



APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF
NORTHERN ARABIA

**CATHEDRAL OF OUR LADY OF ARABIA
GROUND BREAKING CEREMONY**

**JUNE 9
2018**



PASTORAL LETTER 2018-2019

To all the Catholics of the
Apostolic Vicariate of
Northern Arabia

Bishop Camillo Ballin, mccc

TO THE GREATER GLORY OF GOD, ON 9 JUNE 2018, DURING THE PONTIFICATE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS AND THE REIGN OF HIS MAJESTY KING HAMAD BIN ISA AL KHALIFA OF THE KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN, IN THE PRESENCE OF THE APOSTOLIC NUNCIO HIS GRACE ARCHBISHOP FRANCISCO MONTECILLO PADILLA, THE CONSULTANT TO HIS EXCELLENCY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SHAIKH KHALID BIN ABDULLA AL KHALIFA HIS EXCELLENCY MR. KHALID BIN MOHAMMED FAKHROO, AMBASSADORS OF FRANCE, ITALY, GERMANY, PHILIPPINES AND SRI LANKA TO THE KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN, THE CLERGYMEN AND RELIGIOUS FROM THE CATHOLIC, GREEK ORTHODOX, COPTIC ORTHODOX AND EVANGELICAL CHURCHES IN THE KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN, AND THE CATHOLIC FAITHFUL IN THE APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF NORTHERN ARABIA, MOST REVEREND BISHOP CAMILLO BALLIN, MCCJ, THE APOSTOLIC VICAR OF NORTHERN ARABIA, OFFICIATED THE GROUNDBREAKING OF THIS CATHEDRAL WHICH IS DEDICATED TO

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY,
OUR LADY OF ARABIA.



Bishop CAMILLO BALLIN, MCCJ
Apostolic Vicar of Northern Arabia

Bishop's House, P. O. Box 25362
Road 4603, Block 946, House 137 / 125
AWALI, (BAHRAIN)

Mobile Bahrain: (+973) 3950-4488

Bishop's Land Line: (+973) 1749-0929

Bishop's Fax (+973) 1775-0153

Mobile Kuwait: (+965) 9663-6454

Mobile Qatar: (+974) 5580-0907

Mobile Saudi Arabia: (+966) 54 403-2624

e-mail: mail@camilloballin.com



THE MASS

PART ONE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Pastoral Letter 2018-2019

To all the Catholics of the
Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia
Bishop Camillo Ballin, mccj

Introduction

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The purpose of this pastoral letter is to explain in as simple terms as possible the biblical roots of the Eucharistic celebration and the first part of the Mass, from the beginning until the prayer of the faithful included. If God will give us life, we shall see next year the second part, from the preparation of the gifts to the end of the Mass.

A) The biblical roots of the Eucharistic Celebration

When I was a child, I was told that after having received Communion Jesus Christ was present in me for around twenty minutes and the catechists used to tell us to keep quiet and silent during those moments and to speak only to Jesus Christ, the divine guest in our heart. The positive aspect of this teaching was that we became convinced of the real presence of Jesus Christ in us, but the problem was that many of us grew up with only this limited teaching about the Eucharist.

Today I notice in some of our Masses that after the Liturgical greeting to the assembly at the beginning (*The Lord be with you*) the priest gives too much time to speak about the Mass as a feast. People can understand that the main purpose of the Eucharist is to have a banquet of friends. Pope John Paul II writes in the Encyclical *EdE* (n. 10): *At times one encounters an extremely reductive understanding of the Eucharistic mystery. Stripped of its sacrificial meaning, it is celebrated as if it were simply a fraternal banquet.* Thus, we may conclude that the Mass is the celebration of the presence of Jesus in us and the joy of meeting brothers and sisters. We shall understand better the Eucharist if we have a look at the annual Passover of the Jews and at the texts of the institution of the Eucharist (Mt 26,20-30; Mk 14,17-26; Lk 22,14-39; 1 Co 11,23-26).

I) The annual Passover of the Jews

1. The last supper in Egypt and its link with the crossing of the Sea

The exodus from Egypt is without doubt the most important event of the Ancient Testament and marks the birth of the sons of Israel as the people of God. In Ex 12,1-4 God announces that the *crossing of the Sea will be preceded by the last supper in Egypt*. Can we consider the last supper in Egypt as something normal to be done before a trip and to be done in hurry while waiting for the signal of departure? Is it possible to consider the crossing of the Sea independently from the last supper in Egypt? So, what is the relation between these two facts? Which one is the more important?

2. “The blood will be a sign for you”

The context of the last supper in Egypt reveals to us that the verse *The blood will be a sign for you* (Ex 12,13) has to be referred to the efficacy of the blood as *sign of alliance* and so as a sign of belonging and protection. Through the blood of the lamb Israel is declared as not belonging anymore to the Pharaoh. Therefore when the Exterminator sees the blood on the door of the houses he will be obliged to *pass over them*. Through this sign the people of Israel affirms that they belong to God. By sprinkling the blood of the Pascal lamb on the door, Israel, even though physically they are still in Egypt, have already declared that they are not in Egypt anymore and that they have already left the land that is under their feet. Even though the shadow of the Pharaoh seems to be over his ancient slaves, the king of Egypt has practically no jurisdiction over them because the sign of the blood has now proved their exclusive belonging to God and making them the “Community of Israel”. The last supper in Egypt is a prophetic sign announcing that Israel will be liberated next day, it “opens” in the crossing of the Sea. Both are united in a unique and indivisible intervention of liberation, even though each one has its own role. But there is much more.

3. The last supper in Egypt for the generations to come

With the crossing of the Sea, which is the founding event of their liberation, Israel put an end to the slavery of the Pharaoh and began to serve God.

But after the crossing of the Sea, Israel discovers that they are not faithful to God. At Marah (Ex 15,22 ff) they complained because there was no water. They regretted the deceiving prosperity of Egypt (Ex 16,3; Nm 11,5; 14,2-3) and wanted to go back to the Pharaoh (Cfr Nm 14,4). How to find strength to exit once again from the house of slavery, to escape from the hands of the Pharaoh who seems to have again power on them? Can they go back to Egypt in order to cross the Sea another time? Impossible. Faith comes to help. Ex 12,14 says: *This day must be commemorated by you*. This divine order means that the *sign of the Pascal lamb given at the vigil* of the crossing of the Sea was not for that time only, when they left Egypt, but it must be celebrated again by the following generations which, in faith, shall cross the Sea. If God had not instituted the sacrament of the Pascal lamb, the new generations would have remained slaves of their rebellion to God. Meanwhile, in celebrating the Passover every year, they really cross the Sea, even though not physically. When they eat the Pascal lamb, they are brought back, in a sacramental way, to the event of their liberation, the Sea. “Sacramental way” means “really”, even though not “physically”. They can say that when their ancestors crossed the Sea, they were also present there with them!

II) The Christian Eucharist

Along with ancient Israel, who saw in the crossing of the Sea the founding event of their liberation from slavery of the Pharaoh, we prepare ourselves, as the new Israel, to recognize in the death and resurrection of Christ the founding event of a new and eternal covenant.

1. The Last Supper of Jesus and its relation with the Calvary and the Empty Tomb

It is evident that the Last Supper of Jesus cannot be reduced to a farewell supper, where Jesus Christ just wanted to remain for the last time in intimate friendship with his disciples before his death. The Last Supper cannot be separated from the death-resurrection. In fact, the Last Supper is the *prophetic sign* of the founding event which will be realised next day. Both are correlated to each other. We cannot consider the death-resurrection without its deep link with the Last Supper, just as the crossing of the Sea cannot be understood without its link with the last supper in Egypt.

When Jesus Christ said: *This is my body, which is for you ... This cup is the new covenant in my blood* (1 Cor 11,24-25), he created a profound link between the sign of the bread and the wine and the event of his death and resurrection. The bread broken (*for you*) and the wine shed (*new covenant in my blood*) announced what will happen in the next day, his death followed by the resurrection.

But here also there is much more.

2. The institution of the Eucharist

As ancient Israel saw in the verse *This day must be commemorated by you* (Ex 12,14) the order to celebrate the Passover every year, in the same way the new Israel sees in the verse *Do this in remembrance of me ... do this as memorial of me* (1 Cor 11,24-25) the order to celebrate the Last Supper and the inauguration of the Eucharist. As with these words Jesus wanted to say: “You should celebrate the sign of the bread and of the wine that I gave you at the vigil of my passion, eat this bread and drink from this cup which will put you in communion with my body that is to be delivered and with my blood that is to be shed tomorrow on the Calvary”.

If Jesus had not instituted the Eucharist, the event of his death and resurrection would have remained only for that moment when it happened on Calvary and the Church of the future generations, i.e. ourselves, would not have been able to obtain salvation from that far off event. The celebration of the Eucharist therefore brings us back to Calvary and to the Resurrection. Through baptism we enter once and for all in the death-resurrection of Jesus Christ, but we are not perfect. We are lost with many Pharaohs: *sexual vice, impurity and sensuality, the worship of false gods and sorcery, antagonisms and rivalry, jealousy, bad temper and quarrels, disagreements, factions and malice, drunkenness, orgies and all such things* (Gal 5,20-21), our selfishness, the desperate look for richness, power, prestige, fame, self realisation beyond any limit and law. How do we free ourselves from all these Pharaohs? We cannot go back physically to the historical event of Calvary that took place two thousand years ago, nor can we go back with Mary Magdalene to the Tomb of the Resurrected. The celebration of the Eucharist brings us back really, even though not physically, to Calvary and to the Empty Tomb. We can say: when Jesus Christ was on the cross and when he resurrected we were also there!

3. The Eucharist re-presents us to the unique sacrifice

We can understand now that the event of death-resurrection doesn't move, doesn't come to us in the Eucharist, it is we ourselves who are brought to that historical event through the sacrament of the Eucharist. The Mass doesn't "renew" the cross-death-resurrection, nor, worse, "repeats" it. The Mass re-presents us to Calvary and to the Empty Tomb. Pope John Paul II wrote in the Encyclical *EdE*: *Whenever the Eucharist is celebrated at the tomb of Jesus in Jerusalem, there is an almost tangible return to his "hour", the hour of his Cross and glorification. Every priest who celebrates Holy Mass, together with the Christian community which takes part in it, is led back in spirit to that place and that hour* (n. 4). Our Masses don't bring us to the Cenacle but to Calvary. Even though the Eucharist also has an aspect of feast, conviviality, this is not its first characteristic, it is a secondary one. Its first purpose is to present us to the unique sacrifice of Jesus Christ so *that we might live no longer for ourselves but for him* (Eucharistic Prayer IV). We are sure that the Eucharist has been instituted and given us. But, we ask ourselves: Why? The answer is easy: the Eucharist has been instituted and given us in order that we share in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Eucharist, as in all the other Sacraments, Jesus Christ is the good Shepherd who takes on his shoulders the lost sheep and goes home (Cfr. Lk 15, 5-6).

B) The parts of the Mass

The Mass is divided into two main parts: 1) The Liturgy of the Word and 2) the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The first part focuses on the proclamation of God's Word, as it is revealed in the Scriptures. The second part is the celebration of the memorial itself: Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It's interesting to note how consistently the Church has celebrated the Mass, down the centuries. There is no better illustration of this fact than the section of the Catechism of the Catholic Church titled: "The Mass of All Ages" (beginning with N. 1345). When the Church wanted to describe the Mass in our own time, it could do no better than to present, verbatim, a text written by Saint Justin Martyr around A.D. 155. In a letter to the pagan Emperor Antoninus Pius, Justin described the Mass as it was celebrated in the city of Rome, and we can already see both the whole and its parts:

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“On the day we call the day of the sun, all who dwell in the city or country gather in the same place.

