

Study Questions and Talk Notes

A BIBLICAL WALK THROUGH
THE MASS



SESSION ONE

Introduction: The Biblical Foundations of the Mass

Establish the Context

For many Catholics, the Mass might, in a certain sense, be almost *too* familiar. We show up at church each Sunday and perform prayers and rituals that many of us have known since childhood. We stand, sit, and kneel. We make the Sign of the Cross. We recite “Holy, holy, holy,” “Lamb of God,” and “Thanks be to God.”

But what do all these prayers and rituals mean? We might know these rites like the backs of our hands, but do we really understand the significance of all that we are saying and doing in the Liturgy?

One key for unlocking the mystery of the Mass is Scripture. Almost all the prayers and rituals of the Mass are steeped in Scripture. Quotations and allusions to Bible passages are found throughout the Liturgy. And the climax of salvation history—Jesus’ saving death—is made present sacramentally in the Mass. Therefore, the more we know about the biblical roots of the Mass, the more we will come to appreciate the splendor of the Liturgy and be prepared to encounter Jesus at every Mass.

In this study, we will walk through the main parts of the Mass—from the opening Sign of the Cross to the concluding “Thanks be to God”—and consider them in light of their scriptural background. Along the way, we will discover many beautiful spiritual treasures. The prayers and rituals of the Mass, when understood biblically, offer much inspiration, encouragement, and practical help for our lives as Christians. As we will see, the prayers of the Mass challenge us to examine our consciences, repent of our sins, and experience God’s loving mercy. They also remind us of God’s presence with us amid our fears, trials, and sufferings. They can inspire each of us to live our marriage, family life, and friendships with greater love, and they summon us to entrust more of our lives to Jesus.

Most of all, this *Biblical Walk Through the Mass* will help us encounter our Lord more deeply in the Liturgy itself. By understanding the meaning of what we say and do in the Mass, we will be better prepared to give ourselves to Jesus in every prayer and gesture of the Liturgy.

What Is the Mass?

Learning more about the Mass is well worth our time and effort. The Mass has been at the very center of Christian worship since the time of the apostles. It is the celebration of the Eucharist that Jesus instituted at the Last Supper. So important is the Mass that the Second Vatican Council called it the “source and summit” of the Christian life. On the one hand, our entire lives are directed toward the Mass; on the other, we find in the Mass the spiritual strength, guidance, and support we need to live life day to day.

What makes the Mass so central to the Christian life? The beauty and power of the Mass can be better appreciated when one understands the three chief aspects of the Eucharist: as sacrifice, as real presence, and as communion meal.

First, in the Mass the redeeming *sacrifice* of Jesus on the Cross is made present sacramentally so that its saving power may be applied more fully to our lives and so that we can unite ourselves with Christ’s self-offering to the Father (see CCC 1366–1368). Second, in the Eucharist, we encounter the *real presence* of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is not merely a symbol of Jesus. At the moment of consecration, the bread and wine are changed into his very Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity (see CCC 1374). Third, not only does our Lord draw near us by becoming present on the altar at Mass; he comes to dwell *within* us when we receive him in Holy Communion. These three aspects of the Eucharist are explained more fully in the two resources accompanying this workbook: the book, *A Biblical Walk Through the Mass*, and the video presentations.

Overview of the Mass

Before we begin our journey, it will be helpful to have a brief overview of the itinerary we will follow, which is an outline of the Mass itself: the Introductory Rites, the *Liturgy of the Word*, the *Liturgy of the Eucharist*, and the Concluding Rites.

