Old and the New Testaments. Indeed, “Christ himself is the centre and fullness of the whole of Scripture”.² Jesus Christ is always at the centre, always.

¹ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 62.

² *General Introduction to the Lectionary*, 5.

Therefore the liturgy itself distinguishes the Gospel from the other readings and surrounds it with particular honour and veneration.³ Indeed, its reading is reserved to the ordained minister, who concludes by kissing the Book; it calls us to stand up to listen and to make the sign of the Cross on our forehead, our mouth and our breast; the candles and incense honour Christ, who, through the Gospel reading, makes his effective Word resonate. From these signs, the assembly recognizes the presence of Christ who gives them the “Good News” which converts and transforms. What occurs is a direct discourse, as attested by the acclamations with which we respond to the proclamation: “Glory to you, O Lord” and “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ”. We stand up to listen to the Gospel: but it is Christ who is speaking to us, there. And this is why we are attentive, because it is a direct conversation. It is the Lord who is speaking to us.

Thus, in the Mass we do not read the Gospel in order to know how things happened, but rather, we listen to the Gospel in order to realize what Jesus once did and said; and that Word is living, the Word of Jesus that is in the Gospel is alive and touches my heart. Therefore, listening to the Gospel is very important, with an open heart, because it is the living Word. Saint Augustine writes: “The Gospel is the mouth of Christ. He

³ Cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 60, 134.

is seated in heaven, but he has not stopped speaking on earth”.⁴ If it is true that in the liturgy “Christ is still proclaiming His Gospel”,⁵ it follows that, by participating in the Mass, we must give him a response. We listen to the Gospel and we must give a response in our life.

In order to get his message across, Christ also makes use of the words of the priest who, after the Gospel, gives the homily.⁶ Strongly recommended by the Second Vatican Council as part of the liturgy itself,⁷ the homily is not a trite discourse — nor a catechesis like the one I am giving now —, nor is it a conference nor a lesson. The homily is something else. What is the homily? It is taking up “once more the dialogue which the Lord has already established with his people”,⁸ so it may find fulfilment in life. The authentic exegesis of the Gospel is our holy life! The Word of the Lord concludes its journey by becoming flesh in us, being translated into

⁴ *Sermon 85*, 1: pl 38, 520; see also *Lectures on the Gospel of John*, xxx, i: pl 35, 1632; ccl 36, 289.

⁵ Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 33.

⁶ Cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 65-66; *General Introduction to the Lectionary*, 24-27.

⁷ Cf. Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 52.

⁸ Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 137.

works, as happened in Mary and in the Saints. Remember what I told you last time: the Word of the Lord enters through the ears, goes to the heart and passes to the hands, to good deeds. And the homily also follows the Word of the Lord and also follows this path in order to help us so that the Word of the Lord may go to the hands, by passing through the heart.

I have already addressed the subject of the homily in the Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, where I recalled that the liturgical context “demands that preaching should guide the assembly, and the preacher, to a life-changing communion with Christ in the Eucharist”.⁹

The homilist — the one who preaches, the priest or the deacon or the bishop — must carry out his ministry well, by offering a real service to all those who participate in the Mass, but those who listen to it must also do their part. Firstly by paying proper attention, that is, assuming the right interior disposition, without subjective pretexts, knowing that every preacher has merits and limitations. If at times there is reason for boredom because a homily is long or unfocused or unintelligible, at other times, however, prejudice creates the obstacle. And the homilist must be aware that he is not doing something of his own, but is preaching, giving voice to Jesus; he is preaching the Word of Jesus. And the homily

⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

must be prepared well; it must be brief, short! A priest told me that once he had gone to another city where his parents lived, and his father told him: “You know, I am pleased, because my friends and I have found a church where they say Mass without a homily!”. And how often do we see that during the homily some fall asleep, others chat or go outside to smoke a cigarette.... For this reason, please, make the homily brief, but prepare it well. And how do we prepare a homily, dear priests, deacons, bishops? How should it be prepared? With prayer, by studying the Word of God and by making a clear and brief summary; it should not last more than 10 minutes, please.

In conclusion we could say that in the Liturgy of the Word, through the Gospel and the homily, God dialogues with his people, who listen to him with attention and veneration and, at the same time, recognize he is present and acting. Hence, if we listen to the “Good News”, we will be converted and transformed by it, and therefore capable of changing ourselves and the world. Why? Because the Good News, the Word of God enters through the ears, goes to the heart and passes to the hands in order to do good deeds.

