

ST THOMAS AQUINAS - COMMENTARY ON THE HOLY MASS

The Holy Mass: The Mass is the Sacrifice of the New Law in which Christ, through the ministry of the priest, offers Himself to God in an unbloody manner under the appearances of bread and wine.

Excerpt from Trent, Session 22, Doctrine on the Sacrifice of the Mass, CHAPTER II, That the Sacrifice of the Mass is propitiatory both for the living and the dead:

“The holy Synod teaches, that this sacrifice is truly propitiatory and that by means thereof this is effected, that we obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid, if we draw nigh unto God, contrite and penitent, with a sincere heart and upright faith, with fear and reverence... For the victim is one and the same... the manner alone of offering being different.”

Excerpt from Trent, Session 22, Doctrine on the Sacrifice of the Mass, CHAPTER V, On the solemn ceremonies of the Sacrifice of the Mass:

“Whereas such is the nature of man, that, without external helps, he cannot easily be raised to the meditation of divine things; therefore has holy Mother Church instituted certain rites... employed ceremonies, such as mystic benedictions, lights, incense, vestments, and many other things of this kind, derived from an apostolical discipline and tradition, whereby both the majesty of so great a sacrifice might be recommended, and the minds of the faithful be excited, by those visible signs of religion and piety, to the contemplation of those most sublime things which are hidden in this sacrifice.”

Part I – MASS OF THE CATECHUMENS

A) PRAYERS AT THE FOOT OF THE ALTAR

Summa: Certain parts are said publicly: namely, those which pertain both to the priest and to the people, as they are common prayers. However, certain things pertain to the priest alone, to wit, the things which pertain to the proper office of the priest, namely, “that he may offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins,” as is said in Heb 5:1 (as the offertory and consecration). And therefore concerning *these* things which are to be said, they are said by the priest secretly. (IIIa q. 83 a. 4 ad 6)

B) INTROIT

Summa: Before the celebration of this mystery, a certain preparation to worthily do that which is to be offered is in order. The first part of this preparation is divine praise, which is done in the Introit, taken from the Psalms, as Dionysius says, because the Psalms include in praise whatever is contained in Sacred Scripture. (IIIa q. 83 a. 4)

C) KYRIE

Summa: The second part of the preparation for the sacred mysteries contains a commemoration of the present misery, while mercy is sought (IIIa q. 83 a. 4)

D) GLORIA

Summa: The third part of the preparation for the sacred mysteries commemorates the heavenly glory, toward which we are aiming after this present misery, hence we say the *Gloria* (IIIa q. 83 a. 4)

E) COLLECT

Summa: The fourth part of the preparation for the sacred mysteries contains the *Oratio*, which the priest prays for the people that they may be worthy of such mysteries (IIIa q. 83 a. 4)

F) LESSON

Summa: Secondly, following the preparation, before the sacred mysteries are celebrated an instruction is given to the faithful, since the Mass is a mystery of faith. This instruction disposes the faithful through the teaching of the Prophets and Apostles, which are read by the Lectors and Subdeacons. (IIIa q. 83 a. 4)

G) GRADUAL / ALLELUIA / TRACT

Summa: The *Gradual* symbolizes our progression through life, the *Alleluia* is a sign of spiritual exultation, and the *Tract* is symbolic of spiritual lamenting during penitential seasons. These three ought to be achieved in the people from the instruction given [by the Lesson] (IIIa q. 83 a. 4)

H) GOSPEL

Summa: The people are most perfectly instructed by the Gospel. (IIIa q. 83 a. 4)

I) CREED

Summa: People show their assent thru faith to Christ's doctrine, the Gospel, as Our Lord says, "If I speak the truth to you, why do you not believe me?" (John 8:46). Hence because we believe Christ as Divine Truth, we recite the Creed following the reading of His Gospel. (IIIa q. 83 a. 4)

Summa: The Creed is said on feasts of which there is some mention in the Creed, as in the Feasts of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin and the Apostles, who helped establish the faith (IIIa q. 83 a. 4)

Part II – MASS OF THE FAITHFUL

Summa: “The people having thus been prepared and instructed, they now approach the celebration of the mystery, which is offered as a sacrifice and consecrated and received as a sacrament. For first the offertory is made, secondly the consecration of the matter offered is done, third the reception of the same matter is done.” (IIIa q. 83 a. 4)

A) OFFERTORY PRAYER

Summa: Concerning the oblation, two things are performed, to wit the praise of the people in the chanting of the offertory, through which is signified the joy of the ones making the offering, and the prayer of the priest who bids that the oblation of the people be acceptable to God. Whence in I Paralipomenon 29:17 David says “ I offered all these things in simplicity of heart, and thy people who are found here, I saw offer gifts exceedingly (*cum ingenti*) to Thee with joy:” and afterward (v. 18) he prays saying, “O Lord God, preserve this good will.” (IIIa q. 83 a. 4)

B) PREFACE

Summa: Regarding the consecration, which is carried out by supernatural power, first the people are aroused to devotion in the preface, whence they are reminded, by *Sursum corda* to have them *ad Dominum*. Then, once the preface is finished, the people praise the divinity of Christ with devotion, united with the angels, saying *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*; and His humanity with the children [at His entrance to Jerusalem, Matt 21:9,15] saying *Benedictus qui venit*. (IIIa q. 83 a. 4)