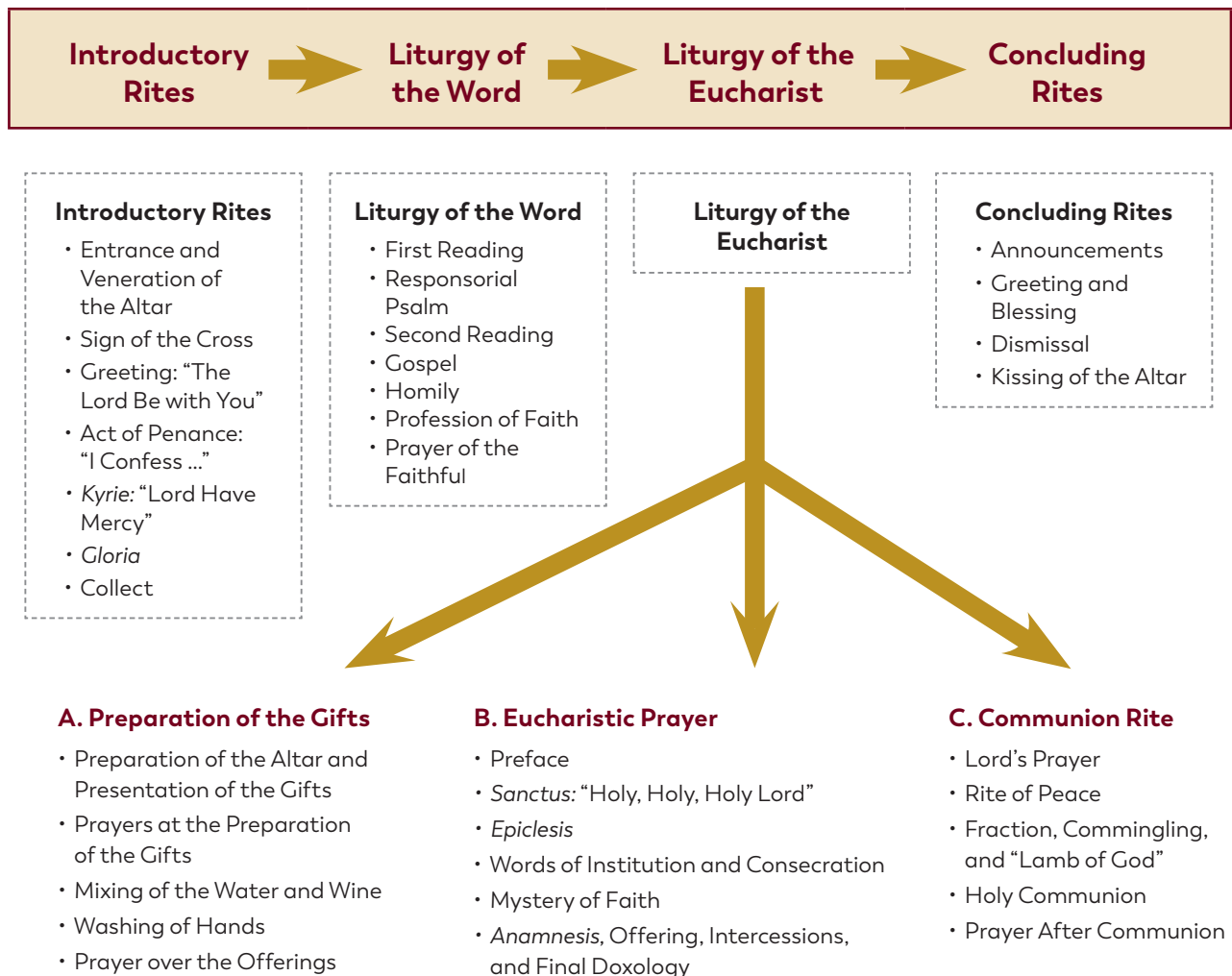
The two principal parts of the Mass are the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. These two form one unified act of worship. We are first nourished at the table of God’s Word through the readings from Scripture and then at the table of our Lord’s Body, which we receive in Holy Communion.

These two central parts of the Mass are flanked by two smaller parts: the Introductory Rites and the Concluding Rites. The *Introductory Rites* open the celebration of the Mass and prepare the faithful for their sacred encounter with God in his Word and in the Eucharist. After Communion, the *Concluding Rites* formally close the celebration and send the people forth to do good works and take Christ into the world.



The chart below lays out these four main sections of the Mass, which serve as an umbrella for the smaller, individual parts of the Liturgy. Keeping this “big picture” of the Mass in mind will be helpful as we embark on our journey.

PARTS OF THE MASS



Read

If you have a chance, read Chapter 1, “What Is the Mass?” in Dr. Sri’s book, *A Biblical Walk Through the Mass* for more background, along with the prayers of the Mass (the Order of Mass).¹

REMINDER: *There is no required home preparation for Session One.* You can do the readings later, and you can answer the following discussion questions together when your small group meets for the first time.