— CHAPTER X —

**The Profession of Faith
and the Universal Prayer**

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 14 February 2018*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Good morning, even if the day is a little unpleasant. But if the soul is joyful it is always a good day. So, good day! Today the Audience is taking place in two places: a small group of sick people is in the Hall, due to the weather, and we are here. But we see them and they see us on the jumbo screen. Let us greet them with a round of applause.

We are continuing with the catechesis on the Mass. To what does listening to the Bible readings, which are elaborated upon in the homily, respond? It responds to a right: the spiritual right of the People of God to receive abundantly from the treasury of the Word of God (cf. *General Introduction to the Lectionary*, 45). When we go to Mass, each of us has the right to receive in abundance the Word of God read well, said well and then, explained well in the homily. It is a right! And when the Word of God is not read well, not preached with fervour by the deacon, by the priest or by the bishop, then the faithful are deprived of a right. We have the right to hear the Word of God. The Lord speaks for everyone,

Pastors and the faithful. He knocks at the heart of those who participate in the Mass, each one in his or her condition of life, age, situation. The Lord comforts, calls, brings forth sprouts of a new and reconciled life. And this is through his Word. His Word knocks at the heart and changes hearts!

Therefore, after the homily, a moment of silence allows the seed received to settle in the soul, so that intentions to heed what the Spirit has suggested to each person may sprout. Silence after the homily. A good moment of silence must be observed there, and each one should ponder what he or she has heard.

After this silence, how does the Mass continue? The personal response of faith is integrated in the Church's *Profession of Faith*, expressed in the *Creed*. We all recite the *Creed* in the Mass. Recited by the entire assembly, the *Symbolum* manifests the common response to what is heard together from the Word of God (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 185-197). There is an essential nexus between listening and faith. They are linked. Indeed, this — faith — does not arise from human imagination, but, as Saint Paul recalls, “comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ” (Rom 10:17). Thus, faith is nourished by what is heard and leads to the Sacrament. In this way, reciting the *Creed* enables the liturgical assembly to “call to mind and confess the great mysteries of the

faith ... before these mysteries are celebrated in the Eucharist” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 67).

The *Symbolum of Faith* joins the Eucharist to Baptism, received “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”, and recalls that the Sacraments are understood in the light of the faith of the Church.

The response to the Word of God heard with faith is then expressed in the common petition, called the *Universal Prayer*, because it embraces the needs of the Church and of the world (cf. GIRM, 69-71; *General Introduction to the Lectionary*, 30-31).

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council wished to restore this prayer after the Gospel and homily, especially on Sundays and feast days, so that, with the participation of the people, “intercession will be made for holy Church, for the civil authorities, for those oppressed by various needs, for all mankind, and for the salvation of the entire world (Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 53; cf. 1 Tim 2:1-2). Therefore, under the guidance of the priest who introduces and concludes, the people, “exercising the office of their baptismal priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all” (GIRM, 69). And after the individual intentions, proposals by the deacon or a reader, the congregation joins its voice, invoking: “Hear us, Lord”.

Indeed, let us remember what the Lord Jesus told us: “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you” (Jn 15:7). “But we do not believe this, because we have little faith”. But if we had faith — Jesus says — like the mustard seed, we would have received all. “Ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you”. And in this moment of universal prayer after the *Creed*, it is the time to ask the Lord for the most important things in the Mass, the things we need, what we want. “It shall be done for you”; in one way or another, but “it shall be done for you”. “All things are possible to him who believes”, the Lord said. What did that man respond, to whom the Lord had addressed these words — “all things are possible to him who believes”? The man said: “I believe, Lord. Help my little faith”. We too can say: “Lord, I believe. But help my lack of faith”. And we must pray with this spirit of faith: “I believe, Lord; help my lack of faith”. Worldly demands, however, do not ascend toward heaven, just as self-referential requests remain unheard (cf. Jas 4:2-3). The intentions for which the faithful people are invited to pray must give voice to the concrete needs of the ecclesial community and of the world, avoiding recourse to conventional and short-sighted formulas. The “universal” prayer, which concludes the Liturgy of the Word, exhorts us to turn our gaze to God, who takes care of all his children.

