

*National Catholic Broadcasting Council presents*

THE  
MASS

*The Mystery at the Centre  
of Salvation Study Guide*

MICHAEL COUTTS, S.J.



Suite 300 - 990 Fort St  
Victoria, BC, V8V 3K2  
Canada

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Author: Michael Coutts, S.J.

Editor: Lynda Clayton

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“The Eucharistic Celebration is much more than a simple banquet: it is exactly the memorial of Jesus’ Paschal Sacrifice, the mystery at the centre of salvation ... every time we celebrate this Sacrament, we participate in the mystery of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ.”

Pope Francis



## Introduction

The Holy Father shared that “the Eucharistic Celebration is much more than a simple banquet: it is exactly the memorial of Jesus’ Paschal Sacrifice, the mystery at the centre of salvation ... every time we celebrate this Sacrament we participate in the mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ.” (Pope Francis, General Audience—February 5, 2014)

Our *2018 Mission* leader is Michael Coutts, S.J. Fr. Michael is a regular celebrant on the *Daily TV Mass* and has been a sought-after retreat leader for many years. In this Mission, Fr. Michael takes us on a journey of discovery to explore the mystery of the Mass.

Our journey begins in Part One, as Fr. Michael begins our reflection with Jesus and the disciples at their last supper together, and it continues as we walk across the Kidron Valley into the Garden of Gethsemane. In Part One, Jesus breaks the bread and blesses the wine, shares his body and blood with us, and tells us to do this in remembrance of him. Fr. Michael also introduces us to the meaning of the fourth cup that Jesus agrees to drink in the Garden of Gethsemane.

In Part Two, Fr. Michael takes us back further to the time of the prophet, priest, and king, Melchizedek. Here we see the significance of the bread and wine.

In Part Three, Fr. Michael explores how the early followers of the Christ remembered him after his death and resurrection. The mystery of the Mass begins to take shape, but it is not without a struggle.

Part Four brings us into our modern times and will explore how we continue to live this mystery, which is at the centre of our salvation, every time we come together as a community to celebrate Mass.

When planning for the 2018 National Catholic Mission was underway, we discussed the hope that this material would be of use to Catholic educators, catechists, and small faith groups. This study guide is designed to be used on its own or in conjunction with the video of the Mission, which is available on the internet.

The *2018 Mission* videos can be used in a variety of ways. Small faith groups may want to gather and watch the Mission in its entirety, which will require one hour. The original Mission aired on TV in two parts of thirty minutes each and can be used over two sessions. The four talks are available individually and would make good ten-minute segments for a longer meeting or class. At the end of each session, questions are provided to stimulate discussion.

It is our hope that Catholic educators will find these resources helpful as they work with our younger generations in their formation. Included in this study guide are questions that can be used for discussions in the classroom, as homework, or as test essay questions.

Please feel free to contact us with your comments and suggestions as to future National Catholic Mission topics or ways we could improve these study guides and video resources.

St. Paul encourages us as a community of the faithful to meet, to share, and to encourage one another, as he said to us in Hebrews 10:24–25:

*... let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Our hope is that this Mission, *The Mass: The Mystery at the Centre of Salvation*, can be used to encourage discussion about how we are all called



to fully participate in the mystery of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Deacon Mike Walsh

Executive Director

National Catholic Broadcasting Council

## A Few Practical Suggestions for Small Faith Groups

Each session is designed to be approximately ninety minutes in length, depending on the discussion generated. The video sessions are almost fifteen minutes each followed by reflection and discussion of approximately one hour. The videos are accessible on the National Catholic Broadcasting Council website: <https://dailytvmass.com/about-mission/2018-mission/>

The questions can be used for individual reflection or for discussion within a group. As a group study, it is important that the participants agree to a covenant of confidentiality. The group should be reminded of this at the beginning of each session. The discussions will be richer in an atmosphere of trust.

To gain the most from your time studying and reflecting together, it is best if each member makes it a priority to attend all four sessions; however, sometimes circumstances come along that prevent the ideal from happening. For that reason, the study guide has been designed to be read on its own if someone is unable to attend a session, but remember that great ideas come from the time of discussion with each other.

To maximize the benefits from the discussion time, it is important that the members agree to commit themselves to listening to each other and to encouraging each other to share their thoughts, perspectives, and feelings.

Two especially important points are *listening* and *confidentiality*.

A closing prayer has been included after the discussion questions for each talk, but a simple opening prayer is a useful tool for helping the group to focus after the initial time of fellowship. A suggested prayer that all can pray together might be:

*Lord, open our eyes that we may experience the mystery of the Mass,  
and be drawn closer to you.*

*“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable to you,*

*O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.” (Psalm 19:14)*

It is helpful to have a Bible available for reference. All scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

For R.C.I.A. Leaders:

In the appendix at the end of the study guide there are some thoughts on enhancing the experience of the Mass for your inquirers, catechumens, and candidates.

For Catholic Educators:

The questions that can be used for discussions in the classroom, as homework, or test essay questions have been included in the appendix at the end of the study guide. You may find some of the questions for the Small Faith Groups helpful as well. These are at the end of each chapter.

# The Mass: The Mystery at the Centre of Salvation

## Resource Page

*[www.dailytvmass.com/The-Mass-Resource-Page](http://www.dailytvmass.com/The-Mass-Resource-Page)*

The Study Guide to the 2018 National Catholic Mission has been designed to be used in conjunction with the videos from the Mission. Please take a moment to visit *[www.dailytvmass.com/The-Mass-Resource-Page](http://www.dailytvmass.com/The-Mass-Resource-Page)* which is on the Daily TV Mass website to explore the resources available for download.

We hope that individuals as well as small faith group leaders like RCIA and Bible Study facilitators and Catholic educators will find this material helpful in teaching and encouraging a deeper understand of the Mass.

The Resource Page offers easy access to the video of the entire Mission as well as each of the four talks which can used separately. The videos are free to download for use at your church or in the classroom. You can also play them directly from the website.

We have also included a link to the eBook and other ways to download the study guide for use by a group.

If you need any information or help in accessing or using the various resources available for the 2018 National Catholic Mission, please contact us:

National Catholic Broadcasting Council  
5762 Hwy 7 East  
PO Box 54035  
Markham, Ontario L3P 7Y4  
Toll-Free Canada and USA: 1-888-383-6277  
Email: *info@ncbc.ca*  
Website: [www.dailytvmass.com](http://www.dailytvmass.com)



# TALK ONE

## *An Invitation to the Lord's Supper*

“Do this in  
remembrance  
of me.”

(Luke 22:19)





# TALK ONE

## An Invitation to the Lord's Supper

### Introduction

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For this National Catholic Mission, we borrow the words of Pope Francis for our theme: *the Mass as "the mystery at the centre of salvation."*

During the season of Lent, our contemplation and prayers centre around the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This is the heart of the Eucharist that we celebrate at Mass. How did the Mass, this Eucharistic celebration, take its form? How did the early followers, who believed that Christ was the Son of God, celebrate this mystery?

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Michael Coutts, S.J.

Let us begin our journey in the Upper Room in the city of Jerusalem, where it all began.

*On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.*

**Matthew 26:17–19**

The disciples had asked Jesus where he was going to celebrate the Passover. Little did they know how important and significant that particular

Passover would be in their lives. Jesus had told them, as we read in the twenty-sixth chapter of Matthew, to go into the city to a friend's house. They were to tell the friend: "The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples" (Matthew 26:18).

You and I together glory in the name of Christian. We too are invited to the Passover. As we look at the table, we see many things, but two things catch our eyes. One is a stack of unleavened bread; in Hebrew, this bread is called *matzah*. Then we notice four cups of wine. We, the disciples, will have just one cup, out of which we will drink of "the cup of the fruit of the vine" four times.

*Say therefore to the Israelites, "I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians..."*

**Exodus 6:6-7**

These four cups stand for the four promises made by God and recorded in the sixth chapter of Exodus. God promised:

- I will bring you out from under the burdens;
- I will deliver you from slavery;
- I will bring you salvation;
- I will take you as my people, and I will be your God.

These four cups are Cups of Blessing, or Mitzvah.

Each person sitting at the table will have a cup, which will be filled four times in remembrance of the four promises.

But let us now focus on the third and fourth glasses of wine.

Jesus held the third cup. Emotions were running high in his heart. Our minds go back to the wedding feast of Cana. His mother had told him of the embarrassing situation of the wine running out, and Jesus made a puzzling statement: *My Hour has not yet come!* (John 2:4). Now at the Last

Supper, we are given an insight into that hour. It was the hour in which Satan, the Prince of Darkness, would hold sway. This hour was not just sixty minutes of our time. It was a period of time: three days to be precise.



Jesus started with the traditional blessing:

*Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam.* We may not know Hebrew, but we would probably recognize the English: “Blessed are you, Adonai our God, ruler of all creation.” It is the prayer that our priests say today over the bread and wine in the preparation of the gifts at Mass, and it has been taken directly from the prayers of our Jewish ancestors.

The third glass of wine is the Cup of Redemption. It is the third promise that God made, about which we read in Exodus 6. Jesus would take the cup and praise God for all His goodness and gifts, especially the gifts of

- lifting the burdens from our shoulders;
- freeing us from slavery;
- bringing us salvation;
- making us a special people.

*Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."*

**Luke 22:19**

Jesus broke the bread. Jesus shared the cup. The apostles did not realize it, but Jesus transformed the traditional Jewish Passover to reflect his own passion and death. He shifted the focus

- from the "body" of the Passover lamb, which was offered in the temple, and
- from the "blood" of the lamb, which was poured out by the priests on the temple altar
- to this third cup, the Cup of Salvation, which he gives to his disciples to drink. Jesus tells his disciples: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

The Gospel of Matthew notes that "When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Matthew 26:30). The hymns were the Hallel Psalms, psalms of praise, Psalms 113–118.

"The snares of death encompassed me ... I called on the name of the Lord: 'O Lord, I pray, save my life!'" (Psalm 116:3–4).

Jesus was on a mission. But did you notice? He did not drink the fourth cup. *He did not drink the fourth cup of wine.*

*Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ... Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."*

**Matthew 26:36, 38–39**



We are now in the Garden of Gethsemane. The three apostles—Peter, James, and John—are with Jesus. They are asleep. Jesus looks at them. James and John want to sit at his right and left hand in the kingdom. They said they would drink the cup that Jesus would drink. But how little they know, and now they are asleep!

Jesus prays: “Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want...” (Matthew 26:39). It is the fourth cup—the one that had not yet been drunk. The fourth cup is the Cup of Consummation.

Today when we finish a meal, many of us ask for a cup of coffee. It is a sign that the meal is finished. The fourth cup would bring the Passover meal to an end. It is a remembrance of the fourth promise: “I will take you as my people, and I will be your God.” It is accomplished. But for Jesus, the Passover was not yet completed. The lamb had to be slain. The blood had to be shed. It was the source of salvation for us.

*... Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

**John 19:28–30**

From Thursday night, we move to Friday noon. From Gethsemane, we move to Calvary. Jesus was nailed to the cross. Blood and water flowed from his side. The Lamb was slain. The blood of the Lamb was shed. It is the source of our salvation.

Jesus said, "I am thirsty" (John 19:28). A rod with some hyssop was dipped in sour wine. Jesus tasted it—his fourth Passover cup. It is the Cup of Consummation. Jesus finally drank it. Jesus said, "It is finished" (John 19:30) and he died. This is the core of our Eucharist.

Pope Francis' words are worth repeating:

*"The Eucharistic Celebration is much more than a simple banquet: it is exactly the memorial of Jesus' Paschal Sacrifice, the mystery at the centre of salvation... every time we celebrate this Sacrament we participate in the mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ."*

Through the ages, the faithful under the guidance of their leaders, inspired by the Holy Spirit, have put more flesh on this core. Besides the Liturgy of the Eucharist, we now have the Liturgy of the Word.

## **Reflection Guide Talk One: An Invitation to the Lord's Supper**

The Last Supper, as we know it, took place during the Passover Festival celebrated by the Jews every year. We must remember that Jesus was a Jew who followed the Jewish practices faithfully. Much of our Christian faith and liturgy find their roots in the Old Testament.

In the narrative of the Exodus, the Bible tells us that God helped the Israelites escape from their slavery in Egypt by inflicting ten plagues upon the ancient Egyptians. The plagues seemed to affect “all the land of Egypt,” but the Israelites were unaffected. The tenth and worst of the plagues was the death of the first born of the Egyptian families. Finally, Pharaoh released the Israelite slaves.

The scriptures indicate that the Israelites were only spared from the final plague by marking their place directly above their doors with the blood of a lamb, and then quickly eating the roasted sacrifice together with unleavened bread (now known as matzoh), which they took from their ovens in haste as they made ready for the exodus from Egypt. God passed through Egypt to kill all firstborn children and cattle, but he passed over houses with the sign of lambs' blood on the doorpost. The night of this plague, Pharaoh finally relented and sent the Israelites away as they had requested.

Moses told the people: “You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children” (Exodus 12:24). Moses then explained why it is called the Passover: “It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses” (Exodus 12:27). When the Jews celebrate the Passover meal, they re-enact that night to make it present again in a real way. This is a very important part of Jewish history and faith. They *experience* this event again each time they re-enact it.



What happens in the liturgy of the Mass that brings an event of the past into the present experience of the assembly of the people each time they are present at Mass? Fr. Ron Rolheiser has explained this very well:

“At the Last Supper, Jesus invited his followers to continue to meet and celebrate the Eucharist ‘*in memory of me.*’...the Hebrew concept of memory of which Jesus was speaking...meant to recall and ritually re-enact it to *make it present again in a real way.*...that’s how the Passover Supper is understood within Judaism.

The Eucharist is the same, except that the saving event we re-enact so as to remake it present through ritual is the death and resurrection of Jesus, the new Exodus. Our Christian belief here is exactly the same as that of our Jewish brothers and sisters, namely, that we are not just remembering an event, we are actually making it present to participate in. The Eucharist, parallel to a Jewish Passover meal, remakes present the central saving event in Christian history, namely, Jesus’ Passover from death to life in the Paschal mystery. And just as the consecrated bread and wine give us the real presence of Christ, the Eucharist also gives us the real presence of the central saving event in our history, Jesus’ passage from death to life.”

<http://ronrolheiser.com/the-real-presence/#.WzELjyApDIX>



Fr. Coutts mentioned that there are four cups, which stand for the four promises made by God. These promises are recorded in the sixth chapter of Exodus. God promised:

- I will bring you out from under the burdens;
- I will deliver you from slavery;
- I will bring you salvation;
- I will take you as my people, and I will be your God.

God made those promises to the Hebrew people centuries ago, yet they still hold true today for all people. Consider for a moment the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32), in which the father is love itself and we are called to embody this same love toward others. Firstly, we are loved; we are also forgiven, for we have all sinned; and once we recognize who we are, we are called to be the loving and forgiving ones. The father in the parable shows that while we are sinners, we can still love with the love of God.

Rembrandt's painting *The Return of the Prodigal Son* has spoken to many over the centuries. It, indeed, speaks of the love that God has for each of us.



Now let's go back to the Last Supper:

*Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."*

(Luke 22:19)

Jesus transformed the traditional Jewish Passover to reflect his own passion and death.

After the meal, Jesus and his disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus asked his disciples to stay awake with him.

*Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." (Matthew 26:36–38)*



The garden scene is one of the most difficult for us to imagine. Jesus was suffering deeply as he prayed to the Father. He begged that this cup might pass from him, but he also told his Father that he was willing to accept his Father's will.

