

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

The Mass, Part 2 – A Mass by any Other Name Would Be as Sweet

Last week, we referred to the Mass as a banquet. This banquet can also go by other names, such as the Eucharist. Exploring the various names of the Mass can help us to further understand the meaning and significance of the Mass for us as Catholics.

In Paragraphs 1328-1332 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), there is a beautiful exposition of the names of the Mass. Let's use this exposition as our foundation for exploring some of the various synonyms for the Mass.

First, from where does the term *Mass* come? The Latin phrase of dismissal at the end of the Mass is "Ite, missa est." The Latin word "missa" gives us the term *Mass*, as well as "missal." But what does the phrase "Ite, missa est" mean? People have translated this phrase differently. Some say, "Go, you are sent," some "Go, it is finished," and some have another translation. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Pope Benedict XVI writes, "In antiquity, missa simply meant 'dismissal.' However in Christian usage it gradually took on a deeper meaning. The word 'dismissal' has come to imply a 'mission.' These few words succinctly express the missionary nature of the Church." [para. 51] The *Catechism* says that, after celebrating the mystery of salvation, the faithful are sent, "so that they may fulfill God's will in their daily lives." [CCC 1332]

In earlier times, the Mass was known by a longer name, the *Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, "because it makes present the one sacrifice of Christ the Savior and includes the Church's offering." [CCC 1330] In addition to our own offering, we also offer thanksgiving for the sacrifice of Jesus, so the Mass is also commonly known as the *Eucharist* (as mentioned above), which is derived from the

Greek word for thanksgiving. [CCC 1328] We make this prayer of thanksgiving as one gathering of people, so the Mass is also known as the *Eucharistic assembly*.

As we gather together to celebrate the Mass, we are joined more closely together with God and with one another. We call the Mass, *Holy Communion*, "because by this sacrament we unite ourselves to Christ, who makes us sharers in his Body and Blood to form a single body." [CCC 1331] In his teaching on the Gospel of John, St. Augustine recognized the Eucharist as "signum unitatis et vinculum caritatis" (a sign of unity and a bond of love) [*In Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 26, 13], because of the great communion that the Eucharist effects – *between* us, and *with* the Lord.

Some may call the Mass, a *Service*, especially those who are sensitive to ecumenism with our Protestant brothers and sisters. The name *Service* for the Mass comes from the fact that the Mass is our greatest liturgy, and the word "liturgy" derives from the Greek "leitourgia," which means a public work, duty or service.

Whatever name we use for the Mass, it is easy to see how important this liturgy is for the Church and for us. We will explore a bit more about its value to us next week.