— CHAPTER XI —

Liturgy of the Eucharist: Preparation of the Gifts

Wednesday, 28 February 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Let us continue with the catechesis on the Holy Mass. The Liturgy of the Word — on which I focused in the last catecheses — is followed by the main part of the Mass which is the *Liturgy of the Eucharist*. In it, through its holy signs, the Sacrifice of the new covenant sealed by Jesus on the altar of the Cross is made continually present by the Church (cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 47). The Cross was the first Christian altar, and when we approach the altar to celebrate Mass, our memory turns to the altar of the Cross where the first sacrifice was made.

The priest, who represents Christ in the Mass, does what Christ himself did and entrusted to the disciples at the Last Supper: *he took the bread and the cup, gave thanks, gave it to his disciples and said: “Take, eat ... drink: this is my body.... This is the cup of my blood. Do this in memory of me”*.

Obedient to Jesus’ commands, the Church organized the Eucharistic Liturgy into *moments which correspond to the words and the actions*

performed by him on the eve of his Passion. Thus in the *preparation of the gifts*, the bread and the wine — that is, the elements which Christ took into his hands — are brought to the altar. In the *Eucharistic Prayer*, we give thanks to God for the whole work of redemption, and the offerings become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. This is followed by the *breaking of the Bread and Communion*, through which we relive the experience of the Apostles who received the Eucharistic gifts from Christ's own hands (cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 72).

Jesus' first gesture: "he took the bread and the cup of wine", thus corresponds to the *preparation of the gifts*. This is the first part of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It is praiseworthy that the faithful should present the bread and wine to the priest because they symbolize the spiritual offering of the Church assembled for the Eucharist. It is good that the faithful themselves bring the bread and wine to the altar. "Even though the faithful no longer bring from their own possessions the bread and wine intended for the liturgy as in the past, nevertheless the rite of carrying up the offerings still retains its force and its spiritual significance" (*ibid.*, 73). And in this regard, it is significant that in ordaining a priest, when the Bishop gives him the bread and wine he says: "Accept from the holy people of God the gifts to be offered for the Eucharistic sacrifice" (cf. *Pontificale Romanum — Ordination of Bishops*,

Priests and Deacons). The People of God who bring the offering, the bread and wine, the great offering for the Mass!

Therefore, in the symbols of the bread and the wine, the faithful place their offering in the hands of the priest who places them on the altar, or the Lord's Table, "which is the centre of the whole Liturgy of the Eucharist" (girm, 73). Thus, the centre of the Mass is the altar and the altar is Christ. We must always look to the altar which is the centre of the Mass. In the "fruit of the earth and the work of man" the commitment of the faithful to obey the Divine Word is offered as a "sacrifice acceptable to the Almighty Father", "for the good of all his holy Church". Thus, "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" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1368).

Certainly our offering is small but Christ needs this small amount. The Lord asks little of us and he gives us so much. He asks for little. He asks us for good will in our ordinary lives; he asks us for an open heart; he asks us to seek to be better in order to welcome the One who offers himself to us in the Eucharist; he asks us for these symbolic offerings which will become his Body and Blood. An image of this offering of prayer is represented by incense which, consumed by fire, releases a perfumed smoke that rises upwards:

incensing the offerings, as is done on feast days, incensing the Cross and the altar, the priest and the priestly people visibly manifest their bond of offering which unites these realities to Christ's Sacrifice (cf. *girm*, 75). And do not forget: there is the altar which is Christ, but always in reference to the first altar which is the Cross and, upon the altar which is Christ, we bring our small gifts, the bread and the wine which will become so much: Jesus himself who gives himself to us.

And all of this is also expressed in the *prayer over the offerings*. In it, the priest asks God to accept the gifts offered by the Church, invoking the fruit of the extraordinary exchange between our poverty and his richness. In the bread and wine, we present to him the offering of our life so that it may be transformed by the Holy Spirit in the Sacrifice of Christ and become with him a single spiritual offering pleasing to the Father. While the offerings conclude the preparation of the gifts, they prepare us for the Eucharistic Prayer (cf. *ibid.*, 77). May the *spirituality of self-giving* that this moment of Mass teaches us illuminate our days, our relationships with others, the things we do, the suffering we encounter, helping us to build up the earthly city in the light of the Gospel.