Excerpt from Trent, Session 22, Doctrine on the Sacrifice of the Mass, CHAPTER IV, On the Canon of the Mass:

“Whereas it beseemeth, that holy things be administered in a holy manner, and of all holy things this sacrifice is the most holy; to the end that it might be worthily and reverently offered and received, the Catholic Church instituted, many years ago, the sacred Canon, so pure from every error, that nothing is contained therein which does not in the highest degree savour of a certain holiness and piety, and raise up unto God the minds of those that offer. For it is composed, out of the very words of the Lord, the traditions of the apostles, and the pious institutions also of holy pontiffs.”

Part III – CANON AND THE CONCLUSION OF THE MASS

A) CANON OF THE MASS

The signs of the Cross in the Canon symbolize the Passion of Christ, which was consummated on the Cross, therefore each stage of the Passion is expressed by signs of the Cross.

Summa: 1st Stage of the Passion: TE IGITUR - CHRIST WAS HANDED OVER: symbolized by the 3 +'s: given over by 1) God (cf. John 3:16), 2) Judas, and 3) the Jews (*Haec + dona, haec + munera, haec + sancta sacrificia...*)

Summa: 2nd Stage of the Passion: QUAM OBLATIONEM - CHRIST SOLD: signified by the 3 +'s: sold to the priests, Scribes, and Pharisees (*benedictam, adscriptam, ratam...*)

Summa: 3rd Stage of the Passion: CONSECRATION - the Last Supper: The CROSSES signify his prefigured passion at the Last Supper (IIIa q. 83 a. 5, ad 3)

Summa: 4th Stage of the Passion: UNDE ET MEMORES - the Passion Itself: 5 +s = 5 WOUNDS: *hostiam puram, sanctam, etc.*

Summa: 5th Stage of the Passion: SUPPLICES TE ROGAMUS - Extension of the Body and Pouring out of the Blood: 3 +'s = stretching of His Body (*corpus*), pouring out of His Blood (*et sanguinem sumpserimus*), and the **fruit** of His Passion (*omni benedictione...*) (IIIa q. 83 a. 5 ad 3)

Summa: 6th Stage of the Passion: PER QUEM HAEC - Triple Prayer on the Cross: 3 +'s during *Per quem haec* = 3 PRAYERS of Christ on the Cross:
sanctificas: for persecutors; Father forgive them...
vivificas: freedom from death; My God, my God...
benedicis: pertains to the attaining of glory; *In manus tuas...*

Summa: 7th Stage of the Passion: PER IPSUM - Three Hours on the Cross: 3 +'s with Host suspended over the chalice = 3 HOURS that Christ was suspended on the Cross. (IIIa q. 83 a. 5 ad 3)

Summa: 8th Stage of the Passion: EST TIBI DEO PATRI - Death of Christ: 2 +'s made with the Host *separated* from the chalice symbolize the SEPARATION of the Soul from the Body. (IIIa q. 83 a. 5 ad 3)

Summa: 9th Stage of the Passion: PAX DOMINI - Resurrection after 3 Days: 3 +'s with the Particle over the chalice = the RESURRECTION on the 3rd day. (IIIa q. 83 a. 5 ad 3)

B) COMMUNION

Summa: Regarding the reception of the sacrament, the people are prepared to receive it, **first** through the common prayer of all the people, the prayer of the Lord (*Pater noster*) in which we ask *panem nostrum quotidianum nobis dari* ... (IIIa q. 83 a. 4)

Summa: The complete celebration of the Mass is finished with thanksgiving, the **people exalting**, the mystery having been received, signified by the chant after communion (the Communion antiphon). (IIIa q. 83 a. 4)

C) POSTCOMMUNION

Summa: The complete celebration of the Mass is finished with thanksgiving, the priest **giving thanks** through prayer, as did Christ, having celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples, recited a hymn as Matthew 26:30 says. (IIIa q. 83 a. 4)

D) CONCLUSION OF THE MASS

Summa: **The Mass** is so named from the sending of the offering via the Angel referred to in the *Supplices te rogamus*, (cf. Malachias) for the priest sends the prayers to God through the Angel: as the people do through the priest. Or it is so named because Christ is the Host *sent* to us. Whence is said, *Ite, missa est*, to wit, **the Host [has been sent] to God** by the Angel, that it be accepted by God. (IIIa q. 83 a. 4 ad 9)

SOURCES FOR FURTHER MEDITATION AND STUDY ON THE HOLY MASS

DEVOTIONAL / SPIRITUAL

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DOGMATIC

Council of Trent:

Session XIII, Decree on the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist

Session XXI, Doctrine on Communion Under Both Species, and that of Children

Session XXII, Doctrine on the Sacrifice of the Mass, Canons on the Sacrifice of the Mass,

Decree on what to observe and avoid in the Celebration of the Mass

St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Pars IIa IIae, Question 83, article 17; Pars III, Questions 55, 83-84