

THE MASS – Lesson 1

What is the Mass?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN? Where does the term “MASS” come from? The English word “Mass” has its roots in the Latin term “missa”. In Latin the Mass ends with “Ite missa est,” which translated into English means “Go, it is sent” – the “it” being the Church.

From the Latin word “missa” comes the English word “dismiss.” So, “Mass” means “dismissal.” The celebration (of the Mass) takes its name from the sending forth that occurs at the end of every Mass.

So, simply stated, because of the way the Latin Mass ended – “Ite missa est”, the celebration of our Lord’s Supper became known simply as the “Mass.”

Today, we often refer to the Mass as the “Liturgy”. One of the ancient names for the Mass was Divine Liturgy – literally, ‘God’s public service’. What was once called the “Mass of the Catechumens” is now called “Liturgy of the Word” and what was once called “Mass of the Faithful” is now called “Liturgy of the Eucharist”. Eucharist comes from the Greek word for “thanksgiving”. Eucharist is also another name for the “Blessed Sacrament”.

DID YOU KNOW? There were actually two dismissals in the celebration – one in which catechumens (people who are not fully Catholic yet want to be) were dismissed right after the sermon, and the dismissal at the end, when all the fully initiated Catholics, the faithful, were dismissed. The Mass is a prayer – a really long prayer. We know this because all Masses, like all prayers, begin and end with the Sign of the Cross.

Today’s mass has two parts: The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Mass is also a banquet. There can be no banquet unless something is sacrificed. Through the Mass we are present at the one sacrifice that Christ offered the Father and we join our own sacrifices to His at every Mass.

OTHER NAMES FOR THE MASS.

1. The Lord’s Supper
2. The Eucharist
3. The Offering
4. The Holy Sacrifice

Each of these names reminds us of what the celebration of the Mass really is:

REVIEW QUESTIONS.

1. Where does the word “Mass” come from”?
2. Can you give at least three other names used for the Mass?
3. What might we sacrifice when we attend Mass?

THE NEXT TIME YOU ATTEND MASS. Pay attention to the first words spoken by the priest, at the beginning of the Mass, and the last words spoken by the priest, at the end of the Mass. Were those first or last words the Sign of the Cross? Why are they spoken?