

THE MASS – A JOURNEY TO EMMAUS

by Jerry Johnson

"The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life." (CCC 1324) "In the earthly liturgy we share in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle." (CCC 1090) The Church is teaching us that at each Mass we experience a foretaste of heaven. It is actually "heaven on earth" for us! Christ comes to us in a very real and substantial presence and allows us to actually touch him just as his followers did 2,000 years ago. This is an amazing reality. What is our personal experience of the Mass? Does it reflect this close, personal touch of God? What effect is it having on our lives? Are we experiencing that unity with Christ and all of the graces that should ensue to enable us to live truly Christian lives? If the Eucharist is really central to our faith, these are very important questions. If, after examining our experience of the Mass, we find it lacking, we need to ask ourselves why. One explanation may be that we are not fully prepared to receive this amazing gift. The Vatican II Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy teaches: "But in order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds should be attuned to their voices, and that they should cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain."

Just what is the "proper disposition" necessary to receive

the full effects of the Eucharist? First, we must be in a state of grace. This means we must be free of mortal sin (see mortal sin on page 2). The normal means of the forgiveness of mortal sin is the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

That's why this sacrament is so important and should be received regularly. Beyond that, however, we must also approach the Eucharist with

the right attitude and certainly with faith. Actually, if we pay attention and participate, the Mass itself will prepare us to receive the Eucharist properly. I'd like to examine the Mass in light of the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus following Christ's resurrection. I think this gives us a great insight into the disposition we need to truly experience the fullness of the Eucharist. Please refer to Luke 24:13-35 on page two as we explore the experience of the disciples and compare it to our own.

As the two disciples are traveling and discussing recent events, the first thing that happens is that Jesus joins them. Each time we come to Mass, we begin a journey and Jesus joins us as well. He is present in the congregation, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt 18:20). He is present in His Word, in the person of the priest and most especially in the Eucharist itself. As Christ joins them, he asks them to describe their thoughts to him. Christ asks us as well as we begin Mass to pour out our hearts to him. To bring the events of our

lives and our sinfulness to him in an act of repentance. The disciples expressed a sorrow as they told of the crucifixion and death of Jesus, the one they were hoping would redeem Israel. As we express sorrow for our sins,

we are also expressing a sorrow for the death of Christ since it was our very sins that nailed him to that cross. Next Christ speaks his Word to them, recalling everything in the Scriptures that

referred to him. In recounting the events of his life and ministry, he was, in effect, revealing the New Testament to them, which was yet to be written. He then explained how so much of his life was hidden in the prophecies of the Old Testament. At Mass he teaches us as well, in the words of the Old and New Testaments and through the explanations of the minister of his Word. As they explained later, their hearts burned within them as they received this revelation. They must have come to a certain belief and faith through these words of Christ. At Mass, we complete the liturgy of the Word with our own profession of faith. When we recite the Creed, are we truly making it our own prayer and an expression of our belief? As they continued their journey, they come to a turning point. Would Christ go on farther and leave them behind. They urged him to stay with them. They offered him the gifts of their food and their dwelling. As we begin the preparation or the "offertory" of the Mass, we are called to do

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the same. We offer our gifts of bread and wine and our tithe, but most importantly we offer to Christ our whole heart, our entire life. We offer him the dwelling of our very bodies. We plead with him to remain with us, to be with us and within us. Our prayers are answered and in the amazing act of self-giving, Christ transforms that simple bread and wine into his very body, blood, soul and divinity. In the person of his minister, the priest, he breaks the bread and blesses the wine and offers us the gift of his very life and divine nature. How do we experience this gift? Are our eyes opened as those of the two disciples at Emmaus and do we truly recognize him in the breaking of the bread? He vanished from their sight and yet he remained in that very real presence of the Eucharist. The same Eucharist we experience and receive each time we participate in the Mass. From that experience, the disciples had to go forth and spread the news. They couldn't hold it in; they had to share it with others. As we are sent forth

from the Mass we are called to do the same. To live and share the Gospel by our words and our actions. Is this our experience of the Mass? Do we enter into an attitude of repentance and ponder the words of Scripture that we hear? Do we profess a deep belief and offer ourselves completely on the altar as we "lift our hearts to the Lord". Is our greatest desire to be joined with the God who saves us and offers his life to us in the very real and substantial presence of the Eucharist? If it hasn't been our experience, it can be. We must pray for the grace to truly prepare ourselves to receive this great and wonderful gift. The gift of God himself, the source and summit of our faith and our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ! Be prepared for the journey and walk the road of the Mass. It is HEAVEN ON EARTH!

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THOUGHTFUL QUESTIONS

1. Are you prevented from recognizing Jesus in the Eucharist because of a poor disposition?
2. Do you participate fully in all of the parts of the Mass?
3. Are you praying for the grace to be properly disposed to receive the body, blood, soul and divinity of the Lord?

Mortal Sin

For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met: "Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent." (CCC 1857)

Mortal sin, by attacking the vital principle within us – that is, charity - Necessitates a new initiative of God's mercy and a conversion of heart which is normally accomplished within the setting of the sacrament of reconciliation: (CCC 1856)

The Road to Emmaus Luke 24:13-35

"Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?" And he replied to them, "What sort of things?" They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of

death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see." And he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures. As they approached the village to which they

were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning (within us) while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread."