

The Consecration and “Mystery of Faith”

"The institution narrative and Consecration, by which, by means of the words and actions of Christ, that Sacrifice is effected which Christ himself instituted during the Last Supper, when he offered his Body and Blood under the species of bread and wine, gave them to the Apostles to eat and drink, and leaving with the latter the command to perpetuate this same mystery" (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 79d).

The Roman Missal (2011)

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

He shows the consecrated host to the people, places it again on the paten, and genuflects in adoration. After this, the he continues...

He bows slightly: TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND DRINK FROM IT,
FOR THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD,
THE BLOOD OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL COVENANT,
WHICH WILL BE Poured OUT FOR YOU AND FOR MANY
FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.
DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME.

He shows the chalice to the people, places it on the corporal, and genuflects in adoration..¹

The Elevation: Ringing of the Bells

General Instruction of the Roman Missal: A little before the Consecration, if appropriate, a minister rings a small bell as a signal to the faithful. *The minister also rings the small bell at each elevation by the Priest, according to local custom.* (GIRM 150)

The Mystery of Faith

Then [the Priest] says:
The mystery of faith.

The Memorial Acclamation

And the people continue, acclaiming:
*We proclaim your Death, O Lord,
and profess your Resurrection
until you come again.*

Or:
*When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup,
we proclaim your Death, O Lord,
until you come again.*

Or:

¹ Roman Missal, *Order of Mass*, nos. 89-91 (EP I), 102-103 (EP II), 111-112 (EP III), 119-120 (EP IV).

*Save us, Savior of the world,
for by your Cross and Resurrection,
you have set us free.*

(Roman Missal, *Order of Mass*, nos. 91, 104, 112, 121)

Scripture

St. Paul and the Eucharistic Words of Institution

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the chalice, after supper, saying, "This chalice 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 chalice, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

The Last Supper and the Words of Jesus

1. "Take, Eat, This is My Body" (Matt 26:26)
2. "Which Is Given For You" (Luke 22:19)
3. "Drink of It, All of You" (Matt 26:27)
4. "This Cup" (1 Cor 11:25)
4. "This is My Blood" (Matt 26:28)
5. "The New Covenant in My Blood" (Luke 22:20)
6. "Which is Poured Out For You" (Luke 22:20)
7. "Which is Poured Out For Many" (Matt 26:28)
8. "For the Forgiveness of Sins" (Matt 26:28)
9. Do This in Memory of Me" (1 Cor 11:25)

The High Priest's Vestments and Golden Bells

You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. It shall have an opening for the head in the middle of it, with a woven binding around the opening, like the opening in a coat of mail, so that it may not be torn. On its lower hem you shall make pomegranates of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, all around the lower hem, *with bells of gold between them all around—a golden bell and a pomegranate alternating all around the lower hem of the robe. Aaron shall wear it when he ministers, and its sound shall be heard when he goes into the holy place before the Lord, and when he comes out, so that he may not die. (Exodus 28:31-35)*

Deacons and the "Mystery of Faith"

Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for gain; they must hold *the mystery of the faith* (Latin *mysterium fidei*) with a clear conscience. (1 Timothy 3:8-9)

Tradition

St. Ambrose and the Words of Consecration (4th century)

St. Ambrose: *Do you wish to be convinced that the consecration takes place by means of*

*the heavenly words? Listen to what the priest says: “Make this offering for us approved, spiritual, acceptable. It is a figure of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ who on the day before he suffered took bread in his holy hands, looked upward toward heaven, to you, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, and giving thanks, he blessed it and gave it to his apostles and disciples, saying, “Take and eat of this, all of you, for this is my Body which shall be broken for many.” Listen carefully now. “In like manner he also took the cup after the meal, on the day before he suffered; he looked upward to heaven, to you, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, and giving thanks, he blessed it and gave it to his apostles and disciples, saying, “Take and drink of this, all of you; for this is my Blood.” (Ambrose, *On the Sacraments* 4.21-22)²*

The 1st and 2nd Memorial Acclamations (5th Century)

Liturgy of Saint James:

The Priest: Do this in remembrance of me; *for as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death, and confess his resurrection, until he comes.*

The Deacons say: We believe and confess:

*The People: We proclaim your death, O Lord, and confess your resurrection.*³

Pope Honorius III: Bowing During the Elevation (13th Century)

Honorius III: Every priest should teach his people frequently that *they should bow in reverence whenever the Life-Giving Host is elevated at the celebration of Mass* and that each one should do the same when the priest is carrying It to the sick.⁴

St. Francis: Kneeling During the Consecration (13th Century)

St. Francis of Assisi: When It is sacrificed on the altar by a priest and carried anywhere, let all peoples praise, glorify, and honor *on bended knee* the Lord God living and true.⁵

The 3rd Memorial Acclamation (15th Century)

Missal of Valencia: The following prayers should be said at the elevation of the Body of Christ: ...I adore you, Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, Savior of the world... You are my Lord and my God, living and true; *Savior of the world, save me, who by your Cross and Resurrection have redeemed me.*⁶

Mystagogy

² In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 2:57.

³ *Divine Liturgy of James*, 3 (Author's translation). Cf. *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 7:54.

