The Mass

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass – the principal act of Catholic worship.

* The Holy Eucharist is consecrated during this Sacrifice.
* “If any one saith, that in the mass a true and proper sacrifice is not offered to God; or, that to be offered is nothing else but that Christ is given us to eat; let him be anathema.”

Christianity without Sacrifice would surely be very strange.

* We find sacrifice as an integral part of religious worship throughout the world.
  + Only more modern religions lack it.
* More importantly – sacrifice is the central act of the religious worship of the Old Testament.
* Undoubtedly, those sacrifices foretell the sacrifice of Our Lord upon the Cross.
  + All the OT sacrifices:
    - The firstborn male: “…the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.”
    - Must be pure, unblemished: “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things as gold or silver, from your vain conversation of the tradition of your fathers: But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled.” St. Peter makes the figure very clear here.
    - The priest also had to fulfill conditions of legal purity: “For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.”
  + Different prophetic elements in the various sacrifices:
    - The pascal lamb – whose blood was put on the doorposts of the Israelites to prevent the angel from killing the firstborn; bones not broken.
    - The scapegoat who was loaded with the sins of the people and driven out of the camp or the city to be destroyed by wild beasts.
    - Etc.
* Those who call themselves Christians but oppose the Catholic doctrine of the Mass would agree with us thus far.
  + However, they would say that Christ’s sacrifice is the once-for-all sacrifice of the New Law, and no further sacrifice needs to be offered.
  + Further, they would claim that the Catholic teaching on the Holy Sacrifice is somehow injurious to sacrifice of Christ, implying that the sacrifice of God-made-man was insufficient for the salvation of the world.
* But would it not be strange if sacrifice, which is such an integral part of life in from the beginning of the existence of mankind, so central to the worship of the OT, should be absent from the life of Christians except as a ***mere*** remembrance.
* Furthermore, Catholics do not claim that the sacrifice of OLJC is insufficient, but that the Mass is strictly dependent upon the sacrifice of Christ:
  + “He, therefore, our God and Lord, though He was about to offer Himself once on the altar of the cross unto God the Father, by means of his death, there to operate an eternal redemption; nevertheless, because that His priesthood was not to be extinguished by His death, in the last supper, on the night in which He was betrayed,–that He might leave, to His own beloved Spouse the Church, a visible sacrifice, such as the nature of man requires, whereby that bloody sacrifice, once to be accomplished on the cross, might be represented, and the memory thereof remain even unto the end of the world, and its salutary virtue be applied to the remission of those sins which we daily commit,–declaring Himself constituted a priest for ever, according to the order of Melchisedech, He offered up to God the Father His own body and blood under the species of bread and wine.” C. of Trent
* So, the Catholic doctrine of the Mass is that it is the same sacrifice as that of the Cross, continued throughout time by means of a sacramental (symbolic) immolation, but that it is truly the sacrifice of Christ’s Body and Blood.
* It is by this sacramental continuation that the graces of Christ’s unique sacrifice on the Cross are applied throughout the course of time.
* Hopefully, anyone who believes in God recognizes that He is all-powerful and that if He wants the continuation of the Cross to take place in this manner, He can do so.
  + There are blasphemous implications if one says that it would be impossible for God to accomplish this.
* So, what we are concerned with is determining IF this is what God has decided to do.
* To answer that question, we consult Scripture and refer to the earliest historical record of what Christians believe.