— CHAPTER XII —

**Liturgy of the Eucharist:
The Eucharistic Prayer**

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 7 March 2018*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

We are continuing the catecheses on the Holy Mass, and with this catechesis we shall focus on the *Eucharistic Prayer*. The rite of the presentation of the bread and wine having concluded, the *Eucharistic Prayer* begins, which qualifies the celebration of the Mass and constitutes its central moment, ordered to holy Communion.

It corresponds to what Jesus himself did, at the table with the Apostles at the Last Supper, when “he gave thanks” over the bread and then over the cup of wine (cf. Mt 26:27; Mk 14:23; Lk 22:17, 19; 1 Cor 11:24): his thanksgiving lives again each time we celebrate the Eucharist, joining us to his sacrifice of salvation.

And in this solemn Prayer — the Eucharistic Prayer is solemn — the Church expresses what she achieves when she celebrates the Eucharist and the reason why it is celebrated; rather, she makes communion with Christ truly present in the consecrated Bread and Wine. After inviting the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord and to give him thanks, the priest pronounces the

Prayer aloud, in the name of all those present, addressing the Father through Jesus in the Holy Spirit. “The meaning of the Prayer is that the entire congregation of the faithful should join with Christ in confessing the great deeds of God and in the offering of Sacrifice” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 78). And in order to join oneself one needs to understand. For this reason, the Church has wished to celebrate Mass in the language that the people understand, so that each one may join him or herself in this praise and in this great prayer with the priest. In truth, “The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1367).

In the Missal there are different formulations of the Eucharistic Prayer, all constituted of characteristic elements, which I would like to recall now (cf. *ogmr*, 79; *ccc*, 1352-1354). They are all very beautiful. First and foremost there is the *Preface*, which is the *act of thanksgiving* for the gifts of God, in particular for sending his Son as Saviour. The Preface concludes with the *acclamation* of the “Holy”, normally sung. It is beautiful to sing the “Holy”: “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord”. It is beautiful to sing it. The whole assembly joins its voice to that of the Angels and Saints to praise and glorify God.

There is then the invocation of the Spirit, that by his power he consecrate the bread and wine. We invoke the Spirit, that he come and that Jesus

may be in the bread and wine. The action of the Holy Spirit and the efficacy of the very words of Christ uttered by the priest make truly present, under the form of bread and wine, his Body and his Blood, his sacrifice offered on the Cross once and for all (cf. CCC, 1375). Jesus was most clear about this. We have heard how Saint Paul, in the beginning, repeated Jesus' words: "This is my body; this is my blood". "This is my blood; this is my body". It was Jesus himself who said this. We should not have odd thoughts: "But, how come something that...". It is the Body of Jesus; it ends there! Faith: faith comes to our aid; by an act of faith we believe that it is the Body and Blood of Jesus. It is the "mystery of faith", as we say after the consecration. The priest says: "Mystery of faith", and we respond with an acclamation. Commemorating the Lord's death and Resurrection, in expectation of his glorious return, the Church offers the Father the sacrifice which reconciles heaven and earth: she offers the paschal sacrifice of Christ, offering herself with him and asking, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to become "one body, one spirit in Christ" (Eucharistic Prayer iii; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 48; *ogmr*, 79f). The Church wishes to be joined to Christ and become one body and one spirit with the Lord. This is the grace and the fruit of sacramental Communion: we are nourished of the Body of Christ to become, we who eat of it, his Body living today in the world.

This is the mystery of communion; the Church is united to Christ's offering and his intercession, and in this light, "in the catacombs the Church is often represented as a woman in prayer, arms outstretched in the praying position. Like Christ who stretched out his arms on the cross, through him, with him, and in him, she offers herself and intercedes for all men" (ccc, 1368). The Church which praises, which prays. It is beautiful to think that the Church praises, she prays. There is a passage in the Book of The Acts of the Apostles; when Peter was in prison, it says the Christian community: "prayed earnestly for him". The Church that prays, the prayerful Church. And when we go to Mass it is to do this: to be a prayerful Church.

