

“Mass is boring. We do the same thing over and over.” This is the common lament of churchgoers routinely bored in the pews. Please note that not all of these eye-rollers are children and teenagers. Some folks who’ve attended Mass for decades are still confounded by the need for ritual. It doesn’t change, may not edify, rarely entertains, and isn’t always artfully performed. So why do we do it over and over? The French philosopher, atheist and anti-Catholic Jean-Paul Sartre famously said, “If you Catholics realized what you have and what you receive at Mass, you would approach the holy altar on your hands and knees!” HE knew what we have here, and he was an atheist!

If you think ritual prep isn’t necessary for Mass, guess again. While most of us don’t have to remember to buy more wine or hosts, or launder the linens involved in Eucharist, someone does. Someone also sets the multitude of ribbons in liturgical books for lectors to proclaim the readings and presiders to offer the prayers. Someone vacuums the carpets, repairs broken kneelers, returns hymnals to their place, and retrieves abandoned bulletins. Someone selects flowers and hangs seasonal banners. The music leader chooses hymns and choir members rehearse. Eucharistic ministers, lectors, servers and ushers are routinely trained and scheduled. And of course, preachers thoughtfully prepare homilies every single week!

Why do these armies of folks prepare so much for Sunday Mass? Because Jesus asks us to celebrate this covenant supper with Him. It reminds us that His life and ours are one life. This ritual keeps the whole Church united with Christ until Kingdom Come: on the same page, moving toward the same goals. Even Jesus prepares for His ritual through the man with the water jar, the owner of the upper room, and the elements of the Passover meal. In ritual, nothing is taken for granted. Because this ritual keeps the community together, and this community is a light to the world.

The Book of Exodus reminds us of the covenant God makes with us through Moses. This new covenant is not only with one person, as it was with Abraham; now it is with a whole nation, Israel. Twice we hear the people say, “We will do everything that the Lord has told us. All that the Lord has said, we will heed and do.” Well, at least they will TRY. They rarely succeeded! While all the sprinkling of blood in the First Reading may be a gorier detail than you might have wanted, the story of this ritual offers you something to consider for the celebration of the Body and Blood of Christ.

For the ancient Israelites, life was in blood. No blood, no life. If the blood stopped flowing or left the body, the creature died. Blood, then, had a sacred or sacramental quality, especially the blood of an animal sacrificed to God.

And if people came into contact with the blood of the altar, that meant they were one with the giver of life, God. So when you drink the cup of Christ's blood, you join yourself to Christ's life and accept the covenant to follow Him on your own.

One final reflection: Is the Mass a sacrifice or a celebration? Basically, Jewish shrine and temple worship could be a messy affair. Because the covenant with God involved blood, the word *sacrifice* was not misused. But when people gathered together, it was time to party, and what better reason to eat, drink, and be merry? By the time of Jesus, however, Judaism had already begun to steer away from the idea that ritual sacrifice was primarily what God wanted. Obedience and fidelity could be symbolized by the ritual moment but should not end there. The sacrifice was pleasing to God, as were hearts uplifted and entire lives rendered to God's service. The Gospels tell us Jesus saw His own looming fate as an act of obedience and giving glory to God. His Blood would be poured out for the sins of many, and He was "lifted up" as an offering on the cross.

When Saint Paul talks about the Eucharist, he doesn't hesitate to use sacrificial language familiar to his Jewish audience. The Roman Catholic Council of Trent in 1562 took pains both to affirm that the Eucharist is the "unbloody" sacrifice of that same Jesus and to clarify that His self-offering is not repeated but "made present" in every Eucharist. What better reason to celebrate as well? And to celebrate not only Christ's love poured out in sacrifice, but to celebrate the fact that, as Vatican II says, Jesus Christ is present in His Body in the assembly, in the priest, in the Holy Word of God, and in the very Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Blessed Carlo Acutis, an extraordinary 15-year-old Italian boy who was recently beatified – one step before canonization and sainthood – took upon himself the arduous task of cataloguing on social media every miracle that happening involving the Most Blessed Sacrament. There were hundreds, including dozens of examples where during the Mass, the bread and wine literally turned into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. Forensic studies by professionals all came to the same conclusion: the flesh came from the heart of a 33-year-old man's heart, which suffered physical trauma.

The blood tested was AB Positive, the universal and most requested blood for transfusions. This is what you and I receive when we come up to receive Holy

Communion – the very Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ Himself, truly present in us and with us!

I conclude with excerpts from one of most beautiful meditations on the Eucharist I have found to date: It is the **Litany of the Most Blessed Sacrament, *Written by St. Peter Julian Eymard, the founder of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers.*** The full prayer is in today's bulletin:

FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT BELIEVE IN YOUR EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE

FOR THOSE WHO ARE INDIFFERENT TO THE SACRAMENT OF YOUR LOVE

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE OFFENDED YOU IN THE HOLY SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR,

THAT WE MAY SHOW FITTING REVERENCE WHEN ENTERING YOUR HOLY TEMPLE,

THAT WE MAY MAKE SUITABLE PREPARATION BEFORE APPROACHING THE ALTAR

THAT WE MAY RECEIVE YOU FREQUENTLY IN HOLY COMMUNION WITH REAL DEVOTION AND TRUE HUMILITY,

THAT WE MAY NEVER NEGLECT TO THANK YOU FOR SO WONDERFUL A BLESSING,

THAT WE MAY CHERISH TIME SPENT IN SILENT PRAYER BEFORE YOU,

THAT WE MAY GROW IN KNOWLEDGE OF THIS SACRAMENT OF SACRAMENTS

THAT ALL PRIESTS MAY HAVE A PROFOUND LOVE OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST,

THAT THEY MAY CELEBRATE THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS IN ACCORDANCE WITH ITS SUBLIME DIGNITY,

THAT WE MAY BE COMFORTED AND SANCTIFIED WITH HOLY VIATICUM AT THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH,

THAT WE MAY SEE YOU ONE DAY FACE TO FACE IN HEAVEN,

O SACRAMENT MOST HOLY, O SACRAMENT DIVINE,

R. ALL PRAISE AND ALL THANKSGIVING BE EVERY MOMENT THINE.

LET US PRAY,

MOST MERCIFUL FATHER,

YOU CONTINUE TO DRAW US TO YOURSELF

THROUGH THE EUCHARISTIC MYSTERY.

GRANT US FERVENT FAITH IN THIS SACRAMENT OF LOVE,

IN WHICH CHRIST THE LORD HIMSELF IS CONTAINED, OFFERED AND RECEIVED.

WE MAKE THIS PRAYER THROUGH THE SAME CHRIST OUR LORD. R. AMEN.