*And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."... Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."... again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."*

(Matthew 26:39, 42, 44–46)

From Gethsemane, Fr. Coutts took us to Calvary—the crucifixion of our Lord. Jesus was on the cross and was given some sour wine to quench his thirst. Immediately he died. He had consumed the final cup.

Pope Francis wrote:

“The Eucharistic Celebration is much more than a simple banquet: it is exactly the memorial of Jesus’ Paschal Sacrifice, the mystery at the centre of salvation... every time we celebrate this Sacrament we participate in the mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ.” General Audience—February 5, 2014

[https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2014/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140205\\_udienza-generale.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140205_udienza-generale.html)

We make the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ real in our own lives every time we celebrate the Eucharist. It is a re-enactment of the actual saving events.

Again Fr. Ron Rolheiser expresses this very well:

“Thus at a Eucharist, there are, in effect, three real presences: Christ is really present in the Word, namely, the scriptures, the preaching, and the music. Christ is really present in the consecrated bread and wine; they are

his body and blood. And Christ is really present in a saving event: Jesus' sacrificial passing from death to life.

And so we go to Eucharist not just to be brought into community by Jesus' word and to receive Jesus in communion, we go there too to enter into the saving event of his death and resurrection. The real presence is in both a person and in an event."

*<http://ronrolbeiser.com/the-real-presence/#.Wt4NbJcpDIW>*

## Discussion for Small Faith Groups:

1. What was the Passover meal remembering? What was its significance? (See Exodus 7–13 for the plagues; Exodus 11–13 deals specifically with the tenth plague, which instituted the first Passover.)
2. When our Jewish friends participate in the Passover, they truly *experience* the event again. Is there an event that we truly experience when we participate in it? Is there something in the liturgy that makes an event that occurred in the past really present to us?
3. God made promises to the Hebrew people centuries ago, yet they still hold true today for all people.
  - a. Have you ever been burdened and found that God brought you out from under the burden? Share how this has occurred in your life.
  - b. Have you felt enslaved by an event or a lifestyle and found that God delivered you? How? Share how this affected you.
  - c. Has God brought you salvation? How have you experienced this salvation? What has it meant in your life?
  - d. Do you feel that God has taken you as his beloved daughter or son? Is God your God? What keeps you from feeling that you are the beloved of God? Can you ask God to help you accept that he loves you unconditionally, no matter who you are or what you have done?
4. Who are the sinners in the parable of the prodigal son?
  - a. The younger son? What is his sin?
  - b. The elder son? What is his sin?
  - c. The father? How does he model God's love?
  - d. How does Rembrandt's painting speak to you? Do you notice anything unique?

5. How did Jesus transform the traditional Jewish Passover to reflect his own passion and death?
  - a. What is the significance of the lamb?
  - b. What was the change in focus from the “body” of the Passover lamb, which was offered in the temple, and from the “blood” of the lamb, which was poured out by the priests on the temple altar, to another focus? What is the new focus for Christians?
  
6. In the Garden of Gethsemane, why do you think that the disciples were unable to stay awake with Jesus?
  - a. Have you ever fallen asleep while speaking with Jesus?
  - b. How did you feel about that?
  - c. How do you think Jesus felt as he agonized over what might happen to him, yet the disciples were drifting off to sleep?
  - d. Have you ever felt alone because your family or friends didn't understand something that you were experiencing?
  - e. Share an experience that you have had where you begged or prayed to God for something that didn't come about, but later you realized that God's will was the better way, or perhaps the only way.
  
7. Take a moment and place yourself at the scene of the crucifixion. How do you feel?
  - a. How do you think Mary, mother of Jesus, felt? What about the other women?
  - b. How do you think John felt?
  
8. Remembering that the Mass is the mystery at the centre of our salvation, how do you plan to make your presence at Mass more meaningful in your own spiritual life?

## Closing Prayer:

### Soul of Christ

Jesus, may all that is you flow into me.  
May your body and blood  
be my food and drink.  
May your passion and death  
be my strength and life.  
Jesus, with you by my side,  
enough has been given.  
May the shelter I seek  
be the shadow of your cross.  
Let me not run from the love which you offer,  
But hold me safe from the forces of evil.  
On each of my dyings  
shed your light and your love.  
Keep calling to me  
until that day comes when, with your saints,  
I may praise you forever. Amen.

*David L. Fleming, SJ*

A contemporary paraphrase of the *Anima Christi*, a favourite prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola.



## **NOTES**

## NOTES

## TALK TWO

*The Order of  
Melchizedek:  
Behold the  
Lamb of God*

“You [Jesus] are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.”

(Hebrews 7:17)



# TALK TWO

## The Order of Melchizedek: Behold the Lamb of God

### Introduction

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As we continue our journey, we travel back into the Jewish Scriptures and visit with the king and priest Melchizedek. We learn about the significance of bread and wine and the sacrifice of the lamb.

In this talk, Fr. Michael explores God's call to each of us at Mass when God invites us to "come back to him, with all our heart."

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Michael Coutts, S.J.

*While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you..."*

**Matthew 26:26–27**

We have just witnessed a scene full of drama. Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take, eat ..." (Matthew 26:26). Then he took the cup with wine and shared it with his disciples, saying, "Drink from it, all of you..." (Matthew 26:27). From there he went to Gethsemane and then to Calvary—with its blood, sweat, and tears.

It is the core action of our Mass. There is a lot of pain, violence, and spilled blood. But it did not begin like that.

Let us go back a few thousand years before that final meal with Jesus and his disciples. Today we celebrate this Last Supper as Holy Thursday. You and I were there because, as disciples, we were invited into this intimate meal.

Now I invite you to go further back in time. It is the time of Abraham. We welcome you as we carry loaves of bread and jugs of wine. We are not going to a party, but a celebration. In modern times, we immediately associate bread and wine with the Eucharist, but that was not always so.

*And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!"*

Genesis 14:18–20



There was another man who also brought bread and wine thousands of years ago. His name was Melchizedek. He was both a king and a priest. As we just heard, he was the King of Salem, a place we now call Jerusalem. Today it is a bustling city, filled with believers of three major religions. But thousands of years ago, Jerusalem, or Salem as it was known, was probably a small hill with a few dozen families living on its slopes.

When we say Melchizedek was king, he was likely the patriarch of those families. But folklore also designates him as a priest. As priest, he would offer sacrifice. For this purpose, he brought bread and wine—the staple food of the time.

So where did all the sacrifice of lambs, goats, and heifers come into play? Why do we have all this blood?

*Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions.*

Genesis 4:2–4

Right from the beginning of time, people offered their best to the Lord. Cain offered the best of the fields; Abel offered a young kid from the flock. Many centuries later, Abraham appeared on the scene. At that time, the sacrifice of animals was a vital part of the traditions and forms of worship of Egyptian, Sumerian, Assyrian, and Babylonian civilizations. Blood flowed plentifully. Blood was the sign of life—the shedding of blood meant a sacrifice of life. Life was the best gift that one could offer to their gods. This was their belief!

The future Jewish people must have seen the sacrifices. They must have noticed the awe and the mystery involved. They also desired to give their very best to their God, so they imitated the sacrifice of lambs and goats.

When did the sacrifice of animals come to an end for the Jews? The Jews continued to sacrifice animals even in Jesus's time. Remember the cleansing of the temple by Jesus?

*The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"*

John 2:13–16





In 70 C.E. the Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed for the third and final time. It was never rebuilt. The killing and sacrifice of animals came to an end with the destruction of the temple.

With the background of the priest in mind, we come to the sacrifice of the Mass. It all began because God wanted to be a part of our lives. When the Bible writers wanted to describe God's care for humankind, they looked around for a metaphor. They took the example from what they saw around them. In neighbouring countries, they saw benevolent and good kings. These kings made a royal grant treaty with the people: "I as your king will provide you with food, clothes, and shelter. You, on your part, will side with me rather than the enemy in time of war."

God was like these kings, but better. Through the prophets, God said to the people: *You will be my people, and I will be your God. I will make a covenant with you.* However, when God made this covenant with the people, God knew that he was going to do all the work. God would gain nothing in return. The people would be the total beneficiaries. The Jewish people would remember this covenant at the Passover meal.

*For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I promised on oath to their ancestors, and they have eaten their fill and grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them, despising me and breaking my covenant.*

**Deuteronomy 31:20**

The Bible tells us that the Israelites often broke the covenant. When they experienced natural disasters, their limited understanding told them that it was a punishment from God for breaking the covenant. At that time, they should have just gone back to keeping the Torah or the laws of the covenant. But they imitated what they saw in their pagan neighbours. Their neighbours offered bloody sacrifices of goats and lambs. The Jews would do the same.

God would simply say: "Yet even now ... return to me with all your heart ..." (Joel 2:12). God did not need the blood of the animals, for God was their creator!

Thousands of years later, we too think that we can appease God by saying the rosary, offering Masses, lighting candles, or going on pilgrimages. These are all holy and good things, but God does not need them. God says to us at each Mass, as God said to the people of Israel: *Come back to me, with all your heart.*

This is the core of our Mass as we celebrate it today. In our next talk, we will look at how these simple essentials were enfolded in scripture, the Word of God.

## **Reflection Guide Talk Two: The Order of Melchizedek: Behold the Lamb of God**

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches:

“The Christian tradition considers Melchizedek, ‘priest of God Most High,’ as a prefiguration of the priesthood of Christ, the unique ‘high priest after the order of Melchizedek’; ‘holy, blameless, unstained,’ ‘by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified,’ that is, by the unique sacrifice of the cross.” (#1544).

The *Catechism* also states that “the Church sees in the gesture of the king-priest Melchizedek, who ‘brought out bread and wine,’ a prefiguring of her own offering.” (#1333)

After the consecration, in Eucharistic Prayer I, the priest prays:

“Be pleased to look upon these offerings  
with a serene and kindly countenance,  
and to accept them,  
as once you were pleased to accept  
the gifts of your servant Abel the just,  
the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith,  
and the offering of your high priest Melchizedek,  
a holy sacrifice, a spotless victim.” (*The Roman Missal* © 2010, ICEL)

In Hebrews 7:13–17, it is written that Jesus was a priest in the order of Melchizedek. So let’s go back to the Old Testament and learn just what that might mean.

Melchizedek was important in biblical tradition, yet he appears only in Genesis 14:18–20, inserted into a story of Abram. Abram had not yet received the name “Abraham” from God (see Genesis 17:5 where God makes the covenant with Abraham). In this story, Abram was rescuing his kidnapped nephew, Lot, by defeating a coalition of Mesopotamian kings.

Melchizedek, the Canaanite King of Salem, met Abram on his return from battle, gave him bread and wine, and blessed him with these words:

*Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
maker of heaven and earth;  
and blessed be God Most High,  
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!*

Genesis 14:19–20



Abram accepted the blessing and then gave Melchizedek a tithe of the booty from his battles. Melchizedek then disappeared from the story.

What do we know about Melchizedek? Melchizedek is a Canaanite name meaning “My King Is Righteousness.” He was King of Salem, which, most probably, is Jerusalem. Melchizedek also served as priest to a Canaanite god.

There is no mention of Melchizedek again until Psalm 110:4: “The Lord has sworn, and he will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’” This psalm has been interpreted as a Messianic psalm in which Melchizedek is a type of Christ, and the coming of Christ is foreshadowed or prefigured.

Parts of the Old Testament are taken as a prefiguring of the events of the New Testament, and some events of the Old Testament are seen to be related to the events of Christ’s life. These events did not prophesy the coming of Christ, but theologians look back and see the prefiguring, or pattern, of Christ in different characters in the Old Testament. This speaks to us of God’s plan for his people throughout history.

In the Old Testament, it seems that the Hebrew people were the ones chosen by God—but, even so, at various times they were instructed to treat all people well and not exclude others. God loves each person. God has a deep desire for relationship with each person.

Let’s look now at the reference to Melchizedek in the New Testament.

The author of Hebrews also mentions Melchizedek, first by recalling the story of Abram meeting Melchizedek, and then referring to Jesus:

*“You are a priest forever,  
according to the order of Melchizedek.”* (Hebrews 7:17)

Christ is a priest not in the tradition of Aaron, who was a Levitical priest (of the house of Levi) by his ancestry, but by divine appointment. Christ does not do his work inside the earthly tabernacle as the Levitical priests did. He is a priest of a different order. Christ is the great high priest who has overcome sin and death and has ushered in the rule of peace. Christ’s priesthood is in the heavenly realm.

In the ancient world, the sacrifice of animals was practised in all the pagan religions. It was common practice to offer the best of the labour of the people to the gods. The Hebrew people wanted to give their best to their God, so they also began to sacrifice lambs. This continued until the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E.

God made a covenant with the Hebrew people:

*"I will take you as my people, and I will be your God" (Exodus 6:7).*

Repeatedly throughout the Old Testament, God reminds the people of their covenant with him. At the Passover feast, the Jewish people remember the covenant and how the Lord brought them out of the land of Egypt into the Promised Land. Whenever the Hebrew people broke the covenant, they would come back to God with a sacrifice. This behaviour is not uncommon in our lives today.

Let's reflect again on the four cups that Fr. Coutts mentioned in the first talk. The final cup was the Cup of Suffering for our Lord—the cup that, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked the Father to take from him. But Jesus surrendered to the will of the Father:

*"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).*

This is the cup that Jesus knew would bring great suffering, not only to him, but also to those whom he loved.

Henri Nouwen addresses this:

"But when we want to drink the cups of our lives, we need first to *hold* them, to fully acknowledge what we are living, trusting that by not avoiding but befriending our sorrows we will discover the true joy we are looking for right in the midst of our sorrows."<sup>1</sup>

Then again Henri Nouwen writes:

"When we hold firm our cups of life, fully acknowledging their sorrows and joys, we will also be able to lift our cups in human solidarity. Lifting our cups means that we are not ashamed of what we are living, and this gesture encourages others to befriend their truth as we are trying to befriend ours. By lifting our cups and saying to one another, 'To life' or 'To your health,' we proclaim that we are willing to look truthfully at our lives together. Thus, we can become a community of people encouraging one

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1 Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), May 10.

another to drink fully the cups that have been given to us in the conviction that they will lead us to true fulfillment.”<sup>2</sup>

Henri Nouwen continues:

“We must empty the cups of our lives completely to be able to receive the fullness of life from God. Jesus lived this on the cross. The moment of complete emptiness and complete fullness become the same. When he had given all away to his Abba, his dear Father, he cried out, ‘It is fulfilled’ (John 19:30). He who was lifted up on the cross was also lifted into the resurrection. He who had emptied and humbled himself was raised up and ‘given the name above all other names’ (see Philippians 2:7–9). Let us keep listening to Jesus’s question: ‘Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?’ (Matthew 20:22).”<sup>3</sup>

Each of us has faced disappointment and sorrow at some time in our lives. Perhaps someone has betrayed us, perhaps it is our own failure to achieve a desire or succeed at a task, perhaps it is the loss of someone dear to us, or some other event that has caused us deep sorrow.

In summary, Part Two has highlighted the presence of God in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. God has been present for all people from the beginning of time. God wants to be in relationship with us. The Mass brings this continuous presence of God throughout history to our attention in various ways, especially through scripture. The Mass is evidence of God’s presence, not only within the celebration of the Mass itself, but within each person as we leave the Mass to go out into the world to proclaim the gospel with our lives. Let’s hold the cup of our lives in such a way that we are a quiet witness to the power of our Lord, who will draw others into relationship with Christ.

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2 Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*, May 11.

3 Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*, May 13.





## Discussion for Small Faith Groups:

1. What is meant when it is said that Melchizedek is a “type” of Christ?
2. St. Augustine once wrote that “The Old (Testament) is in the New (Testament) revealed, and the New is in the Old concealed.” [Augustine, *Questions on the Heptateuch* 2.73] What do you think he meant by this?
3. Throughout both the Old Testament and the New Testament, God seems to have a plan for his people. Who are God’s people?
4. The Eucharistic Prayer 1 mentions “the gifts of your servant Abel the just, the sacrifice of Abraham ...” What is the origin of the sacrifice, of the shedding of blood and offering an animal sacrifice?
  - a. How do we try to appease God today?
  - b. What behaviours do you engage in as you try to appease God for the times you have not followed him closely enough?
  - c. What does God really want from us as individuals? As God’s church?
5. As Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, what do you think was on his mind and in his heart? What were his concerns?
  - a. Can you put yourself into that scene and feel what you think Jesus must have been feeling?
  - b. What do you think were the concerns of his disciples? How were they feeling? How do you think you would have reacted in that situation?
6. How are we being asked to hold the cup of our lives—the personal sorrows, the failures, the disappointments, and the chaos in our world?
  - a. When you have faced these challenges, what have you done to move forward?
  - b. How have you been asked to hold the cup of your life?
  - c. How has your relationship with Christ directed you in holding your cup?

## **Closing Prayer:**

### **Spiritual Communion**

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Blessed Sacrament.  
I love You above all things, and I desire You in my soul.  
Since I cannot now receive You sacramentally,  
Come at least spiritually into my heart.  
As though You were already there,  
I embrace You and unite myself wholly to You;  
Permit not that I should ever be separated from You.

*St. Alphonsus Liguori*

## **NOTES**

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## TALK THREE

### *The Word of My Lord*

“I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you ... so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.”

(Luke 1:3–4)





# TALK THREE

## The Word of My Lord

### Introduction

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In Fr. Michael's first talk, we started our journey in the Upper Room with Jesus and his disciples at the Passover meal. There Jesus shared his body and blood with us for the first time.

We were with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when he asked his Father to take this cup from him if it was his will to do so. We learned that Jesus needed to drink from the fourth cup—the Cup of Consummation. Because of his death on the cross and his resurrection, he gave us the gift of salvation.

We also explored the ancient traditions that led up to that Last Supper in the Upper Room as we learned about the ancient order of Melchizedek.

In this next talk, we will look at how the followers of the Way, as the early Christians were called, gathered to break bread in memory of Jesus.

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Michael Coutts, S.J.

The early Christian believers were very conscious of the command of Jesus Christ: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Although the Last Supper most likely took place during the Passover meal, the followers of the Christ did not keep the rituals, prayers, and actions of the Passover. Furthermore, Passover was only once a year, and the Christian believers

celebrated the Eucharist more than once a year. Since churches were not yet built, they would gather in the homes of the believers.

The early Christians met together to break bread—that is how they described what we call the Eucharist today. They celebrated Mass during a meal. At some point during the meal, the patriarch of the house would say: “My friends, do you remember what Jesus did before he died? He took bread. He took wine. He blessed these and gave them to his disciples, saying: Take and eat. Take and drink. We will do this in remembrance of the command of Jesus.”



We can read about this custom in 1 Corinthians 11.

*For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often*

*as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.*

**1 Corinthians 11:23–26**

Several problems arose as they celebrated the Eucharist during the meal.

In the first place, there were difficulties in serving a meal on a regular basis. The number of believers began to grow. They increased rapidly as we read in The Acts of the Apostles.

Secondly, believers in Christ were coming from the Gentile community. Confusion grew around having meals at Gentile homes—remember, the Jews had strict dietary laws, and most of the early followers were Jews. Gentile homes contained allusions to pagan gods. Politics also had to be considered, as it was customary to salute the emperor. The Gentiles showed respect to the emperor by addressing him as “god.”

Thirdly, the rich families tried to outdo one another in the lavishness of the meals, resulting in jealousy and envy. The poor could not host these meals, so a certain amount of condescension toward the least of the brothers and sisters developed.

Fourthly, since the Eucharist took place during a meal, the wine flowed freely. Many a believer would be drunk by the time of the Eucharist. It was no wonder Paul sternly wrote this warning to the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 11:

*When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!*

**1 Corinthians 11:20–22**



The early followers of the Christ separated the Eucharist from the meal. The believers would observe a fast. They would abstain from food and alcohol to have a sense of the sacred.

The actual words of consecration in those days, and even today, take only a few minutes. They soon realized that in order to ready themselves for this sacred action, they would have to take time for preparation in advance. They would spend this time recalling their religious story. Since most of the believers had a Jewish background, their stories would be from their Exodus experience and from the prophets, especially those who spoke about the Messiah.

- They would tell the story of humankind and sin.
- They would tell the story of how God cared for them.
- They would tell the story of how they were unfaithful to God.
- They would tell the story of their sorrow, their repentance, their sacrifice.
- They would tell of their hope for the Messiah.

Here is an example of what they might have read:

*A voice cries out:*

*“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.  
Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.  
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”*

**Isaiah 40:3–5**

In addition, there were always letters from the apostles: Peter, Paul, James, and John. These would address issues:

- of discouragement in time of persecution;
- of complacency during times of prosperity;
- of scandals within the faith community—adultery, stealing, quarrels, lending money at exorbitant rates;
- of an administrative nature—quarrels, jealousy, lack of forgiving.

They might read from a letter from Paul, like this letter to the community he had established in Thessalonica, where the people were being persecuted:

*To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore, we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring.*

**2 Thessalonians 1:1b–4**



Remember that the Gospels were yet to be written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Yet some of the people attending a meal were alive during the time of Jesus or had known people who knew the Christ. They would tell about the miracles, the teachings, the parables of Jesus. These stories would be transmitted orally. Eventually they were written down, so they would not be lost to time. Here is an example from Luke:

*Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.*

**Luke 1:1–4**

These writings became what we call today the Liturgy of the Word. Following their reading at Mass in modern times, we express our gratitude by saying: “Thanks be to God” or “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.”

I would ask you to close your eyes and imagine a small house church in Thessalonica, Ephesus, Corinth, or Philippi. It was probably the ground floor of a well-to-do believer. Usually they were women. We hear of women like Damaris or Tabitha or Dorcas. The believers and even the would-be-believers, who today we would call RCIA candidates, would listen attentively to the “Word of the Lord.” They had to deal with the same issues we deal with today:

- bossy or controlling leaders;
- sin and scandal in the community;
- preferential treatment given to a certain group;
- care for the poor or persecuted churches;
- preachers who toned down the teaching of Christ.

## Reflection Guide Talk Three: The Word of My Lord

In Part One, we were with our Lord as he shared the Passover meal with his disciples, and we looked at the history of the Passover. Then we reflected on Jesus's suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane as the disciples were unable to remain awake as he prayed. We discussed the significance of the four cups relating to the four promises of God to the Israelites:

- I will bring you out from under the burdens;
- I will deliver you from slavery;
- I will bring you salvation;
- I will take you as my people, and I will be your God.

God makes these same promises to each of us today, although we are in different circumstances from those of the Israelites. And for each of us, our circumstances are different from those of everyone else. Yet God is present in all circumstances.

Part Two focussed on the ancient traditions that led up to that Last Supper in the Upper Room as we learned about the ancient order of Melchizedek and how Christ is a priest by divine appointment.





In Part Three, we learned that the early Christians were called followers of the Way and that they gathered to break bread in memory of Jesus.

The early Christians met in homes, or house churches. They gathered for a meal and were very conscious of remembering what Jesus had told the disciples: “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19).

