

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

The Mass, Part 1 – The Everlasting Banquet

Have you ever traveled to a different country, especially one where they speak a language you do not understand? Have you ever attended Mass in another language? Did you notice that, even if you did not understand the language, you were still able to know exactly what was happening in the Mass? You may have even been able to answer the priest's invocations in your own native tongue.

One of the great epiphanies one might have from this experience is to realize that the Mass is really the same throughout the world. From this realization, it is not hard to extrapolate that at any time, day or night, there is a Mass being celebrated somewhere throughout the world. All of the Masses that are celebrated throughout the world are united to the never-ending Mass in the Heavenly Kingdom. [CCC 1344] This means that the Mass is an everlasting banquet – the greatest banquet that ever existed and we are all invited!

The concept of the Mass as banquet has existed from the very beginnings of our faith. In fact, it was Jesus Himself who placed this great act of sacrificial love in the midst of a meal, the Passover meal. "When it was evening, he reclined at table with the Twelve. [...] While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples, said, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.'" [MT 26:20, 26-28] Jesus not only invited the Apostles to that first Mass (the Last Supper), but He invites each one of us to join in this meal at every Mass.

When we consider the Mass as a meal, it gives us the basic structure of the Mass. It is very similar to a banquet one might attend. When one attends a banquet, the meal can be broken down into four basic movements: greeting, getting to know one another, the meal proper, and the farewell. The Mass has a similar structure. [cf. CCC 1346] The "greeting" is known as the Introductory rites, which consist of the Sign of the Cross, the Penitential rite and the Collect (or Opening Prayer). The "getting to know one another" includes the Liturgy of the Word (or Readings), the homily, and the Prayers of the Faithful (or General Intercessions). The "meal proper" is, of course, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, where we pray the Eucharistic prayer (the prayer of blessing and consecration of the bread and wine) and then receive the Body and Blood of Jesus. After the meal, our "farewell" includes the Prayer after Communion, the Solemn Blessing and the Dismissal.

In the weeks to come, we will explore each of these movements in more detail. However, before we do so, we will explore some general concepts about the Mass, such as why should we come to Mass, our posture at Mass, and the value of music and silence during Mass.

