

Homily 2 - The Consecration

Today we begin our reflections on the parts of the Mass. We will not begin at the beginning as would normally be expected, but we will start at the high point of the Mass, the summit, the moment we call the “consecration,” when the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. If we can grasp with Faith what God is doing at this moment we will better see and understand ‘what we do’ and ‘why’ in all the other parts of the Mass.

There are two questions that will help focus our meditation: First - What is God doing at the moment of consecration? and 2nd, what is our part--how do we participate?

What is God doing? Just under 2000 years ago, at a precise moment in history, Jesus Christ, true God and true man, freely and willingly offered his life on a Cross for the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of the world. What Jesus did at this moment cannot be repeated. As St. Paul said, “Christ died once and for all--He can no longer die again” (This is important to understand, for some of our Protestant brothers and sister wrongly think that we believe that Christ somehow dies again and again at every Mass--but we do not believe this). To prevent the death of Christ and its saving power from remaining in the past like all other historical events, Jesus, on the night before He died, commanded his disciples to repeat, renew and prolong a memorial of his death which He celebrated with them at the Last Supper. “Do this in memory of me.” And this memorial of His death is what we call the Mass.

What is unique about this memorial, and which distinguishes it from other memorials in human life, is that the reality remembered becomes present. The reason for this is that everything that Christ did, and especially His death, resurrection and ascension, participates in the eternity of God, which transcends all time, and are able then to extend to both the past and to the present. So at the moment of consecration, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the words of Christ, the Body and Blood that Jesus offered in Sacrifice on the Cross does not remain in the past, but is actually present here upon our altar. The prayer over the gifts by the priest expresses very clearly this belief: “Let you Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy, that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.” God answers this prayer at every Mass, and the Holy Spirit does indeed come down with power to effect this miraculous change. And it is the whole Paschal mystery that becomes present: Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension.

This is the only purpose of the priesthood: to make Christ present. On the day I was ordained I offered my life, my human nature to Christ, and Christ makes use of it to be sacramentally present through me at every Mass. When I preside at Mass I represent Christ as Head of the Church. Using my hands, Jesus again takes bread and wine, and with my voice, pronounces, not my words, but His own words which alone have the power to change the bread and wine into his Body and Blood. The altar bells are rung at this moment to help emphasis and highlight the miracle that has taken place. This is why all are kneeling at this moment if they can, and why the priest genuflects--it is our

response in faith to what has happened--and we adore God so powerfully and personally present in our midst.

And notice how the bread and wine are consecrated individually, which reflects symbolically the manner of Christ death. For on the Cross His blood was separated from his body.

So what is God doing? He's making the one and only Sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ present for us (not a new sacrifice, for Christ does not die again), and God is changing the bread and wine we offer into the Body and Blood of Christ.

What is our part?

At the moment of Christ's death, Mary, his mother was below the Cross, and with her was John, Mary Magdalene and some other women. What were they doing? I think we can be certain that they were not bored or wondering about the time, nor daydreaming about other things? And they were far from being mere spectators. What were they doing? Were they not drawn in by their faith and love to share and take part in the suffering and death of Christ? Unlike the ridicule and indifference of others near the cross, they were united to Christ's heart, wishing only to offer themselves to Christ and with Him to the Father. They were living Christ's death, and Christ was living His death in them. Immersed in His sacrifice, they were doing with their human nature what Christ was doing with His: offering it completely to the Father.

And this is precisely what Jesus Christ asks of us: to give ourselves to Him at the moment of consecration, for at that moment the One, Sacrificial death of Christ is truly present. Before the consecration the bread and wine on the altar symbolize the offering of ourselves. But at the moment of the consecration we are called to unite ourselves with the death of Christ--we die with Him, we die to our sinfulness and all that is contrary to love and the Gospel. Christ, Risen and Glorified can die no more, but he takes our human nature that we offer Him, and continues His death in us.

There is a wonderful piece from Bishop Fulton Sheen that describes our part at the moment of consecration: "I give myself to You, O Christ. Here is my body. Take it. Here is my blood. Take it. Here is my soul, my will, my energy, my strength, my property, my wealth, all that I have. Take it. Consecrate it. Offer it with Yourself to the heavenly Father in order that He, looking down on this great sacrifice, may see not only You, his beloved Son, but also me in You. Transform the poor bread of my life into Your divine life; thrill the wine of my wasted life into Your divine Spirit; unite my broken heart with Your Heart; change my cross into a crucifix. Let not my abandonment, my sorrows and grief go to waste. Gather up all the fragments of my life to be absorbed into Yours; let my little crosses be entwined with your great Cross, so that I may inherit the joys of everlasting happiness in union with You."

Imagine if more people sincerely and generously made this kind of offering at every Mass, opening their hearts to the transforming power of Christ's Sacrifice--how their lives would change!

Here we can understand what **Blessed John Paul II** meant when he said: "In that little round, white, consecrated host is the answer to all the worlds problems." Blessed John Paul could only say this because he himself was a man who believed in God's presence and power in the Mass. And for those fortunate enough to witness him offering the Mass, his deep engagement in it was very evident.

My dear friends, God calls us to express with our lives the language of the consecration: "This is my body given up for you . . . This is my blood, shed and poured out for you." What a different world this would be if husbands and wives were saying this to each other through their actions at every moment of the day, parents saying this to their children, and children to parents, saying this to our friends and neighbors, priests saying this to their congregations: "Here is my life which I want to offer up, lay down and pour out for you! How can I die for you today?" This is how the Eucharist is Wisdom, showing us the meaning of our life, what our freedom is for: to give our life away, to pour it out and lay it down for the good and happiness of others. Jesus gives Himself to us in Holy Communion, pouring His life and love into us so that we can, together with Him, pour out our lives for each other.

May God help us put into practice what we have learned.