The Eucharistic Prayer asks God to welcome all his children in the perfection of love, in union with the Pope and the Bishop, mentioned by name, a sign that we celebrate in communion with the universal Church and with the particular Church. The prayer, like the offering, is presented to God for all the members of the Church, living and departed, in expectation of the blessed hope of sharing the eternal inheritance of heaven, with the Virgin Mary (cf. ccc 1369-1371). No one and nothing is forgotten in the Eucharistic Prayer, but every thing is attributed to God, as is recalled by the doxology which concludes it. No one is forgotten. And if I have someone, relatives, friends, who are in need or have departed from this world to the

other, I can name them at that time, interiorly and silently, or write the name so it may be said aloud. “Father, how much do I have to pay to have my name said there?” — “Nothing”. Is this understood? Nothing! One does not pay for Mass. Mass is Christ’s sacrifice, which is freely given. Redemption is freely given. If you want to make an offering, do so, but it is not paid for. It is important to understand this.

This codified formulation of prayer, perhaps we may feel it to be somewhat distant — it is true, it is an ancient formula — but, if we truly understand the significance, then we will certainly participate better. Indeed it expresses all that we fulfil in the Eucharistic celebration; moreover, it teaches us to cultivate three attitudes that should never be lacking in Jesus’ disciples. The three attitudes: first, learn “*to give thanks, always and everywhere*”, and not only on certain occasions, when all is going well; second, *to make of our life a gift of love*, freely given; third, *to build concrete communion*, in the Church and with everyone. Thus, this central Prayer of the Mass teaches us, little by little, to make of our whole life a “Eucharist”, that is, an act of thanksgiving.

— CHAPTER XIII —

**Liturgy of the Eucharist:
Communion Rite**

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 14 March 2018*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Let us continue with the Catecheses on the Holy Mass. At the Last Supper, after Jesus took the bread and the cup of wine, and gave thanks to God, we know that “he broke the bread”. In the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Mass, this action corresponds to the *Fraction of Bread*, preceded by the prayer that the Lord taught us, that is, by the “Our Father”.

Thus begins the Communion Rite, continuing the praise and petition of the Eucharistic Prayer with the community’s recitation of the “*Our Father*”. This is not one of many Christian prayers, but *the prayer of the children of God*: it is the great prayer that Jesus taught us. Indeed, con-signed to us on the day of our Baptism, the “Our Father” makes resonate within us those same sentiments that Christ Jesus bore within. When we pray the “Our Father”, we pray as Jesus prayed. It is the prayer that Jesus prayed, and he taught it to us; when the disciples said to him: “Master, teach us to pray as you pray”. And this is how Jesus prayed. It is so beautiful to pray like

Jesus! Formed by his divine teaching, we dare to turn to God calling him “Father”, because we are reborn as his children through water and the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph 1:5). No one, truly, could call him “*Abbà*” — “Father” — in a familiar way without having been created by God, without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as Saint Paul teaches (cf. Rom 8:15). We must consider: no one can call him “Father” without the inspiration of the Spirit. How often there are people who say “Our Father” but do not know what they are saying. Because yes, he is the Father, but when you say “Father”, do you feel that he is Father, your Father, the Father of mankind, the Father of Jesus Christ? Do you have a relationship with this Father? When we pray the “Our Father”, we connect with the Father who loves us, but it is the Spirit who gives us this connection, this feeling of being God’s children.

What better prayer than the one taught by Jesus could prepare us for sacramental Communion with him? Apart from in the Mass, the “Our Father” is prayed in the morning and at night, in the Praises and in Vespers; in this way, the filial attitude toward God and that of fraternity with our neighbour help give Christian form to our days.

In the Lord’s Prayer — in the “Our Father” — we ask for our “daily bread”, in which we see a particular reference to the Eucharistic Bread, which we need in order to live as children of

God. We also implore “forgiveness of our trespasses”. And in order to be worthy to receive God’s forgiveness we commit to forgiving those who have offended us. And this is not easy. Forgiving the people who have offended us is not easy; it is a grace that we must ask for: “Lord, teach me to forgive as you have forgiven me”. It is a grace. Through our own efforts we are unable: to forgive is a grace of the Holy Spirit. Thus, as we open our heart to God, the “Our Father” also prepares us for fraternal love. Lastly, we again ask God to “deliver us from evil” which separates us from him and divides us from our brothers and sisters. Let us clearly understand that these requests are quite appropriate to prepare ourselves for Holy Communion (cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 81).

