

The Consecration and "Mystery of Faith"

As we continue our journey through the Eucharistic Prayer, we turn now to one of the elements in the Eucharistic prayer that is the same every time the Mass is celebrated, and which also brings us really to the heart of the Eucharistic Prayer itself. And that is the words of institution, or the consecration of the bread and wine, as well as the elevation of the consecrated host and the consecrated chalice in the midst of the Eucharistic Prayer. Let me give you the official description of this part of the Mass from the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* that's at the beginning of the Roman Missal. It says this:

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 mystery¹

Alright, so that's the Church's description. So that's what we're looking at now, what's happening during the institution narrative and consecration. So let's see what the priest says. So, if we're going to look at this part of the Eucharistic Prayer carefully, we need to turn to the section in the Eucharistic Prayer, that is the same, when the priest will take the host and take the chalice and pronounce over them what are frequently known as the words of institution, sometimes called the institution narrative. So here's how the Missal describes this part of the Mass, which is then going to be followed by a proclamation known as the *Mysterium Fidei*, the Mystery of Faith, said by the priest, to which the people are going to respond with an acclamation. So let me read through this part of the Missal and then we're going to ask where does it come from in Scripture and where does it come from in tradition? So the words of institution are the same in all the versions of the Eucharistic Prayer, and it says this:

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

¹ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 79d.

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...²

Now, pause there for just a second. That's what's happening at the altar during the words of institution and the consecration of the elements. One of the things that the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* points out, though, that I want to highlight, is the common custom of ringing a bell at the time of the consecration. This is a custom that people have lots of questions about. So the Missal says this:

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)

So notice, as the consecration and elevation of the elements is taking place, the elevation of the host, the elevation of the chalice, there's also, according to the norms, you can ring a bell at that moment. So the question is why? We will look at that in just a second. After the consecration and elevation of the chalice and the host, then the priest says something very important. He proclaims:

The mystery of faith.

² Roman Missal, *Order of Mass*, nos. 89-91 (EP I), 102-103 (EP II), 111-112 (EP III), 119-120 (EP IV).

He will often sing it, chant that, and then the people will respond with an acclamation. One of three, there are three different acclamations in the Missal that can be said:

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:

Save us, Savior of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection, you have set us free.³

So it's right there in the heart of the Missal, in the heart of the Eucharistic Prayer. So the question that it raises is why are we saying and doing these things? Why is the priest saying the words of Jesus from the Last Supper? Why is he elevating the host and elevating the chalice? Why do we ring a bell when the host and the chalice that have been consecrated are elevated? Why does he say The mystery of faith? And then why do we respond with one of these memorial acclamations? Where are they from? What's the purpose being served at this part of the Canon of the Eucharistic Prayer?

Okay, if there is any part of the Mass, which many if not most Catholics can figure out where it comes from in the Bible, it's the words of consecration; it's the words of institution. Most Catholics will recognize that what is being said here comes from the words of Jesus at the Last Supper. Now, what many people may not realize, however, is that there are actually multiple accounts of the words of institution of Jesus at the Last Supper in the Bible. For example., there are multiple accounts of the words of institution, the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of Luke, and the letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians. All four of them

³ Roman Missal, *Order of Mass*, nos. 91, 104, 112, 121.

give accounts of Jesus's words of institution at the Last Supper, over the bread and over the wine of the Passover meal.

So just as one example, I'll quote from St. Paul's account of the words of institution in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Listen to these carefully. I know you are probably familiar with these words, but I want you to read the account of Paul with the words of consecration from the Mass in mind and you can hear some similarities and some differences. This is the writing of St. Paul:

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)

Now, if you compare that account with what we see in the the actual liturgy of the Mass, you'll notice there are some differences and some similarities. And the reason for that is that the words of consecration in the Mass are not replicated from any one account of the words of institution in the Bible. They are actually a kind of synthesis or summary of various accounts of Jesus's words in the New Testament. So, for example, if you look, I have a little chart here just telling you how the Mass takes it from each part. So, for example, when the Mass says "take...eat...this is my body." This is from the account of Matthew 26. When it says which is "given up for you." That's from the account of Luke 22. When it says "this is...my blood," that's from Matthew 26. Whereas when it says which is "poured out for you", that's from Luke 22 and which is "poured out...for many" is from Matthew 26. You'll see, what the liturgy is doing is, it's taking both. Which is poured out "for you", as in Luke, and "for many", as in Matthew. And then finally, the command "do this in memory of me." Jesus doesn't say that in the Gospel of Matthew, but he does say it in the account of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 11. So if you look at a little chart of the exact phrases, you can see that again, the liturgy is like a pastiche or a kind of

collage or a tapestry woven together from the fabrics of the inspired words of Scripture, but brought together by the Church in the liturgy to give us this single account of the words of institution and words of consecration.