The first mention of the Eucharist is in 1 Corinthians. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians was written before the Gospels. At that time, the Lord’s Supper was not the Mass in our sense of the word. It was a regular Jewish meal, a love feast. Later the Eucharist evolved into the Mass. Banquets like this were common in the Greco-Roman culture, but Paul wanted this to be different from the pagan practices. We often think that the early Christians were of one mind and everything went smoothly, but there were challenges even in the early church. Let’s look at 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 to gain a little understanding of some of Paul’s concerns.

*Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you! For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread*

*and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation. About the other things I will give instructions when I come.*

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

The overarching impression that we receive from these communal meals is that they involve fellowship—not only fellowship with other followers of the Way, but fellowship with the risen and living Jesus the Christ.



## Preparation for the Eucharist

The early followers of the Way realized that they would need to prepare themselves for the sacred action of the Eucharist. They did so by recalling their religious story.

This portion of the Mass is now called The Liturgy of the Word.

Let's look at the prayers and the readings to see how the very early beginnings of the church have influenced the Mass today.

1. Sin was addressed by the early believers. Today we begin Mass with the Penitential Act—the confession of our sins. We follow that with the *Gloria*, where we give glory and praise to God for his love and mercy and grace.
2. The first reading is taken mainly from the Old Testament; the one exception occurs from Easter to Pentecost, when it is from The Acts of the Apostles. In these readings, we hear about the unfaithfulness of God's people, yet how God continuously throughout history has cared for the people. The readings from Acts tell of the miracle of the Holy Spirit and how God has provided for all people.
3. The Responsorial Psalm underlines God's love and care for his people, both as a body of people but often as individuals. Sometimes within the psalm there will be a plea for help, telling the story of humankind's great need for God.
4. The second reading is from the New Testament, sharing with us the struggles and successes of the early church through the letters to the churches. These same letters were written for the early church to help them overcome challenges and to encourage them to live the way God was calling them to live. These letters would have been read to the people when they gathered for the Eucharist. Remember, the Gospels had not yet been written.

5. The Gospel reading tells us of our Lord's life on earth. These are the stories of Jesus, which we love to hear, as Jesus ministered to the people of his day. We are reassured that Jesus continues to live through God's people. We are also instructed on how we need to live so that others will see Jesus in our lives. In the early church, these stories were told in an oral tradition, as they had not yet been recorded as we know them today.
6. After the homily, which expands on the readings, we then declare our faith, send our petitions to the Lord, and give our money offering before the Communion portion of the Mass begins.

The Mass includes all the elements that the early church considered important. Each part of the Mass leads us to the Eucharist, which is the “source and summit of our faith.” Each prayer, each reading, each response is building to a crescendo—the Eucharist. How powerful it is to understand that all around the world, the Mass is celebrated in the same way but in different languages!



## Discussion for Small Faith Groups:

1. Carefully review 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 in the study guide (p. 51-52) and discuss the following:
  - a. What seems to concern Paul?
  - b. Are these concerns present in the church today?
  - c. What are Paul's instructions to the people?
  - d. How are these instructions part of our faith life today?
2. These communal meals involved fellowship with other followers of the Way as well as with the risen and living Jesus the Christ.
  - a. What implications are there for us as we participate in the Mass?
  - b. Do you feel the presence of Christ during Mass?
  - c. Do you "attend" Mass, or do you "participate" in Mass?
  - d. How can we "participate" in Mass when it is so easy to be distracted by all that is going on in our minds?
3. What does The Liturgy of the Word include? Discuss your thoughts on this.
4. Are you able to focus throughout the Mass, or do you find that your mind wanders? What do you do if that happens?
5. Is there one part of the Mass that speaks more deeply to you?
6. How does it feel to know that you are participating in worship that is common around the world?
7. Discuss the significance of the Mass in your life.

For small faith groups, you might like to take some time to share prayer concerns and to pray spontaneously prior to praying the following closing prayer.

**Closing Prayer:**

Grant me daily the grace of gratitude,  
to be thankful for all my many gifts,  
and so be freed from artificial needs,  
that I might lead a joyful, simple life.

*Edward Hays*

## **NOTES**

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## TALK FOUR

*The Gifts to  
and from  
God—  
Offertory,  
Communion,  
Now Go  
in Peace*

“... our participation in the Eucharist is not a reward for good behavior, nor is it to fulfill an obligation or to receive a spiritual ‘charge.’ It is a recommitment to the covenant and true discipleship in service to others.”

Scott Lewis, S.J.



# TALK FOUR

## The Gifts to and from God—Offertory, Communion, Now Go in Peace

### Introduction

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In our previous talks, we have experienced how the Passover supper held in the Upper Room just before our Lord's Passion and death changed everything.

We have been a part of the early churches of Thessalonica or Corinth as they struggled with how to best honour our Lord's commandment to "Do this in remembrance of me." We learned how they prepared for the breaking of the bread by reading the Word of the Lord.

In this final talk, we will come to understand why the offering of the gifts and our shared communion are so important to our celebration of the Eucharist.

The Mass, which is at the heart of the mystery of our salvation, concludes as the assembly is told to "Go in peace," and they are encouraged to serve the Lord by the way they choose to live their lives.

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Michael Coutts, S.J.

Today the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the Presentation of the Gifts. Many of us call this rite the Offertory. We feel very honoured when we are chosen to bring up the gifts of bread and wine and the collection given by the community at Mass. In many parishes, the congregation

stands up in solidarity as the gifts are brought up. Silently we say: “That is my gift. I am proud to be a part of this prayer and worship.”

In earlier times, the deacons presented the bread and a cup of wine mixed with water to the bishop. The bishop then began the Eucharistic prayer. In later times, the bishop said a prayer over the bread and the wine before beginning this prayer. The rite gradually expanded to where the people themselves brought the gifts to the altar. It was simply called the Preparation of the Gifts.

By the third and fourth centuries, the bringing of gifts to the altar became very elaborate. It developed into a whole ritual. Tables were prepared at the side aisles and they were covered to overflowing with gifts.

The bishop would receive the gifts from the aristocracy, and the deacons would receive from the rest of the congregation. One can see how this would affect the unity of the faithful people. The people called this ritual the Offertory. Today, we have restored its original name to the Preparation of the Gifts.



When the early followers of the Christ gathered together for the Eucharist, soon after the Bishop said the words, “This is my Body and this is my Blood,” the blessed bread was broken and shared. Then the cup was passed around. This is the Communion as we have it today. Now we spend time between the words of consecration and the sharing of the bread, or Communion.

We pray for the living, we pray for the dead, we pray for the Pope, the Bishop, and leaders of the church. Today these prayers are highly structured. We also pray for our secular leaders. The tradition of praying for the needs of the community and the world has been there since the very early gatherings of the church members. In 1 Timothy 2, St. Paul encouraged Timothy and tells us:

*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

**1 Timothy 2:1–4**

Following the tradition of the Passover meal, Jesus Christ took bread into his hands, pronounced the prayer of praise, and then broke the bread. In the early church, this breaking of the bread was the only ritual. This occurred between the Eucharistic prayer and the Communion. There was the one bread which is broken. The one bread was a sign of unity. It was a sign that we are all from one body in Christ; as St. Paul tells us: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:17).

In The Acts of the Apostles, the Eucharist itself was once called “the breaking of the bread” (*cf.* Acts 2:42).

*As we came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple,*

*they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

*Acts 2:43–47*

Communion was a sacred and solemn ritual then as it is now; however, a great emphasis was placed on unity among the church members. This union was to be established before the believers could approach the altar for Communion.



If there was any division in the community, that division had to be healed before receiving the “bread that was broken, and the cup that was shared.”

In these small church communities, this was possible because they knew one another. Furthermore, if there was a rift between members, it would be clearly visible. It would be scandalous. Communion was truly a sign of union in the community.