Indeed, what we ask in the “Our Father” is extended by the prayer of the priest who, in the name of all, implores: “Deliver us Lord from every evil, and grant us peace in our day”. He then receives a sort of seal in the Rite of Peace: what he first asks of Christ is that the gift of His peace (cf. Jn 14:27) — thus different from worldly peace — may help the Church to grow in unity and in peace, according to His will; then, with the concrete gesture exchanged among us, we express “ecclesial communion and mutual charity before communicating in the Sacrament” (cf. *girm*, 82). In the Roman Rite the exchange of the sign of peace, placed from antiquity before Communion, is ordered to Eucharistic

Communion. According to Saint Paul's admonition, it is impossible to communicate with the one Bread that renders us one Body in Christ, without recognizing that we are reconciled by fraternal love (cf. 1 Cor 10:16-17; 11:29). Christ's peace cannot take root in a heart incapable of experiencing fraternity and of restoring it after it has been wounded. Peace is granted by the Lord: he grants us the grace to forgive those who have offended us.

The gesture of peace is followed by the *Fraction of Bread* (cf. *girm*, 83; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1329). Performed by Jesus during the Last Supper, the breaking of the Bread is the revelatory gesture that allowed the disciples to recognize him after his Resurrection. We remember the disciples of Emmaus who, in speaking of their encounter with the Risen One, recount "how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread" (cf. Lk 24:30-31, 35).

The breaking of the Eucharistic Bread is accompanied by the invocation of the "Lamb of God", the figure which John the Baptist indicated in Jesus "who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). The biblical image of the lamb speaks of redemption (cf. Ex 12:1-14; Is 53:7; 1 Pet 1:19; Rev 7:14). In the Eucharistic Bread, broken for the life of the world, the prayerful assembly recognizes the true Lamb of God, namely, Christ the Redeemer, and implores him: "Have mercy on us ... grant us peace".

“Have mercy on us”, “grant us peace” are invocations that, from the “Our Father” prayer to the Fraction of Bread, help us to prepare our soul to participate in the Eucharistic banquet, the source of communion with God and with our brothers and sisters.

Let us not forget the great prayer: the one that Jesus taught us, and which is the prayer with which he prayed to the Father. This prayer prepares us for Communion.

— CHAPTER XIV —

**Liturgy of the Eucharist:
Sacramental Communion**

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 21 March 2018*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!

And today is the first day of Spring: Happy Spring! But what happens in Spring? Plants blossom, trees flower. I will ask you some questions. Can a sick tree or plant fully blossom if it is sick? No! Can a tree, a plant which is not watered by rain or artificially, blossom nicely? No. And can a tree and a plant whose roots have been removed or which have no roots flower? No. Without roots, can they flower? No! And this is a message: Christian life has to be a life that must blossom in works of charity, in doing what is good. But if you have no roots, you cannot blossom, and who is the root? Jesus! If you are not with Jesus, there in the roots, you will not blossom. If you do not water your life with prayer and the sacraments, will you bear Christian flowers? No! Because prayer and the sacraments water the roots and our life blossoms. I hope that your Spring may be bloom beautifully, as blooming as Easter will be; blossoming with good works, virtue and doing good to others. Remember this, this is a very beautiful verse from my country: “What blossoms a tree

bears come from what lies underneath it”. Never cut off Jesus’ roots.

And let us now continue with the catechesis on the Holy Mass. The celebration of Mass which we have been reviewing in stages is organized around Communion, that is, in being united to Jesus; the Sacramental Communion: not spiritual communion which you can have in your own home by saying: “Jesus I would like to receive you spiritually”. Not, Sacramental Communion, with the Body and the Blood of Christ. We celebrate the Eucharist to nourish ourselves of Christ who gives himself both in Word and in the Sacrament of the Altar, in order to conform us to him. The Lord himself says this: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him”. (Jn 6:56). In fact, Jesus’ gesture of *giving* his Body and Blood to his disciples at the Last Supper, still continues today through the ministry of the priests and deacons; ordinary ministers of the distribution of the Bread of life and the Cup of salvation, to the brothers and sisters.