The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits.

Then the reader has finished, he who presides over those gathered admonishes and challenges them to imitate these beautiful things.

Then we all rise together and offer prayers for ourselves ... and for others, wherever they may be, so that we may be found righteous by our life and actions, and faithful to the commandments, so as to obtain eternal salvation.

When the prayers are concluded we exchange the kiss.

Then someone brings bread and a cup of water and wine mixed together to him who presides over the brethren.

He takes them and offer praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and for a considerable time he gives thanks [in Greek: Eucharistian] that we have been judged worthy of these gifts. When he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all present give voice to an acclamation by saying: “Amen”.

When he who presides has given thanks and the people have responded, those whom we call deacons give to those present the “Eucharisted” bread, wine and water and take them to those who are absent”.

The Mass at a Glance: Outline of a Typical Sunday Mass in Ordinary Time

The Liturgy of the Word

Introductory Rite

Antiphon or song

Sign of the Cross

Greeting

Penitential Rite

Gloria

Opening Prayer

First Reading (usually from the Old Testament)

Responsorial Psalm

Second Reading (usually from the New Testament letters)

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Alleluia and Gospel reading
Homily
Creed
General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful)

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts
Collection
Presentation of the Bread and Wine
Prayer over the Gifts
Preface
“Holy, Holy, Holy”
Eucharistic Prayer
Communion Rite
 The Lord’s Prayer (“Our Father”)
 The Sign of Peace
 “Lamb of God” and Breaking of the Bread
 Communion
Cleansing of Vessels
Closing Prayer
Blessing and Dismissal

The Church and Its Furnishings

The two main parts are the sanctuary and the nave.

The **sanctuary** is an area set apart for the altar, distinct from the rest of the church. The word *sanctuary* literally means “holy place”. It is where almost all the rites of the Mass take place.

The **nave** is the main body of the church, where the faithful gather. The word comes from the Latin word for ship (*navis*). The early Christians liked to compare the Church to a ship (Luke 5P3: “*Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat*”). However, the renewal of the Liturgy after the second Vatican Council, pointed at another biblical background, the Last Supper of Jesus, who “*reclined at table*” (John 13:12). Therefore in the modern churches the nave has preferably a round shape.

The **altar** is the focal point of the church's furnishings. An altar is different from an ordinary table. A table is for a meal or banquet, and the Mass is certainly a meal and a banquet, but the Mass is still more than that. It is a *sacrifice*. The altar is the place where the sacrificial death and Resurrection of Christ will be sacramentally continued.

A chair stands near the altar, and it is often flanked by other chairs. The prominent chair is the **presider's chair**, which belongs to the priest. It symbolizes his place at the "head" of Christ's body, the Church. A **crucifix**—that is an image of Jesus on the Cross—stands visibly near the altar. It may be a processional cross that is carried in at the beginning of Mass. The crucifix reminds us of what is taking place on that altar, what is being done, as Jesus said, "in memory". The Mass, like the Last Supper, makes present the one sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.

Candles are placed on or near the altar. Since the emergence of electric light, these have a purely symbolic purpose: they symbolize Jesus Christ, the "light of the world" (John 8:12). A large candle, called the Paschal Candle, usually stands near the altar for Masses in the Easter season and for Masses of Christian Burial.

The **ambo** or **pulpit** is the lectern from which the Scriptures are proclaimed and the homily preached.

On entering a church, we often find some form of holy water. We dip our fingers in the water, and then draw it over our body as we make the sign of the Cross. The action reminds us of our baptism and so renews our commitment to Jesus Christ.

The **tabernacle** is the repository where the Church reserves whatever consecrated hosts are remaining from the Mass. These hosts will be distributed to people who are homebound or hospitalized, or in the Lay Common Service done by a lay person. Since we believe that Jesus is really present in those hosts as he was present two thousand years ago, even though in another form, we give due reverence to the tabernacle. In the Mass, the Word becomes flesh for our sake, and he remains present, in the tabernacle. During the Eucharistic celebration we focus on the altar, after the Eucharistic celebration we focus of the tabernacle for personal prayer and adoration.

To show more clearly that in the Eucharistic celebration the center is the altar

and not the tabernacle, and to facilitate the service of the altar boys during the Eucharistic celebration, (they should genuflect every time they pass in front of the tabernacle), it is preferable that the tabernacle be a part, not too near the altar.

The **sanctuary lamp** is a special candle that burns perpetually near the tabernacle when the Blessed Sacrament is kept, to indicate the presence of Jesus.

Vestments

During the Mass, the priest wears special clothing, called “vestments”. They signify the priest’s role in the Church. He is not there to act in his own name or speak for himself. He is there to stand in the place of Christ. He clothed himself with Christ (Cfr. Galatians 3:27) like a garment.

The color of the priest’s vestments varies according to the feasts and seasons. Violet or purple is used during Advent and Lent, to symbolize penance. Red sometimes signifies blood (as on Holy Friday and the memorial of martyrs and apostles) and sometimes the fire of the Holy Spirit (as on Pentecost). --Green is used in Ordinary Time, to symbolize life and hope. White vestments are worn on some feasts dedicated to Jesus (like Christmas and Easter), to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to the angels, and to saints who are not martyrs.

The **alb** (from the Latin word for white, *alba*) is the vestment the priest puts on over his clothes. It is a long white garment that reaches to the feet. In the Bible, a white garment is a symbol of purity. Let us think of the “*bright, clean linen garment*” (Revelation 19:8), and of the Jesus’ promise to his faithful ones: “*They will walk with me dressed in white, because they are worthy. The victor will thus be dressed in white*” (Revelation 3:4-5).

The **cincture** is a braided cord, which is drawn as a belt around the alb and the waist.

The **stole** is a long, narrow strip of cloth that hangs around the neck and down the front of the alb. The stole symbolizes the priest’s sacramental power as he represents Jesus Christ and reminds him of the “yoke” of Jesus: “*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light*” (Matthew 12:29-30).