The early believers took the call for unity seriously, and they almost literally followed the words of Jesus in Matthew 5.

*So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.*

**Matthew 5:23–24**

There was another dimension to Communion. Other important groups in the community were the elderly and the homebound. These believers were unable to be physically present at the Eucharist. Some of the blessed bread was broken to be shared with those who could not be present. It was wrapped in a small linen cloth, and the presider would then send the members to them with the words: “Ite, missa est,” or words to that effect. In the name of the community, we tell you, “Go—you are sent forth.”

Today we use that greeting for the whole congregation at the end of Mass. For those of us who do not know Latin, we think “Ite, missa est” means “Go, the Mass is ended.” But it was the Latin for “Ite Congregatio missa est,” which means “Go, the assembly is dismissed.”

Our dynamism and challenge today are the same as that of our early church 2,000 years ago. They had to return to the secular world and their daily chores. They had just received the body and blood of the Lord. They had been encouraged and supported by the faith community. They were transformed. They had a metanoia (a change of attitude), a courage that came from their communion with the Lord.

We have arrived at the Dismissal.

As we go forth at the end of our Mass, the words spoken about Jesus are the words both of blessing and challenge found in Luke 4:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free..." Luke 4:18

We too are called to bring the good news and set people free.

We are encouraged at the end of Mass, as I encourage you at the end of this Mission, to "Go in Peace to love and serve the Lord" by the way you choose to live your lives.

Our response to this blessing and challenge are the simple yet powerful words:

*"Thanks be to God."*





## **Reflection Guide Talk Four: The Gifts to and from God—Offertory, Communion, Now Go in Peace**

To summarize our journey so far, in Part One, we were with our Lord as he shared the Passover meal with his disciples, and we looked at the history of the Passover. Then we reflected on Jesus's suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane as the disciples were unable to remain awake as Jesus prayed. We discussed the significance of the four cups relating to the four promises of God to the Israelites:

- I will bring you out from under the burdens;
- I will deliver you from slavery;
- I will bring you salvation;
- I will take you as my people, and I will be your God.

God makes these same promises to each of us today although we are in different circumstances from those of the Israelites. And each of us is in different circumstances from those of each other. Yet God is present in all circumstances.

Part Two focussed on the ancient traditions that led up to that Last Supper in the Upper Room as we learned about the ancient order of Melchizedek and how Christ is a priest by divine appointment.

In Part Three, we learned that the early Christians were called followers of the Way and that they gathered to break bread in memory of Jesus.

In Part Four, we discover why the offering of the gifts and our shared communion are so important to our celebration of the Eucharist.

St. Paul encouraged the early Christians to pray. Fr. Coutts mentioned Paul's words to Timothy:

*“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right*

*and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*

1 Timothy 2:1–4

In the liturgy, the Prayer of the Faithful is highly structured and precedes the Preparation of the Gifts. We include prayers for many leaders of the church and many needs of our world and our own parish community. Just as Jesus would often go off to a secluded place to pray, prayer is essential to our practice of faith, whether we pray alone or with the faithful. Jesus promised us that *“where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them”* (Matthew 18:20).

Fr. Coutts shared the history of the Preparation of the Gifts. The way it was organized caused division among the faithful, as the rich were treated differently from the rest of the faithful. It is interesting to reflect on what we learned about the challenges of the early church in Part Three. Paul addressed the divisiveness and the lack of concern for the less fortunate.

Let’s take a brief look at a few verses from 1 Corinthians 11 again to refresh our memories about some of Paul’s concerns.

*“Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse ... I hear that there are divisions among you ... When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk ... Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?”*

1 Corinthians 11:17–18, 20–22

Paul was concerned about humiliating those who had very little. In the early centuries, this would have been the concern regarding the way the Offertory was organized, and it explains the changes that have been made.

Today the gift-bearers are chosen randomly as people come into Mass, and it is a joy to see the faithful participate in this part of the Mass by carrying the gifts to the priest and altar servers. Each considers it a privilege and a joy to contribute to the worship in this way!



The Preparation of the Gifts continues as the priest begins the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the gifts are consecrated, becoming the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the early church, the breaking of the bread was the only ritual, but this has been expanded over the centuries to include a longer liturgy. However, the emphasis on unity has remained strong. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *“Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread”* (1 Corinthians 10:17). Unity is expressed in the way we all sit, stand, and kneel together, as well as the way we say the responses in unison.



Fr. Coutts shared that there was a great emphasis placed on unity in the early church. It was imperative for divisions to be healed prior to participating in the Eucharist. As you can imagine, any divisions would be obvious in a small house church, and peaceful participation in the Eucharist would be almost impossible. In our parishes today, for practical reasons, we cannot follow this practice of the early church; however, it is still important to be at peace with others when participating in the Eucharist.

When we participate in the Eucharist and consume the body and blood of Christ, we are “taking the cup,” and Christ is asking us, just as Jesus asked his disciples, “*Can you drink the cup?*” (Matthew 20:22; Mark 10:38). There is no easy response to this question!

Community was important in the early church, and it remains so today. Just as the believers were given bread to take to those who were unable to join the others, today we send the Eucharist to those who are unwell so that they too can partake in the body of Christ.

At the end of the Mass, we are sent out to live the gospel through the way we interact with others and thus to “drink the cup” by bringing Christ into the world. We are grateful to God for this privilege.

Scott Lewis, S.J. provides an excellent summation of the Eucharist as he brings us back to the covenant of God with the Hebrew people:

“Jesus prepared for a special Passover—his last, and the supper that would inaugurate the reign of God. At the Last Supper, Jesus offered his own blood to renew and strengthen the covenant. His body and his blood would be given for the sake of humanity and the world.

In New Testament terms, the cup is the symbol of discipleship and martyrdom. By drinking from that cup, the disciples promised to adhere to the covenant and to continue the work of Jesus regardless of where it might lead.

The same applies to us—our participation in the Eucharist is not a reward for good behavior, nor is it to fulfill an obligation or to receive a spiritual ‘charge.’ It is a recommitment to the covenant and true discipleship in service to others.

The body and blood of Jesus nourish and sustain us. Both the sign and the substance of our covenant, which is our strength and blessing. We are sustained and blessed by it to the extent that we are faithful and committed.” (The Catholic Register, June 2, 2018)

***<https://www.catholicregister.org/opinion/item/27452-god-s-word-on-sunday-ancient-world-offers-lesson-in-covenants>***

Let us also remember the words of Pope Francis:

“The Eucharistic Celebration is much more than a simple banquet: it is exactly the memorial of Jesus’ Paschal Sacrifice, the mystery at the centre of salvation... every time we celebrate this Sacrament we participate in the mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ.”

The word “Eucharist” means “thanksgiving.” The theme of thanksgiving continues throughout the Eucharistic celebration. Let us participate actively rather than passively in the Mass, so that we may accept Christ’s

## THE MASS

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selfless act of love with a heart of gratitude. Then we will be enabled to live the gospel in the community in which we live and have our being!



## Discussion for Small Faith Groups:

1. What do you think is the purpose of prayer?
  - a. How do you feel about prayer? Are you comfortable praying?
  - b. Do you take time to pray?
  - c. How do you pray? Are you able to share your concerns with our Lord?
  - d. Do you feel comfortable sharing your weaknesses with God and handing over your weaknesses to God?
2. What seems to be a common challenge and concern within the church throughout the centuries?
  - a. How has this challenge continued even today? Do you see evidence of this within your parish?
  - b. How are we to address this? What lessons can we learn from the early church?
3. Why would it have been important in the early church to make certain that there was peace among the faithful prior to the Eucharist?
4. How does it affect us if we are not at peace with someone when we participate in the Eucharist?
5. Have you ever had the experience of coming to the Eucharist with a bad feeling about another person or about something that happened? How did that affect your participation in the Eucharist? Discuss with the group.
6. What does it mean to be able to “drink the cup”? What is Christ asking of us?
7. How do we show Christ to other people?
8. How do we see Christ in the world?