During Mass, after breaking the consecrated Bread, that is the Body of Christ, the priest shows it to the faithful, inviting them to participate in the Eucharistic banquet. We know the words that ring out from the sacred altar: “Happy are those who are called to his Supper. This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”. Inspired by a passage in the Book

of Revelation — “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9): it says “marriage” because Jesus is the Spouse of the Church — this invitation calls us to experience intimate union with Christ, the source of joy and holiness. It is an invitation which brings happiness and at the same time spurs us to an examination of conscience enlightened by faith. If in fact, on the one hand we can see the distance which separates us from the sanctity of Christ, on the other, we believe that his Blood is “shed for the forgiveness of sins”. We were all forgiven at Baptism and we are all forgiven or will be forgiven when we approach the sacrament of Reconciliation. And do not forget: Jesus always forgives. Jesus never tires of forgiving. It is we who tire of asking for forgiveness. In fact it is in considering the salvific value of this Blood that Saint Ambrose exclaimed: “If I sin continually, I must always have a remedy” (*De Sacramentis*, iv, 6, 28: pl 16, 446a). In this faith, we too turn our gaze to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and we invoke him: “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof but only say the word and my soul shall be healed”. We say this at every Mass.

Although we are the ones who stand in procession to receive Communion; we approach the altar in a procession to receive communion, in reality it is Christ who comes towards us to assimilate us in him. There is an encounter with

Jesus! To nourish oneself of the Eucharist means to allow oneself to be changed by what we receive. Saint Augustine helps us understand this when he talks about the light he received when he heard Christ say to him: "I am the food of strong men; grow, and you shall feed upon me; nor shall you convert me, like the food of your flesh, into you, but you shall be converted into me" (*Confessions* VII, 10, 16: pl 32, 742). Each time we receive Communion, we resemble Jesus more; we transform ourselves more fully into Jesus. As the Bread and the Wine are converted into the Body and Blood of the Lord, so too those who receive it with faith are transformed into a living Eucharist. You reply "Amen" to the priest who distributes the Eucharist saying "the Body of Christ"; that is, you recognize the grace and the commitment involved in becoming the Body of Christ. Because when you receive the Eucharist, you become the Body of Christ. This is beautiful; it is very beautiful. As it unites us to Christ, tearing us away from our selfishness, Communion opens us and unites us to all those who are a single thing in him. This is the wonder of Communion: we become what we receive!

The Church strongly desires that the faithful also receive the Lord's Body with Hosts consecrated at the same Mass; and the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more fully expressed when Holy Communion is received under the two Species, even though we know that Catholic doctrine

teaches us that Christ, whole and entire, is received even under only one Species, (cf. girm, 85:281-282). According to ecclesiastical norms, the faithful normally approach the Eucharist in a processional manner, as we have said, and receive Communion standing with devotion, or on their knees as established by the Episcopal Conference, receiving the Sacrament either on the tongue or in the hand, if allowed, as preferred (cf. girm 160-161). After Communion, silence, silent prayer helps us treasure in our hearts the gift which we have received. To slightly extend that moment of silence, speaking to Jesus in our hearts, helps us a great deal, as does singing a psalm or a hymn of praise (cf. girm 88) that can help us be with the Lord.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist ends with the prayer after Communion. On behalf of everyone, with that prayer the priest turns to God to thank him for having shared the banquet and to ask that what was received may transform our lives. The Eucharist makes us strong in order to produce fruit in good works to live as Christians. Today's prayer is significant: we ask the Lord that "the participation in his Sacrament may be for us a heavenly medicine, heal us from sin and reaffirm us in his friendship" (cf. Roman Missal, Wednesday, Fifth week of Lent). Let us approach the Eucharist: receiving Jesus who transforms us into him makes us stronger. The Lord is so good and so great!

— CHAPTER XIV —

Becoming Eucharistic Men and Women

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 4 April 2018*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning and happy Easter!

You see that today there are flowers: the flowers express joy, cheerfulness. In certain places Easter is also called “Easter in bloom”, because the Risen Christ flourishes: he is the burgeoning flower; our justification flourishes; the holiness of the Church flourishes. Therefore, many flowers: it is our joy. All week long we celebrate Easter, all week long. And thus let us say to one another, once again, all of us, the wish of “Happy Easter”. Let us say it together: “Happy Easter!” [*They respond: “Happy Easter!”*]. I would also like us to say Happy Easter — because he was the Bishop of Rome — to beloved Pope Benedict, who is following us on television. Let us all say “Happy Easter” to Pope Benedict: [*They say “Happy Easter!”*]. And a nice round of applause.