The **chasuble** is the outer vestment the priest wears at Mass. It symbolizes the priest’s role as a leader, after the Good Shepherd: “*I am the good shepherd. A*

good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me” (John 10:11.14).

The Church’s Calendar

Jesus accomplished our salvation during Passover; and the mystery of our salvation, has ever since, borne the name of that holy day: the Paschal Mystery. The first Christians rearranged all the passage of time around that reality. They kept “*the first day of the week*” (Acts 20:7) as “*the Lord’s Day*” (Revelation 1:10). It was the first day, but they also called it the “*eighth day*”. It was both the beginning of their week and its end and fulfillment, just as Jesus is both the beginning and fulfillment of all history: “*I am the Alpha and the Omega... I am the first and the last*” (Revelation 1:8.17), “*I am the beginning and the end*” (Revelation 21:6).

During the seasons of Advent and Lent - which are seasons of penance and preparation – we suppress the jubilation of the *Gloria*; and during Lent we suppress *Alleluia* as well.

C) A closer look at the Mass

The procession

Before the Mass can begin, the priest puts on his vestments and makes his entrance. The, the *procession*, the entry of the priests and of others, may seem like a merely mechanical event, or a show.

The procession is part of the ritual, and so it is rich in meaning. It symbolizes our earthly pilgrimage toward heaven. We are a pilgrim people, and we are making our way through life to God. We do not travel alone. Like the tribes we read about in the Bible, we move through life as a family, and that family is the Catholic Church.

When we gather as God’s family for the Mass, the procession brings the ministers – the altar servers, lectors, and even the choir - and then, finally, the priest into the sanctuary. On their way to the sanctuary, they represent us all. We can see ourselves, by the grace of the Mass making progress on the way to heaven.

At the head of the procession may be a *crucifer*, an altar server bearing a cross.

This simple, common image reminds us that Jesus is our *“leader to salvation ... made perfect through suffering (Hebrews 2:10).*

The procession moves, outwardly, at a dignified pace. Inwardly, however, and spiritually, we are listening to heaven, behind the leader who goes before us: Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, and glorified.

The sign of the cross

The Liturgy begins with the Church’s most basic blessing, most fundamental prayer: the *Sign of the Cross*. It is both a gesture and a vocal prayer. Pope Benedict XVI described this simple action as “a kind of synthesis of our faith”. It’s a summary of the core doctrines of Christianity. By our words, it proclaims the Trinity of persons in the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At the same time, it acknowledges the oneness of God, because we bless ourselves in a singular “name”: In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

By the form of the cross, we also acknowledge the means of our redemption: the cross of Calvary, whose sacrifice is made present for us in the Mass.

The early Christians loved to trace the sign, and today we can only imagine its ancient significance. In the ancient world, the cross was an instrument of torture and shame, a method of execution reserved for the most hated criminals. Yet those Christians, who had seen men and women so tortured, drew the sign over their body at every opportunity, and they considered it a blessing.

The Sign of the Cross was their reminder of the extent of Jesus’ love> He was willing to undergo the most humiliating death for our sake. Again, Pope Benedict put it well. The Sign of the Cross, he said *“tells how much God loves us, it tells us that there is a love in this world that is stronger than death, stronger than our weaknesses and sins. The power of love is stronger than the evil which threatens us”.*

We have been redeemed through the events that happened on one cross two thousand years ago. It also reminds us of our baptism, when the priest signed us and said: “ “. We should remember this and we should rejoice.

The Penitential Rite

We know that we have not always lived up to the teaching of Jesus Christ. Saint John says: *“If we say: We are without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”* (1st John 1:8-9).

Weakness and a tendency to sin have, unfortunately, been part of our human condition. Nevertheless, Saint John adds in the following verse of the Scripture: *“If we acknowledge our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing”*. And so we come before the altar, the Church, before Christ in a penitential spirit, and we express our sorrow in the traditional prayers: *“Lord have mercy”* (see Mathew 17:15).

Glory to God in the Highest

If in the Penitential Rite we acknowledge our lowliness, in the very next prayer, the *Gloria*, we praise God’s greatness. The Church takes the opening lines of this prayer from the angels’ song at the birth of Jesus. The early Christians thought it proper to sing the same song in the Mass. St. John Chrysostom wrote: *“The wise men adored this body when it lay in the manger; they prostrated themselves before it in fear and trembling. Now you behold the same body that the wise men adored in the manger, lying upon the altar; you also know its power and saving effect”*.

*Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace to people of good will.
We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,*

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*have mercy on us.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen*

After its angelic opening, the *Gloria* proceeds with a litany of scriptural titles for God: heavenly king, almighty Father, Only Begotten, Lord, Lamb of God, Most High, Christ. According to the ancient chronicles of the Church of Rome, the *Gloria* has been part of the Church's public prayer since around A.D. 128 when it was added to the nighttime Mass at Christmas. It was then that Pope Saint Telesphorus decreed: *"At the opening of the sacrifice the angelic hymn should be repeated – that is 'Glory to God in the highest' "*.

The Church uses the *Gloria* in Sunday Masses as a form of celebration, except during the seasons of Advent and Lent, when the Liturgy is more penitential. It is also used during certain feasts and solemnities when they fall on weekdays. In the parts of the Mass we have seen so far, the Blessed Trinity has been a consistent theme: invoked in the Sign of the Cross, and again in the greeting, and again in the threefold form of the *Kyrie*. The *Gloria* further develops this theme as it praises the persons of the Godhead in all their heavenly glory.

Opening prayer

After the *Gloria* and a brief moment of silence, the priest offers an "opening prayer", sometimes called a "Collect", that emphasizes some special theme or themes of the Mass. The congregation takes this prayer as its own by responding "**Amen**".

The first Reading

After the *Gloria* and the *Opening prayer*, we proceed to a series of readings from the Bible, passages the Church has excepted and arranged for the Mass in a meaningful way. We have arrived at the *Liturgy of the Word*.