Now, I don't have time to get into this in any detail, but some of you might be wondering, well wait, how can there be differences between the various Gospels? And the answer to that is very simple. It is that when you look at the Gospels, although the details will differ, the substance is the same. And So what the Church is doing is taking various details from each of the different accounts and weaving them together to give us a synthesis or a unified account of the words of consecration that will be the same at every single Mass. So with that in mind, you don't have to be an expert in the history of the liturgy or have studied the mystical writings of the Saints to realize that mystically what is happening at this moment in the Mass is that we are, in a sense, being placed in the role of the Apostles in the upper room with Jesus at the institution of the Eucharist on the night of the Last Supper. That's very clear from the institution narrative itself.

However, there are things that are a little bit more subtle and less clear that are still important to look at. One of them is the ringing of the bells. This is one of my favorite aspects of the Eucharistic Prayer and of the moment of concentration, is the addition of the ringing of the bell to the elevation of the consecrated host and the consecrated chalice. Is there any Scriptural foundation for ringing bells? Well, on the one hand you could say, and and people do point out, that the bells serve a very practical function, which is to call the attention of the faithful, of the laity, to the moment of the pronouncement of the words of consecration and the elevation of the body and blood of Christ. But it is fascinating to note, and I'm not the first to do so, that bells played a role not just in the Bible in a general way, but in the liturgy of sacrifice in the Old Testament, in particular when the high priests would go into the Holy of Holies to offer the atoning sacrifice of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. So in the book of Exodus 28, it says this about what would happen when the priest entered the Holy of Holies. Listen to this. It says:

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.

So you think here of a priestly chasuble, right? There's an opening for the head and he puts it on over his shoulders:

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)

This is very serious. You had to have those bells ringing when Aaron entered the Tabernacle to offer sacrifice, which is not like what happened when I was young. I was an altar boy and one time I was supposed to be ringing the bells and we were kneeling beside the altar and I fell asleep and my brother had to elbow me to wake me up to shake the bells at this moment during the Mass. So sorry, mea maxima culpa, but altar boys are prone to do this kind of thing. Thankfully I did not die because I forgot to ring the bells. But in this case, the book of Exodus makes this obviously a grave obligation that the priests bells would ring when he enters the holy place to minister, in other words, when he enters the holy place to offer sacrifice. So the ringing of bells and the offering of sacrifice by the high priest in the Holy of Holies was tied together in the book of Exodus.

The final text that is kind of a Scriptural root for the consecration and elevation at the Mass is the phrase the mystery of faith. Now if you know something about the history of the words of consecration, you'll know that in the Middle Ages the consecration actually included the expression “mystery of faith” over the chalice. And that expression comes from not the words institution in the Last Supper. The Last Supper accounts never mentioned Jesus saying the words mystery of faith. That actually comes from the letter of St. Paul to Timothy, when he is talking about the roles of the deacons in the early Church. And in 1 Timothy 3:8-9, it says this:

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)

Now it's not really clear here what Paul's referring to. There are different interpretations of his words. Most commentators think that what Paul is saying is the deacon needs to be orthodox. In other words, he needs to hold the mystery of faith, he needs to believe the truths of the faith with a clear conscience. Although it is interesting if you look at later traditions, especially in the Roman tradition, there's often a link between the deacon and the chalice, right? The Deacon will actually, in some accounts be the one who lifts up and elevates the chalice along with the priest, while the priest elevates the host. So some interpreters have suggested that Paul may actually be referring to the deacons participation in the liturgy here, and the mystery of faith is our faith in the blood of Christ, in the chalice, and he's the one who lifts it up or holds it up. It's really difficult to prove that. It's a very enigmatic verse, but this is where the phrase comes from that makes its way into the liturgy during the consecration and elevation of the host and the chalice. That is clear, that *mysterium fidei* comes from 1 Timothy 3:9. All right, so those are some of the biblical roots of the consecration, elevation, and mystery of faith proclamation.