Take a Deeper Look

1. Catholics are so familiar with the sacred words Jesus spoke the night before he died: “This is my body ... This is my blood.” We hear the priest repeat these same words at every Mass when he consecrates the bread and wine. What if we had never heard these words before? What if we were Jews in the first century hearing Jesus speak them for the very first time? Put yourself in the scene and imagine being one of the apostles there at the Last Supper, watching Jesus take bread and wine and speak these solemn words:

TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND EAT OF IT,
FOR THIS IS MY BODY,
WHICH WILL BE GIVEN UP FOR YOU. ...

TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND DRINK FROM IT,
FOR THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD,
THE BLOOD OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL COVENANT,
WHICH WILL BE POURED OUT FOR YOU AND FOR MANY
FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME.

If you were one of the apostles at that first Eucharist and you heard Jesus say these words, what would you be thinking or feeling? What would the words mean to you?

¹ As mentioned in the introduction, the prayers of the Mass can be found in the *Roman Missal*, in printed missalettes like those in most parish pews, on the Laudate phone app, or by subscription in publications like *The Word Among Us* and *Magnificat*.

2. We've seen how the Eucharist is not merely a symbol or a reminder of Jesus. At Mass, the bread and wine are really changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. So when we receive the Eucharist in Holy Communion, we are receiving Jesus himself. How does this understanding of the Eucharist affect the way you will approach the Mass and receive Communion in the future?

3. During his public ministry, when people draw near to Jesus, he brings about amazing transformation in their lives. According to the following passages, who comes to Jesus and what does he do for them?

Matthew 8:1-3

Matthew 8:23-27

Matthew 9:2-7

Matthew 9:20-22

4. To which of the people or situations in these stories can you relate most? Why?
5. The same Jesus who walked from town to town in Galilee, giving sight to the blind, curing the sick, comforting the sorrowful, and calming storms—this same Jesus is actually present to us today in the Eucharist. And he wants to do great works in our lives if we come to him with confidence and love. How might these stories inspire you to approach Jesus today in the Eucharist? In what ways might Jesus be inviting you to draw closer to him in the Eucharist?

Application

This exercise will help you apply one of the key themes of the session to your life. After meditating on it, respond to God with a brief written prayer if you choose.

Throughout salvation history, God has been present to his people, but with the institution of the Holy Eucharist and Holy Communion, God has united himself to us in an extraordinary way. Think about the gift of the Eucharist. Are you mindful of God's real presence when you receive him in Holy Communion? This week, reflect on Christ's real presence in the Mass. How can you better prepare yourself to receive him sacramentally in the Eucharist? Ask God how you can be more present to him in the Mass.

Dear Lord ...

**After the small group discussion, watch Dr. Sri's video presentation for Session One.
The talk notes that begin on the following page provide an outline of the video presentation.**

SESSION ONE TALK NOTES

Introduction: The Biblical Foundations of the Mass

I. Understanding the Mass

II. Key Aspects of the Eucharist

- A. The Eucharist as sacrifice (see CCC 1366–1368)
- B. The Eucharist as real presence
 - 1. Unique presence in the Eucharist (see CCC 1373–1374)
 - 2. Meaning of “real presence”
- C. The Eucharist as Holy Communion

III. The Eucharist as Sacrifice: Old Testament Background

- A. Three aspects of sacrifice
 - 1. Sacrificed animal
 - 2. Communion meal
 - 3. Covenant union
- B. Examples
 - 1. Isaac and Abimelech (see Genesis 26)
Symbolism of sacrificial meal: shared life
 - 2. Israel at Mount Sinai (see Exodus 24)
 - 3. Passover
- C. Jesus fulfills the Passover sacrifice
 - 1. Last Supper: Old Testament sacrificial language applied to himself
 - 2. The Passover sacrifice is followed by a meal
 - a. 1 Corinthians 5:7-8
 - b. 1 Corinthians 10, 11

IV. The Eucharist as Real Presence and Holy Communion

- A. The importance of the real presence: John 6
- B. The gift of the Eucharist: “You are a tabernacle”
- C. God with Us: Visiting Jesus in Adoration

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