“Faith comes from what is heard” Saint Paul said (Romans 10:17). And so we receive the words of the Bible as the earliest Christians received them> We receive them from the Church. Let us remember that for many centuries there were no printing presses, books were very costly, and many people could not read. Still, Christians received the Scriptures in an orderly fashion as they attended Mass throughout their lives. In fact, the early Church defined its Scriptures as those books that could legitimately be read during the Mass – for no other documents, no other words may be proclaimed as “The Word of God” at Mass.

The Church sets out a through program of readings in a book called the ***Lectionary***. On most Sunday, these begin with a selection from the Old Testament.

The Old Testament is what we call the forty-six books that make up the first (and larger) portion of the Bible. These books record the history of salvation from the moment of creation till the coming of Jesus Christ. (Salvation history from that moment forward is the subject of the New Testament, the second part of the Bible). The Old Testament includes the Pentateuch (the first five books) as well as books of history, wisdom that is a little like philosophy, and prophecy.

What we call the Old Testament, Jesus and the apostles simply called “the Scriptures”. The Old Testament books were the Church’s first Scriptures - and they remain our first Scriptures, in order of sequence, whenever we go to Mass. Jesus himself proclaimed the Old Testament to have an abiding value: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law of the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law (Matthew 5:17-18).

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Christianity is unintelligible apart from the religion of ancient Israel - God's primordial covenant with his chosen people. Jesus understood himself and explained himself in light of the Old Testament. Thus, the Christians have always venerated the Scriptures of ancient Israel.

The books of the Old Testament are, as we proclaim in the Mass: "The Word of the Lord". They are God's inspired Word. They are a Word he spoke through human authors, who freely cooperated with his action.

Catholics believe that all the Old Testament books - though they vary in style, genre, and content, and though they were written over the span of a millennium and more - have a single common subject, and that is Jesus Christ. This is how a third century Bible scholar, an Egyptian named Origen, explained it: "Christ, the Word of God, was in Moses and the Prophets ... Moses or the Prophets said and did everything they did because they were filled with the Spirit of Christ".

God revealed the Old Testament as a preparation of the New Testament. The Old contains the New, though in a hidden way. As Jesus himself said, he came to "fulfill" the law and the prophets. In the New Testament, that fulfillment is complete. No longer hidden, the Word is made flesh and dwelling among us. Thus, we can fully understand the Old Testament only when we see it through the lens of the Gospel.

In the Liturgy of the Word, the first reading, like all the readings, is read aloud from a special lectern called the ambo.

You will notice that brief periods of silence come at intervals during the Liturgy or the Word. There is silence between the readings and the Responsorial Psalm, between the second reading and the Gospel, and after the homily. These are important moments for meditation, when we receive of the Word of God into our hearts.

The Deutero-canonical Books of the Old Testament are: Tobias, Judith, Ben Sira, Wisdom (of Salomon), 1-2 Maccabees, Baruck, Daniel 3:24-100.

In the meeting of Rabbis at Jabneh (Yamnia), 45 kilometers west of Jerusalem, they decided to reject those books, although Jewish, under the pretext that they were "written in Greek". But this is not true because many of them

existed in Hebrew (like Ben Sira, Baruck, 1 Maccabees) and in Aramaic (Tobia). The real reason was that Jews refused to have the same Old Testament as the “minim”, “heretics, impure” Nazarenes, meaning Christians, whose majority was reading the Septuagint, Greek version of the Holy Books. And some of those Books existed only in Greek, in the Septuagint. And Christians were keen on quoting them especially to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. As for the Protestants, with Andreas Bodstein from “Karlstad” in 1520, he took the Jewish position against the Catholic Church.

The Responsorial Psalm

Between the first reading and the second, we actually have another “reading” from the Bible. It’s a reading shared by a leader - either a lector or a cantor - and the entire congregation.

The Responsorial Psalm is usually taken from the biblical Book of Psalms, the great collection of the hymns and prayerful poems of ancient Israel. (It is likely that many of the Psalms were used in the ancient liturgies of the Jerusalem Temple). On rare occasions, the lectionary presents another biblical canticle. *Mary’s Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55), for example, is sometimes used on feasts dedicated to her honor.

Most of the time, however, we pray the Psalms, and we do so in a call-and-response fashion. The electors read a series of lines - or the cantor signs them - and the congregation responds with an *antiphon*, a line repeated at intervals. It is interesting to note that antiphonal singing has been part of the Mass since the very beginning of Christianity. It is probably something we learned from ancient Judaism.

In A.D. 111, a Roman governor named Pliny observed that the Christians in his region met on Sunday “before dawn and sing responsively a hymn” before partaking of “ordinary and innocent food”. An early tradition records that Saint IGNATIUS of Antioch, a contemporary of the Apostles, introduced antiphonal singing into the Church after he had a vision of the angels singing that way in heaven.

When we pray the Psalms this way, we are praying as Jesus did, as Mary did, and as the Apostles did. The Psalms of Israel came easily to their mind in all circumstances. The Book of Psalms is the Old Testament book most often quoted in the New Testament.

It is easy to see why the Psalms were so memorable. Poetry makes things easier to remember. Melody makes poetry more memorable still. The lines of the Psalms stick with us: “Taste and see the goodness of the Lord” ... “The Lord is my shepherd. There is nothing I shall want” ... “I rejoiced when I heard them say ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord’ “ ... “This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad”.

One of the Church fathers, Saint Basil the Great, told his priests that the Psalms were useful precisely *because* they were remembered. People might forget the homily, even if the priest is very well prepared, but they will remember the antiphon of the Psalm, because it is melodic, and they will sing it often through the day.

Another Church father, Saint Athanasius, noted that the Psalm contained “all things human” - joy, gratitude, repentance, cries for help, pleas for justice, and appeals for mercy. Noting the Church’s Christ centered reading of all Scripture, Saint Augustine taught that the Psalms represent the prayer *of* Christ, prayer *about* Christ and prayer *to* Christ.