Our acclamation, our response to the priest — almost forgot that one — actually is also from St. Paul. You'll notice if you go back up to the account of the Last Supper, Paul says:

as often as you eat this bread and drink the chalice, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

I might mention here as it's dawning on me, just as an aside. Some scholars have pointed out there that when Paul says that “as often as you eat this bread and drink this chalice, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes”, that there might be an illusion there to Jewish liturgy. Because in the Jewish liturgy, the Jewish rites and prayers that accompany the offering of the Passover were called the Haggadah, which literally in Hebrew means the proclamation. So some commentators have suggested here that Paul's using the language of the Jewish Passover, this

proclamation, this acclamation as a way of describing the new Passover of the Christian Eucharist. In any case, that's the Biblical foundations for the consecration and elevation.

Where do these come from in the tradition? If we look at the writings of the Church Fathers and Doctors from the very, very earliest time, I mean, if you go all the way back, once the Fathers of the Church begin explaining the mystical meaning of the Mass, the words of consecration of the bread and the wine are always going to be central to their explanations of what's happening invisibly on the altar of the Christian Eucharist. So the most famous example of this is really one of the earliest mystagogical treatises we have, it is from St. Ambrose of Milan. He wrote treatises on the mysteries and on the sacraments. He was a 4th century Bishop of Milan. He's the mentor of St. Augustine, who really helped Augustine come into the fullness of the faith and undergo a radical conversion. In St. Ambrose's writing, there are a series of catecheses that he's giving to new Christians on what's happening during the Mass, what's happening during the liturgy. And in his treatise he explains the moment of consecration with reference to the Last Supper in a very powerful and influential way with the following words. So imagine yourself here, it's the 4th century in Milan, and this great Saint and Bishop is teaching you about what's happening at the consecration during the liturgy. This is what St. Ambrose said:

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."*⁴

This is a really important quote because you will notice a couple of things. First, this is the earliest witness that we have to what will later be known as the Roman Canon, or Eucharistic Prayer I, which is the Eucharistic Prayer particular to the Roman Church. We're going to have a whole video looking at the Roman Canon and looking at Eucharistic Prayer I. I'll do that in another video, but for now I just want you to see, first, Ambrose is the earliest witness to the Eucharistic prayer. Second, you'll notice that although in later centuries, like in the Middle Ages, the Eucharistic Prayer is going to come to be said silently, right? What's called the silent canon, and that's going to be that way for about 1000 years. It's going to be a long tradition. But in the early Church that was not the case. The Canon, the Eucharistic Prayer, was pronounced out loud, and you can actually see that because Ambrose is telling the new Christians, "Listen to what the priest says. Listen to what he's saying. If you want to understand what's happening, you need to listen." So he is presuming there that they can not only hear the Eucharistic Prayer, but they can hear the words of consecration in particular as a kind of window or key to understanding what's happening during the liturgy.

And then the third element of Ambrose that is really significant for the consecration and elevation is you'll notice that he does not mention the mystery of faith as part of the actual words of institution. So in the oldest version of the Eucharistic Prayer, the mystery of faith is not actually part of the words of consecration. And by the way, although Ambrose is in the church in Milan, it's very clear from his writings that he's following the liturgy of the Church of Rome. So there's a very strong similarity between the liturgy of Ambrose and the Roman Church, and so scholars today accept Ambrose's description of the liturgy as reflective of what is happening in the Roman Rite. The reason this is significant is that after the Second Vatican Council, Pope St. Paul VI removed the expression, the mystery of faith, from the words of consecration over the chalice, which is where it was in the Missal of the Council of Trent, to after the consecration as an

⁴ Ambrose, *On the Sacraments* 4.21-22.

acclamation of the priest. He just says or sings the mystery of faith and then the people respond with their acclamation.

With that said, it doesn't end with the proclamation, mystery of faith, by the priest. There are also these three acclamations that are part of the contemporary Roman Missal of St. Paul the VI. Where do these come from in the tradition? Well, it is true that if you look at the Roman liturgy, for many centuries there was no acclamation of the people at this point in the Mass. This is a development that takes place after Vatican II with the Missal of Paul the VI. However, the prayers that we pray at this moment in the liturgy actually are rooted in the tradition of the Church and come from sources that many people aren't familiar with, but are really interesting. For example, having an acclamation at all at this point in the middle of the Eucharistic Prayer is something that's very common in the Eastern liturgies. And in this case, our first option for the Memorial Acclamation is actually taken from a very important Eastern liturgy known as the Liturgy of St. James. If you have a copy of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, volume seven has early liturgies, and one of them is the Liturgy of St. James, used by many Eastern Christians. And there are various dates for the Liturgy of James, some date it all the way back, at least in its core, to the 5th century AD. So this is a very ancient acclamation. And in the midst of the Eucharistic Prayer in the Liturgy of St. James, this is what happens. It says:

The Priest:	Do this in remembrance of me; for <i>as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death, and confess his resurrection, until he comes.</i>
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Here the priest is quoting St. Paul.