For small faith groups, you might like to take some time to share prayer concerns and to pray spontaneously prior to praying the closing prayer.

**Closing Prayer:**

“O my God, come to me,  
so that You may dwell in me and I may dwell in You.”

*Saint John Vianney*



## **NOTES**

**NOTES**

# APPENDIX

*R.C.I.A. Use*

*Classroom Use & Questions*

*Acknowledgements & Copyrights*

*View/ Download the Mission*



## R.C.I.A. Use of the Study Guide

For people who are inquiring about the Roman Catholic expression of the Christian faith, it is not only important to understand the origins of the Mass, but also to truly experience the Mass. Why do we attend Mass?

This is an important concept—that we come to Mass in love and faith. Without love for God and faith in God, the Mass will seem empty and pointless. We come to Mass to worship and experience God. Yes, we can worship God in many other ways; however, Jesus called us to meet as a community where the presence of Christ is in the assembly of the people as well as in the Eucharist itself.

As Catholics, we are encouraged to see God in all things. When we ask ourselves why we need to attend Mass, we should keep in mind the reason we are involved in R.C.I.A. We are all seekers—people who are looking for a deeper meaning in life—and we have decided that Jesus the Christ holds the key to that deeper meaning for us. Our goal is to be with Christ, to live our lives as Christ-like people. Yet we're unfinished. We are becoming. When we look to him, Christ will guide what we are becoming. Being really present at Mass will help us along this journey of life that we have chosen. Let's truly experience the Mass and encourage inquirers, catechumens, and candidates to do the same. Experience the Mass and ask yourself, "What is God saying to me through the Mass?"

## Teacher Use of the Study Guide in the Classroom

The purpose of this study guide (*The Mass: The Mystery at the Centre of Salvation*) is to allow students to deepen their understanding of the Mass and of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The fundamental importance of the celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist in our everyday lives deepens our Paschal journey of faith development and apostolic call. As Catholic teachers, we play a crucial role not just in educating the minds of students, but also developing, strengthening, and nurturing the faith relationship of our students with our Lord and God, Jesus Christ. This is the mission of the Catholic Church and of all the faithful apostolate. Pope Francis best describes this mission in the Apostolic Exhortations, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Joy of the Gospel) (2013) when he writes:

*The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries", but rather that we are always "missionary disciples" (120).*

This apostolic call to evangelize is deeply rooted in our Catholic teaching vocations—our students will go on to shape the future, bring an end to social injustice, and bring positive changes to both the local and global community. This is our teaching vocation and this is our Catholic responsibility toward the youth.

For Catholic teachers in Ontario, it is important to know that this resource falls within the guidelines of the Ontario Ministry of Education. In using the Ontario Catholic Secondary Curriculum Policy Document for Religious Education (2016) in our Catholic teaching mission, *The Mass: The Mystery at the Centre of Salvation* is an extra and vital resource that can be used in the high school classroom for all grade levels of religious education. This resource touches upon all the strands of the Ontario Catholic Secondary Curriculum: Scripture, Profession of Faith, Christian Moral Development, Prayer and Sacramental Life, Family Life Education, and Research and Inquiry Skills. In following the units of study as set out in the Religious Studies Course syllabus for each grade level and for each Catholic high school, teachers can take from the different talks within the study guide and the different questions to build on the curriculum being taught, spark discussions, reflect upon what is being taught, and provide additional thought questions/homework that can be used in the classroom to strengthen the lesson being taught.

For Catholic teachers elsewhere, this is an important resource where religious education is included in the curriculum in different school settings. This study guide may also be useful for catechesis with youth in the parish.

Cosmo Femia, OCT  
Religious Studies Department Head/Chaplain  
Loretto Abbey C.S.S., Toronto, ON

## Additional Questions for Use in the Classroom

### Talk One:

1. In the Exodus account, why did God send the ten plagues onto Egypt? What was God trying to demonstrate to the Egyptian people? What do each of the ten plagues represent in detail?
2. How does the Passover feast foreshadow the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ?
3. How does the meal of the Passover foreshadow the Last Supper and the celebration of the Holy Eucharist?
4. The Passover feast was a saving grace for the Israelite people; that is, it protected them from the last plague, death. How is the celebration of the Holy Eucharist our saving grace?
5. The promises that God made to the Hebrew people centuries ago are called covenants. Why are these covenants important to the Hebrew people? How do covenants shape our relationship with God?
6. What is the difference between a covenant and a present-day treaty/contract? Give an example of a present-day covenant and a contract/treaty. List and explain the traits/characteristics that are involved in a covenant.



7. A parable is a story that teaches a lesson. In the New Testament, Jesus uses parables to help the people come to their own realization of their shortcomings and how their behaviour does not model the true people that God wants all of us to be.
  - a. In the parable of the prodigal son, who does each character in the story represent:
    - The younger son?
    - The older brother?
    - The father?
  - b. Why is this parable so important and what does it help us understand about the weakness of humanity and about our relationship with God?
  - c. Examine Rembrandt's painting *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. How does Rembrandt's painting speak to you? Do you notice anything unique?

### **Talk Two:**

1. Through our baptismal promise, are we not all called to a "type" of priesthood and to apostolic work? Explain.
2. St. Augustine once wrote that "The Old (Testament) is in the New (Testament) revealed, and the New is in the Old concealed." [Augustine, *Questions on the Heptateuch* 2.73] What do you think he meant by this? Explain!
3. Examine the following New Testament Gospel passage: Jesus Talks with a Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-26).
  - a. Why did the Samaritan woman find it strange that Jesus, a Jew, spoke to her?
  - b. What does this reveal about Jesus and His love for us?
  - c. What does this Gospel passage reveal about how our relationship with others should be?
4. Why is the Sacrament of Reconciliation so crucial in our lives to heal and strengthen our covenant relationship with God?

5. Why is receiving the Holy Eucharist so crucial in our lives to develop our covenantal relationship with God?

**Talk Three:**

1. How does the Mass renew our spirit, our relationship with Jesus?
2. As we proceed to receive the Eucharist in the celebration of the Mass, the priest says, “The Body of Christ,” and we respond by saying, “Amen.” Do we actually know what we are saying to Jesus? What does Amen mean? What are we promising Jesus?

**Talk Four:**

1. The Old Testament often describes the Hebrew people’s relationship with God as a covenantal marriage.
  - a. Is communication important in a marriage? Explain.
  - b. If we think of our relationship with God as a marriage, how important is prayer in healing and strengthening our relationship with God?
2. Participation in the Holy Mass must be transformative; that is, it must transform and change us. In other words, when we come to Mass, we must remove our negative feelings for others and transform into the individual that God expects us to be—loving, compassionate, and forgiving. Describe how you would be able to achieve this goal.
3. If our bodies are to represent the Holy Tabernacle when we receive the Eucharist, why is it imperative that we prepare our bodies for Jesus to enter inside of us? What does Jesus expect of us? Explain.

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<http://ronrolheiser.com/the-real-presence/#.WzELjApDIX>

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## About the Author

Michael Coutts, S.J. belongs to the Jesuits of Canada Province. Born in Bombay, he received a Bachelor's Degree and Licentiate in Philosophy at the Pontifical Athenaeum, Pune, India. He then completed a Bachelor of Education Degree before being posted to Guyana, South America in 1969. In 1970, he studied for his Bachelor of Divinity (Honours) at the London University. He served as the Director of Manresa Jesuit Spiritual Renewal Centre in Pickering, Ontario. Fr. Coutts has worked in schools and parishes in both India and Canada. He began celebrating the Sunday Mass at CFTO in 1994 and has been celebrating the Daily TV Mass with the National Catholic Broadcasting Council (NCBC) since 2001.