So let your voice be heard at the Responsorial Psalm. Let it join the voices of the others around you. If you do, you will find that the ancient songs rise as readily to your lips and your mind as they did for Jesus and his first disciples. The Psalms are something that go home with Christians, when Christians go home from Mass. Indeed, they go with us wherever we go. Saint John Chrysostom said: “Are you a craftsman? As you sit at work, sing Psalms ... You shall be able to sit in your workshop as in a monastery”.

The second reading

At Mass on Sundays, as well as special memorials and feast days, the Church prescribes a second Scripture reading before the proclamation of the Gospel. This reading is usually chosen from the New Testament books that are not “Gospels” - the letters of the Apostles, the Acts, and the visionary Book of Revelation.

The form of these books is especially well suited for the Mass. Indeed, many of them were written precisely for that purpose: to be read at Mass. At the close of one letter, Saint Paul said: “I adjusted you by the Lord that this letter be read to all the brothers” (1 Thessalonians 5:27). The Book of Revelation begins with the benediction: “Blessed is the one who reads aloud and blessed are those

who listen to this prophetic message” (Revelation 1:3).

So, still today, we read aloud and we listen. In the second reading we often catch glimpses of the problems and the progress of the Church’s first generation. They struggled to be faithful to the Gospel amid sometimes-hostile pagan culture. They knew the pain of estrangement from family members and friends who misunderstood them. They disagreed with one another about practical matters, even related to the Church. They rejoiced at the conversion of friends who were sinners. They mourned when fellow Christians went backsliding into immorality. They loved the Mass, too, as we do (listen closely to 1 Corinthians, chapters 10 and 11).

From the second reading, we come to know that our fellowship is not just with Christians in our parish, or in our time. It is *catholic*—that is, universal. It embraces all people of the world, at every period of the Church’s history. We are still living in the Church described in the Apostles’ letters. We want to be faithful, as that first generation was, even if we should undergo persecution. We are dependent upon the witness of these ancestors in the faith. And so, when the lector announces the second reading as “The Word of the Lord”, we respond with grateful voices: “Thanks be to God”.

Alleluia

Alleluia is one of the two Hebrew words that have endured, untranslated, for use in the Mass. (The other is *Amen*).

Alleluia (sometimes spelled *Hallelujah*) means “Praise the Lord”. That is what we do when rise to hear the proclamation of the Gospel.

Praise is the purest form of prayer, because it seeks nothing for itself, but only God’s glory. We ask God for good things. We *thank* God for graces we have received. Our gratitude, however, moves us to consider not just what God has done for us, but *who* God is. And so we praise the Lord.

The Hebrew word *Halleluja* has, since ancient times, been an important part of the Passover celebration of the Jews. It is a key word in certain Psalms, called *Hallel* or “Praise” Psalms. In the time of Jesus, when the Jerusalem Temple was still standing, the assisting priests (the Levites) would chant a group of these Psalms (113-118) continuously during the sacrifice of the Passover lambs. Families would chant two of these Psalms (113-114) during the Passover meal at home. This was like the “hymn” that Jesus and his disciples sang at the end of the Last Supper (see Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26).

Thus, this classic expression of praise, *Alleluia*, has always been integral to the

Passover, and so it became an important part of the Christian celebration of the Paschal Mystery.

Consider the reasons devout Jews have given for their praise. In the Talmud (from around A.D. 200) we can find the oldest account of the rites of the Passover meal: “In every generation a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt ... He brought us out from the bondage to freedom, from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning to a festival day, and from darkness to great light, and from servitude to redemption; so let us say before him the *Hallelujah*”.

This is what Jesus was celebrating with his closest friends at the Last Supper. It is what he continues to celebrate with us at every Mass. Now he delivers us - from bondage to freedom, sorrow to gladness, mourning to joy, darkness to light, slavery to redemption. This is the meaning of our salvation. This is the gift we have received with the Gospel. And so when we stand and receive the Gospel, see raise our own great *Hallel*. We say or sing *Alleluia*.

The Church omits *Alleluia* during the season of Lent, for reasons that should be obvious. During Lent, we cultivate a longing to celebrate the Passover of Jesus Christ, his Paschal Mystery, his Easter. As we wait, we look forward to the time of the *Hallel*, the season of *Alleluia*. At Easter Vigil, we restore *Alleluia*, and the Churches ring out with praise at the good news.

The Gospel

For the first two Readings and the Psalm, we have been seated, to signify our receptiveness to God’s Word. Now, however, we stand to recognize the arrival of the great King, Jesus, in the words of the Gospel.

The priest or deacon precedes his reading of the Gospel by repeating a portion of the introductory rites: “The Lord be with you”, to which everyone responds: “And with your Spirit”. It is as if we are beginning again, drawing still nearer to Christ, whom we acknowledge as present in the inspired Word. For, as the Church declares in its General Instruction of the Roman Missal: “When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to the people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel”.

The word *Gospel* means, literally, “good news”. It is the word the Apostles used to describe their proclamation of Jesus’ saving work (see Romans 1:1, 1:15).

The Gospel readings at Mass are chosen from the first four books of the New Testament, the accounts of Jesus’ earthly ministry. The priest announces the

source of his selection as he says: “A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew” (or Mark or Luke or John). The congregation responds by saying: “Glory to you, O Lord”, and making a small Sign of the Cross over the forehead, the lips, and the breast. He prays that the Lord may be in his heart and on his lips, and make him worthy to proclaim the Gospel.

The Sunday readings unfold a three-year cycle of Gospel readings. The first year, Year A, uses the Gospel according to Saint Matthew. Year B follows Saint Mark. Year C follows Saint Luke. Saint John’s Gospel is used often in the Church’s special seasons, and it also fills out Year B, since Saint Mark’s Gospel is relatively brief.