⁴ Pope Honorius III, *Bullarium Romanum* (November 22, 1219). Honorius III, n. XL, tom. III, pages 366a-366b. Quoted in Francis of Assisi, *The Saint: Early Documents* (ed. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. et al.; New York, N.Y.: New City Press, 2001), 55 note a.

⁵ Francis of Assisi, “First Letter to the Custodians” (1220). In Francis of Assisi, *The Saint: Early Documents* (ed. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. et al.; New York, N.Y.: New City Press, 2001), 55.

⁶ In James Monti, *A Sense of the Sacred: Roman Catholic Worship in the Middle Ages* (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius, 2012), 66, quoting Michel Andrieu, ed., *Les Ordines Romani du haut moyen âge* (vol. 3.; SSLED; Louvain, Belgium: “Spicilegium sacrum Lovaniense” Administration, 1951), 181.

St. Ambrose and the Mystery of the Eucharistic Change (4th Century)

Notice each detail... *Before it is consecrated; it is bread; but once Christ's words are added, it becomes the Body of Christ. Before Christ's words are spoken, the cup is full of wine and water; but once his words are said, it becomes the Blood that redeemed the people. Notice the many ways Christ's word can change things.*⁷

The Mystery of the Consecration and Elevation (13th Century)

William Durand: These words, "Who the day before he suffered," are the sixth part of the Canon, and Pope Alexander I, it is said, added them... *What happens in this place represents what Christ did in the Lord's Supper... It is with good reason that after uttering these words, "This is my body," the priest raises the body of Christ... according to these words, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32)... [T]he host is [also] lifted so that the people... knowing, by the elevation, that it is accomplished and that Christ descended on the altar. So they prostrate themselves on the ground with respect, according to the words of the Apostle to the Philippians, "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow," (Phil 2:10), and let it be adored with heart and mouth... Now at the elevation of the host and of the chalice the bell is rung, for in the Old Testament the Levites sounded silver trumpets at the time of the sacrifice so that this sound might warn that they were preparing to worship the Lord.*⁸

St. John Paul II: "The Mystery of Faith and "Eucharistic Amazement"

St. John Paul II: *At every celebration of the Eucharist, we are spiritually brought back to the paschal Triduum: to the events of the evening of Holy Thursday, to the Last Supper and to what followed it.... [In Gethsemane,] The blood which shortly before he had given to the Church as the drink of salvation in the sacrament of the Eucharist, began to be shed; its outpouring would then be completed on Golgotha to become the means of our redemption... The agony in Gethsemane was the introduction to the agony of the Cross on Good Friday... "Mysterium fidei!—The Mystery of Faith!". When the priest recites or chants these words, all present acclaim: "We announce your death, O Lord, and we proclaim your resurrection, until you come in glory". In these or similar words the Church, while pointing to Christ in the mystery of his passion, also reveals her own mystery: *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*.... Her foundation and wellspring is the whole *Triduum paschale*, but this is as it were gathered up, foreshadowed and "concentrated forever in the gift of the Eucharist. In this gift Jesus Christ entrusted to his Church the perennial making present of the paschal mystery. With it he brought about a mysterious "oneness in time" between that *Triduum* and the passage of the centuries. *The thought of this leads us to profound amazement and gratitude.... I would like to rekindle this Eucharistic "amazement" ...*⁹*

⁷ Ambrose, *On the Sacraments* 4.23. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 2:57.

⁸ Durandus, *Rationale of the Divine Offices*, 4.41.1, 51-52. In Durandus, *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, 3:275, 300-301.

⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on the Eucharist in Its Relationship to the Church, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (April 17, 2003), nos. 5-6.

Pope Francis, General Audience (Wednesday, 22 November 2017)

"This is the Mass: *to enter the passion, death, resurrection, ascension of Jesus; when we go to Mass it is as if we were going to Calvary itself.* But consider: whether at the moment of Mass we go to Calvary — let us ponder this with the imagination — and we know that the man there is Jesus. But will we allow ourselves to chat, to take photographs, to put on a little show? No! Because it is Jesus! We certainly pause in silence, in sorrow and also in the joy of being saved. As we enter the church to celebrate Mass, let us think about this: *I am going to Calvary*, where Jesus gave his life for me. In this way the spectacle disappears; the small talk disappears; the comments and these things that distance us from something so beautiful as the Mass, Jesus' triumph."

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What are the biblical roots Consecration and Elevation? Why is this moment in the Eucharistic Prayer so important?

3. When did the custom of elevating the Host and Chalice begin? What is the mystical significance of this moment during the Mass?

For Further Reading

Jungmann, Joseph, S.J. *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development.* 2 Volumes. Translated by Francis A. Brunner, C.S.S.R. Reprint. Notre Dame, Ind.: Christian Classics, 2012. Volume 2, pp. 1-40. [An in-depth study of the history of the offertory procession.]

Amalar of Metz, *On the Liturgy.* 2 vols.; trans. Eric Knibbs; Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 36; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014. Volume 2, pp. 109-133 [An in-depth examination of the spiritual meaning of the Offertory in the Medieval Church.]