With this catechesis we conclude the cycle dedicated to the Mass, which is precisely the memorial, but not only as a remembrance, one relives the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus. Last time, we came to Communion and the

Prayer after Communion; after this oration, Mass concludes with the *blessing* imparted by the priest and the *dismissal* of the people (cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 90). As it began with the sign of the Cross, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, it is again in the name of the Trinity that the Mass, that is the liturgical action, is sealed.

However, we are well aware that although the Mass comes to an end, *the task of Christian witness begins*. Christians do not go to Mass to fulfil a weekly duty and then it is forgotten, no. Christians go to Mass in order to participate in the Lord's Passion and Resurrection and then to live more as Christians: the task of Christian witness begins. We leave the Church by "going in peace" to carry God's blessing in our daily activities, in our homes, in our workplaces, among the occupations of the earthly city, "glorifying the Lord with our life". But if we exit the Church gossiping and saying "look at this one, look at that one...", with 'tongues wagging', the Mass has not entered my heart. Why? Because I am not capable of living the Christian witness. Every time I leave Mass, I must exit better than how I entered, with more life, with more strength, with more willingness to bear Christian witness. Through the Eucharist the Lord Jesus enters us, into our heart and our flesh, so that we may "hold fast in our lives to the Sacrament we

have received in faith” (cf. *Roman Missal*, Collect for Monday in the Octave of Easter”).

Therefore, from the celebration of life, aware that the Mass is fulfilled in the concrete choices of those who personally engage in the mysteries of Christ. We must not forget that we celebrate the Eucharist in order to become *Eucharistic men and women*. What does this mean? It means allowing Christ to act within our deeds: that his thoughts may be our thoughts, his feelings our own, his choices our choices too. And this is holiness: doing as Christ did is Christian holiness. Saint Paul expresses it clearly, in speaking of his own assimilation to Jesus, and he says this: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). This is Christian witness. May Paul’s experience illuminate us too: to the measure in which we quash our selfishness — that is, kill that which is opposed to the Gospel and to Jesus’ love — a greater space is created within us for the power of his Spirit. Christians are men and women who, after receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, allow their soul to expand with the power of the Holy Spirit. Allow your souls to expand! Not these souls so narrow and closed, small, selfish, no! Expansive souls, broad souls, with vast horizons.... after receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, allow your souls to expand with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Since the real presence of Christ in the consecrated Bread does not end with the Mass (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1374), the Eucharist is *safeguarded in the tabernacle* for Communion to the sick and for silent adoration of the Lord in the Most Holy Sacrament; Eucharistic worship outside of Mass, be it in private or community form, indeed helps us to remain in Christ (cf. *ibid.*, 1378-1380). Therefore, the fruits of the Mass are intended to mature in everyday life. Thus, we can say, stretching the image somewhat: the Mass is like the grain, the grain of wheat which then grows in ordinary life; it grows and matures in good deeds, in the attitudes that assimilate us to Jesus. The fruits of the Mass, therefore, are intended to mature in everyday life. In truth, *augmenting our union with Christ*, the Eucharist renews the grace that the Spirit gave us in Baptism and in Confirmation, so that our Christian witness may be credible (cf. *ibid.*, 1391-1392).

Yet, by igniting divine charity in our hearts, what does the Eucharist do? *It separates us from sin*: “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” (*ibid.*, 1395). Regularly approaching the Eucharistic Banquet renews, strengthens, and deepens the bond with the Christian community to which we belong, according to the principle that *the Eucharist makes the Church* (cf. *ibid.*, 1396); it unites us all.

Lastly, partaking in the Eucharist *commits us to others, especially the poor*, teaching us to pass from the flesh of Christ to the flesh of our brothers and sisters, in whom he waits to be recognized, served, honoured and loved by us (cf. *ibid.*, 1397).

Carrying in earthen vessels the treasure of the union with Christ (cf. 2 Cor 4:7), we constantly need to return to the holy altar, until in heaven, we will fully taste the beatitude of the marriage supper of the Lamb (cf. Rev 19:9).

Let us thank the Lord for the journey of rediscovery of the Holy Mass which he has given to us to carry out together, and let us allow ourselves to be drawn with renewed faith to this real encounter with Jesus, our contemporary, dead and Risen for us. And may our life always be thus “in bloom”, as Easter, with the flowers of hope, faith and good works. May we always find the strength for this in the Eucharist, in union with Jesus. Happy Easter to all!