Often on Sundays the Gospel echoes themes that have been introduced in the first reading, and sometimes in the Responsorial Psalm as well. The Church’s lectionary arranges passages to show how the content of the Bible is united. It is one story, with one principal author: God himself, who inspired the human authors. The lectionary is a great blessing. It ensures that faithful Catholics hear the Bible in its fullness, and not just a few favorite portions chosen according to the interest of one or another preacher. It places the Bible front and center as the Church’s book - and the Gospel front and center as the heart of the Bible.

The lectionary presents all the readings together on the page. Some parishes, however, keep a separate Book of the Gospels - an ornate book, beautiful bound, sometimes encased in precious metals. This, too, is an outward sign of the Gospel’s value in the Church. They are a holy book, *the* Holy Book. If all the Bible is a temple, then the Gospels are the Holy of Holies. Bound together, they are treated as a sacred object. The priest, in fact, shows his affection and reverence for the sacred page by kissing it, a very ancient custom.

Only a priest, bishop, or deacon may read the Gospel at Mass. They receive this authority with the Sacrament of Holy Orders. During Holy Week, however, lay readers may assume certain roles in the reading of the long Passion narratives. By the way we treat the Gospel, we acknowledge that it is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word. In the way it is proclaimed - and sometimes in the way it is printed in a book - the Gospel is something set apart, and that is the very definition of holiness.

At the end of the reading, the priest reminds everyone that we have heard “The Gospel of the Lord” and the congregation responds, directly to Jesus, who is present: “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ”.

The Homily

For hearing the Gospel, we come to the homily. In the homily, a member of the clergy - a priest, deacon or bishop - explains a passage of the Scripture and gives practical applications.

The homily is a graced moment to share the faith. Christian friends may encourage us in many circumstances. But the context of the Mass - the remembrance of Christ and his real presence - makes the homily a preeminent place for us to hear what we need to hear. In the homily, we learn and grow with help not only from the preacher, but from the Holy Spirit. It is the clear teaching of the Church that “the liturgical homily” hold “pride place” among “all forms of Christian instruction” (see Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 132).

The great, living, apostolic tradition is ours to pass on to a generation that longs to be part of something good, life-giving, and meaningful. So the Church shares the faith in the spirit of the first Christians, who gathered to receive the apostles’ teaching in the context of “the breaking bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). The Church does so in the spirit of Jesus, who addressed synagogue gatherings (see Luke 4:16-20) and, on the day of his Resurrection, with the disciples of Emmaus “interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:27).

The apostles followed this pattern wherever they went. Later in the Acts of the Apostles (20:11), we find Saint Paul preaching to the Church’s assembly throughout the night, “until daybreak”!

Homilies today tend not to run on so long - but they are no less an important part of the Mass. Since so much in our culture changes so rapidly, it is essential that the teaching of Christ be applied to circumstances of our day in a way that allows the believer to see the full implications of the profession of faith. Catholic faith is not merely about abstract points of theology. Nor is it something we dust off and wear for an hour on Sunday. It is a commitment of our whole life, and the homily shows how the faith applies to life - at home, at work, at leisure. As Saint Justin Martyr put it in A.D. 155: “When the reader has finished, he who presides over those gathered admonishes and challenges them to imitate these beautiful things”.

By explaining the Scripture, “the homily, as an integral part of the Liturgy, increases the Word’s effectiveness” (so we read in the Church’s General Instruction of the Roman Missal).

Today’s preacher may also draw from a wealth of resources. The three-year cycle the lectionary provides may be richly integrated with the Catechism of the Catholic Church to touch on every aspect of our faith in a way that roots it in Scripture and relates it to daily life.

We know why

All the readings along with the homily unify us: by becoming true Christians we overcome our national, ritual and family divisions. They are transforming us: by becoming new men, we give up the bad habits and customs of our life. So, the purpose of the readings and the homily in the Eucharist is not only to remind us the teachings of Jesus Christ, but especially they are a strong invitation to conversion, to discover where I am in comparison with what I heard. I have to ask myself: what are these readings and homily telling me? In this way we realize that God is walking with us hand in hand in our life, He is leading us with an unlimited patience and love; in one word, we experience that He is our loving Father!, that no one in the world loves me as He does! Therefore, we can now profess our faith with joy and, later, when the Priest will say: *Let us give thanks to the Lord our God*, we can answer with all our heart and a strong voice: *It is right to give him thanks and praise*, and we know why.

The profession of faith

The members of the congregation now stand up and, together, proclaim their common faith.

When we recite the *Creed* at Mass, we act in communion with each other and with the whole body of Christ - the Church throughout the world and down to the ages, the saints of the past as well as our current neighbors. No Catholic is an island. No Catholic lives alone in the faith. Even someone who lives on a desert island, even someone who languishes in solitary confinement, if they keep the faith, they live in Christ with the whole Church. And that’s why we stand and make our profession together, as a community - as a communion.

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The English word *Creed* comes from the first word of the ancient Roman baptismal profession as it is rendered in Latin: *credo*, which means “I believe”. We recite the Creed as a summary of our faith. We publicly acknowledge that what we have heard in the readings and in all our upbringing in the faith. And we publicly announce our adherence to the teaching of Christ - everything we have received in tradition from the Apostles.

We believe in God. We believe in Christ. We believe in the Holy Spirit. And we believe in Christ’s Church, the Catholic Church. These are the four great proclamations of the creed that we recite on Sundays.

In the New Testament we find short formulas that summarize key doctrines: for example, “Jesus is Lord” (Romans 10:9, 1 Corinthians 12:3). These simple statements gradually developed into longer sequences of “articles”, lines affirming doctrines distinctive to the Christian faith. These early summaries were called the “rule of faith”, and they found final form as the early baptismal creeds, such as the Apostles’ Creed - a relatively brief statement, which in our Vicariate we use in Advent-Christmas-Lent-Easter.