The Old Testament

* We have already referenced the numerous sacrifices of the OT.
  + Again, religious practice for thousands of years revolved around the offering of sacrifice.
  + The people had sacrifice offered on their own behalf, they attended the sacrifice and joined their prayers to those of the priest.
  + They often, though not always, communicated in the sacrifice by eating a portion of what had been offered.
  + Catholic teaching on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is in perfect continuity with these elements of OT worship, though since Our Lord, the figures are replaced by the reality.
* Prophecy of Malachy
  + “For from the rising of the sun even to the going down, my name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to my name a clean oblation: for my name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of hosts.” (1.11)
  + To what does this refer if not to the Mass?
    - Certainly not the Jewish sacrifices, which were only offered in the Temple in Jerusalem and never among the Gentiles.
    - Not any pagan sacrifice, nor natural law sacrifice.
    - A clean oblation, a sacrifice pleasing to God, glorifying His name among the Gentiles.
* Prophecy from the Psalms
  + “Thou art a priest forever, according to the order of Melchisedech.” Ps. 109.4
  + This psalm is clearly a messianic prophecy – so the priesthood referenced is that of Jesus Christ.
  + Not a priest of the line of Aaron – Our Lord was of the tribe of Juda, not the tribe of Levi.
  + Melchisedech – the mysterious figure of the OT who met Abraham as he returned from the battle by which he rescued his nephew, Lot, who had been taken prisoner by the Elamites.
  + The Epistle of the Hebrews makes repeated reference to this prophecy and the figure of Melchisedech.
    - Refers to the greater antiquity of Melchisedech’s priesthood w/ reference to that of Aaron.
    - Also, refers to Melchisedech being a mysterious figure, appearing almost eternal, no reference made to his parents, his early years, etc.
  + But, if OLJC is of the priestly order of Melchisedech, this surely means that He offer sacrifice after the manner of Melchisedech.
    - Mel. did not sacrifice himself on a cross.
    - He offered a sacrifice of bread and wine – figure of the Last Supper.
    - Our Lord offered bread and wine, but they became a sacrifice by their transformation into His Body and Blood.
* Clear from the institution of the Holy Eucharist that Our Lord in inaugurating a sacrifice.
  + “This is the chalice, the new testament in my blood, which shall be shed for you.” Saint Luke
  + St. Matthew adds, “unto the remission of sins”
  + Note that St. Luke speaks of the chalice itself, of course, the chalice refers to what is contained in the chalice – the Blood of Our Lord.
  + It would be a stretch to suppose that this refers only to the shedding of blood on the Cross which would have no direct reference to a chalice.
  + Further, Our Lord is establishing the New Covenant.
    - “This is my blood of the New Testament.”
  + Reference to the establishment of the OT.
    - “And he took the blood and sprinkled it upon the people, and he said: This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you...” [Exodus 24:8]
    - St. Paul references this in the Epistle to the Hebrews.
  + There is a change, at the Last Supper, from the Old to the New Covenant.
  + The time of mere figures and symbols has passed, and we enter into the reality.
  + Can the great religious rite instituted by Jesus Christ remain on the level of pure symbol – just some bread and wine to make us think of His Passion?
  + Was the real blood of the Old Covenant just to give way to a figure? A symbol?
* The force of Our Lord’s words
  + “This is My Body.” “This is My Blood.”
    - Explicit, clear – to make “is” mean “symbolizes” is to do violence to the text.
  + “…which is given for you.” “…which is being poured out for you.”
    - Present tense
    - And then the repetition of the words of Moses, establishing a new covenant.
* The Protestant conception of the Eucharist makes it into practically nothing.
  + A piece of bread, a sip of wine, just as a reminder of the Crucifixion.
  + The OT sacrifices were more real, more effectively symbolized the Crucifixion.
  + The concept of sacrifice, so central to man’s notion of religion from the very beginning, left aside, having no place in daily life anymore.

The Real Presence

* Much of what has already been said applies to the Real Presence as much as to the reality of the sacrifice.
* Not a real sacrifice w/o OLJC being truly present.
* “This is My Body.” “This is My Blood.”
  + Nothing in the context implies merely symbolic presence.
* John Chapter 6
  + Jesus works the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves.
    - This miracle is a figure of the Holy Eucharist.
      * Spread throughout the world under appearance of bread.
      * Manifesting divine power of Jesus in a striking way to prepare to receive the teaching about the Real Presence and Holy Communion.
      * It is a difficult teaching of the faith – a stumbling block for many throughout history.
      * But Jesus is God – He can do what He wants.
      * And His words are ***very*** clear!
  + “I am the bread of life…If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give, is my flesh, for the life of the world.”
    - His audience reacts immediately: “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”
  + Our Lord does not soften, explain away, or in any way attenuate His first statement.
    - He further emphasizes: “Amen, amen I say unto you: Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath everlasting life: and I will raise him up in the last day.”
    - Amen, amen – an emphatic expression
  + Many followers leave Him at this point.
    - It wouldn’t make sense for Him to let them walk over a simple misunderstanding.
    - If you believe the Bible is the word of God, then you have to have a plausible explanation for what Our Lord means here.
    - These words are strong – He is promising eternal life to those who eat His flesh and drink His Blood, and He says that those who do not do so will not have life in them.
    - It stretches credulity past the breaking point to imagine that this is all referring to eating a piece of bread as a merely symbolic memorial of the Passion.
    - “The words that I have spoken to you, are spirit and life. But there are some of you that believe not.”
* St. Paul
  + I Corinthians 11
    - “Therefore whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord.”
      * If you receive communion unworthily, while in sin, you are guilty of attacking Our Lord.
      * Again, meaningless if it is a symbolic piece of bread.
    - “For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord.”
      * How much clearer could it be?
      * “not discerning the body of the Lord”!
      * The words and the context show that St. Paul is referring to the Real Presence of Our Lord.
      * Can it possibly mean, “not discerning that the body of Our Lord is symbolized”?
      * And why would it matter, if we were speaking only of a symbol.
* Absolutely explicit in the teaching of the Fathers of the Church.
  + To give just a couple of the earliest Fathers.
    - St. Ignatius of Antioch (d. in early 2nd c.)
      * Refers to a heretical sect and says they ‘abstain from the Holy Eucharist and prayer because they do not believe that the Eucharist is the flesh of Our Lord Jesus Christ…”
    - St. Irenaeus (130-202)
      * “Christ declares that the chalice, which is but earthly, is His own Precious Blood. Since then the chalice and bread by the word of God become the Eucharist of the Body and Blood of Christ, how dare they [the heretics] deny that the flesh which partakes of the flesh and blood of Christ and is a member of Him, will receive the gift of God, i.e., life everlasting.”
  + These are representative of the whole body of patristic writings on the subject.
    - Of course, one can find a few quotes that, taken from context, seem to imply something else.
    - Nevertheless, the patristic teaching is unanimous on the subject of the real presence.