

THE MASS – Lesson 3a

The Origin of the Mass/Opening the Door

THE ORIGIN OF THE MASS. Almost two thousand years ago, on the night before he died, Jesus of Nazareth celebrated the Passover meal with His disciples. They gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem. Scripture (the Holy Bible) tells us that at the end of the meal, Jesus suddenly departed from the well-known ritual. He took the bread into His hands, said a blessing over it, then broke it as His disciples watched. Jesus gave the pieces to the saying to them, “Take, eat; this is my body”. Jesus then took a cup filled with wine and gave thanks to God for its contents. He said to them, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant of my blood”. “Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me”.

Jesus declared an “new” covenant (agreement, contract, promise) between God and humanity. Like the Pascal meal that he celebrated on that night with His disciples, this New Covenant will be celebrated by the followers of Jesus until he comes again. It is this New Covenant that we celebrate each time we come to Mass.

OPENING THE DOOR. There is great symbolism in the doors of a church. Sometimes they include frescoes (paintings) depicting the whole of salvation history on them. Sometimes you will see the image of Christ holding a lamb on His shoulders painted or depicted in stained glass over the front doors of the church. This reminds us that Jesus said, “I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture”.

DID YOU KNOW? The Passover meal, commonly called the Seder meal today, is a Jewish ritual meal that once a year commemorates and celebrates the Passover, God’s liberation (freeing) of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. The meal is a simple one of wine, unleavened bread (bread made without yeast), herbs, and a Passover lamb.

In the ancient liturgy (a tradition that still exists in the Eastern Catholic and Orthodox churches), there was a point at which the deacon would call out to the congregation, “The doors, the doors!” The ushers would ensure that the doors had been barred so the uninitiated could not enter or be present to witness the sacred mysteries that were about to unfold.

REVIEW QUESTIONS.

1. When was the first Mass celebrated?
2. Who was the first person to celebrate a Mass?
3. What do church doors symbolize?
4. What do you think our New Covenant with God means for us?

THE NEXT TIME YOU ATTEND MASS. Here is a question you should ask yourself as you approach or pass through the church doors: WHAT IS IT THAT JESUS IS GOING TO SAVE ME FROM?