The Creed we usually recite today is commonly called the Nicene Creed, after the fourth-century Council of Nicaea, which produced its basic articles. The Creed is more accurately called the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, because it was more fully developed at the Council of Constantinople, later in the fourth century. At these Councils (held in lands that are now part of Turkey), the Church made a definitive response to heresies that threatened to confuse believers and divide God’s family. At Nicaea (A.D. 325), the Church opposed those who denied the divinity of Jesus Christ. At Constantinople, the Church condemned a heresy that denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

Within every article is an essential doctrine to the faith - a dogma that must be accepted if we are to claim the name Christian. Behind most articles lurks some dark challenge to the faith. For example, against ancient heretics who rejected the heritage of Judaism, the Church required Christians to affirm that the Holy Spirit “has spoken to the prophets”. Against those who rejected Jesus’ humanity, we proclaim the he “was incarnate” - that is, he took on flesh - “and became man” and “suffered death and was buried”.

The Church gives us the Creed so that we can prepare ourselves to celebrate their Eucharist. In the Creed we declare our unity with Christ and the Church. In the Eucharist we consummate that unity. What we accept verbally in the Creed, we accomplish bodily in Holy Communion.

The Apostles' Creed
(to be said in Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter)

It is called so because it goes back to the very early Christians, perhaps to the time of the Apostles.

*I believe in God, the Father almighty
Creator of heaven and earth.*

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day, he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

The Niceno-Costantinopolitan Creed
(to be said in the Ordinary Time)

It is so called because it has been formulated by two Councils: Nicea (325 A.D.) and Constantinople (381 A.D.)

*I believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.*

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*I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.*

*I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church,
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

Prayer of the faithful

A recurring theme in the New Testament letters is the Apostles' concern for proper conduct at worship - at Mass. This is a special concern in the First Letter to Timothy, where we read: "First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings {in Greek: *Eucharistias*} be offered for everyone,

for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. This is good and pleasing to God our savior” (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

In the general intercessions of the Mass - also called the “petitions” or “Prayers of the faithful” - we seek to fulfill the Apostles’ request and please God our savior, who himself urged us: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7).

In Baptism, each and every Christian receives a share in Christ’s priesthood (see Revelation 1:6 and 1 Peter 2:9). Living in Christ, every Christian stands as a mediator between God and the world, offering “supplications, prayers, petitions ... for everyone”. Since our most powerful prayer in the Holy Mass, we use the occasion to raise our prayer on behalf of ourselves and others. When we do so, the Church says in its General Instruction of the Roman Missal, we are “exercising our priestly function”.

The priest who is celebrating Mass introduces the prayer, usually while standing at the presider’s chair. At the ambo, a deacon or a layperson announces the intentions, which may vary from week to week, taking into consideration the current concerns of the community. Each petition ends with an invitation for the assembly to join in the prayer: for example, “Let us pray to the Lord”. And the assembly, in unison, gives some customary response, for example: “Lord, hear our prayer”.

The Roman Missal indicates that the sequence of intentions should follow this general outline:

1. For the needs of the Church;
2. For public authorities and the salvation of the whole world;
3. For those oppressed by any need;
4. For the local community.

In particular celebrations, such as weddings or funerals, the series of intercessions may refer more specifically to the occasion.

This is another part of the Mass that Saint Justin Martyr illuminated back in the second century: “Then we all rise together and offer prayers for ourselves - and for all others, wherever they may be”.

Just a few years after Saint Justin, a North African theologian named Tertullian describe the petitions at Mass, playfully, as a sort of “wrestling” with God:

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“We meet together as an assembly and congregation so that, as we are united in offering our prayer to God, we may wrestle with him in supplications. God delights in this violence. We pray, too, for the emperors, for the ministers and for all in authority, for the welfare of the world, for the prevalence of peace, for the delay of the final consummation”. So we see the prayers had not changed much in the century and a half since Saint Paul’s day. Nor have they changed much in the two thousand years since then.

Tertullian went on, in another book, to note that our prayer has the power to accomplish many things: “to transform the weak, to restore the sick, to purge the possessed, to open prison bars, to loose the bonds of the innocent. Likewise it washes away faults, repels temptations, extinguishes persecutions, consoles the faint-hearted, escorts travelers, appeases waves, makes robbers stand aghast, nourishes the poor, governs the rich, appraises the fallen, arrests the falling, confirms the standing. Prayer is the wall of faith: her arms and missiles against the foe who keeps watch over us on all sides”.

Does this mean that God will always give all that we want, exactly as we want it, just because we prayed for it at Mass? No, of course not. God is our Father and no parent would do that. God will, however, always give us what we need. Tertullian explained that our prayer does not eliminate suffering, but rather “it supplies the suffering, and the feeling, and the grieving, with endurance; it amplifies grace by virtue, that faith may know what she obtains from the Lord, understanding what - for God’s name’s sake - she suffers”.

Saint Paul earnestly prayed for relief from his own suffering, but God said to him: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). God’s grace will be enough for us, too. Thus, while we ask for relief of the world’s ills, we ask also for the grace to endure them, if that is what God wants from us.

For we know from experience that suffering is a school of wisdom and kindness. Many of the wisest and kindest people we know are those who have suffered most. Christ himself showed us that the way to glory passes through great suffering and even death. Yet he also showed us the necessity of constant prayer. He prayed without ceasing and calls us to do the same.

So with every Mass we raise our prayers. Like Saint Paul, we offer our prayers, petitions, and Eucharist (*eucharistias*) for everyone, and we do this explicitly and specifically in the Prayer of the Faithful.

D) Conclusion

We should imitate the Christians of Bitinia, a Church in North Africa. In A.D. 304, Roma persecutor arrested a group of them who had gathered for worship. At their trial, the judge asked them why they had exposed themselves to such danger. They replied: “***We cannot live without Sunday Mass***”.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us:

“The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin” (N. 2181).

Let the Mass be the center of our life!

**Your Bishop,
+ Camillo Ballin, mccj**

**Awali, Kingdom of Bahrain, 02 September 2018:
13th anniversary of my Episcopal Ordination.**