The Deacons say:	We believe and confess:
The People:	We proclaim your death, O Lord, and confess your resurrection. ⁵

⁵ *Divine Liturgy of James*, 3 (Author's translation). Cf. *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 7:54.

So this part of the contemporary Roman Liturgy is actually drawing from the Eastern tradition of the people having an acclamation during the Mass. But that's not all. The third acclamation:

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

This is a really interesting one. It is actually drawn from a private prayer of a priest in a medieval Missal known as the Missal of Valencia, which dates to about the 15th century. So this is a late medieval, early modern Missal actually, in the Latin tradition. But by the 15th century, the Latin Church, the Roman Church, and the various Latin rites had developed the practice of pausing at the consecration and elevation and having some kind of exclamation or private prayer, just adoring the presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. Because by this point in the West, there's a real strong recognition that once the words of consecration have been pronounced, the bread and wine are transubstantiated into the body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ. So it's fitting to respond, to pray, to utter some words of awe and reverence at the majesty of Christ. So in the Missal of Valencia it actually says:

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

So here what the Church is doing is taking the prayer of the priest from a late medieval missal and putting it, again, on the lips of the people as an act of adoration for the real presence of Christ. In response to the mystery of faith that He's truly present: body, blood, soul, and divinity, we cry out in awe:

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

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.

So although the introduction of these prayers is definitely an innovation in the Roman liturgy, they are based on traditional prayers, either acclamations of the people from the Eastern tradition or prayers of the priests after the consecration and elevation in the Latin tradition in the West. Before I move on, just one little note. You might have noticed in that ancient priestly prayer, "My Lord and my God," that's the words of Thomas in the presence of the risen Christ, like doubting Thomas when Christ invites him to put his hand in his side or put his finger in the wounds and Thomas says, "My Lord and my God." That acclamation or exclamation, actually Pope St. Pius X encouraged laypeople to say at the moment of elevation and consecration as just kind of like a private prayer, "My Lord and my God." So just like Thomas, we are kind of asking God to help us strengthen our faith and our unbelief, our tendency to unbelief, you know, "I believe, Lord, help my unbelief." So too, St. Pius the X encouraged the faithful to say "My Lord and my God" at the moment of consecration and elevation, and gave it as a kind of indulgenced prayer. So that custom that you see in the Middle Ages, and then in St. Pius the X, is now part of the official liturgy with this acclamation and response to the mystery of faith and consecration in the elevation of the elements.

Oh, okay, sorry, almost forgot. It's not just the words but it's also the gestures, right? So one of the key gestures at this time during the liturgy is that the faithful are kneeling at the time of consecration. And you'll also see the priest himself genuflect after the consecration of the host and the consecration of the chalice. So where does this practice of kneeling and genuflection come from? Well, if you study the early Church, you'll know that in the early Church the Eucharistic prayer was ordinarily said standing. And in Eastern churches today, standing is still the posture of reverence. It's a posture of attention for the Eucharistic Prayer, but in the Latin West we kneel, especially during the consecration of the host and the chalice. Where does that come from?

Well, that's a medieval innovation from the early 2nd Millennium at the time of Pope Honorius III in the 13th century. So you can find this in a papal bull that was issued in the year 1219 AD. So it's a long time ago, and this is what the Pope wrote:

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.⁷

So notice here, Pope Honorius is telling the priest, through this papa bull, to teach the people to bow at the elevation as an act of reverence for the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, body, blood, soul, and divinity. And what this appears to suggest at this point, is that the people are bowing as their primary act of reverence, right? And that they are standing and bowing before the Blessed Sacrament. Now, it is interesting, at the same time the Pope issued this decree, another famous figure in the early Church was St. Francis of Assisi. And if you study the life of St. Francis, here I have a book of his early documents, you'll know Francis had a deep devotion to the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. And so when this decree was released, one of the things Francis made sure of is that his friars and those that they taught, not only bowed before the Eucharist, he also taught that we should genuflect. In other words, an even more solemn act of veneration was to kneel. So St. Francis of Assisi, and also in the 13th century, in one of his letters to the friars, said this:

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.⁸

So in the 13th century especially, we see a development of gestures that are meant to show reverence and adoration to the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament at the time of consecration and elevation. Whether through bowing, a reverent bow, like Pope Honorius is saying, or through bending the knee through genuflection, like St. Francis of Assisi encouraged among his Friars. And these are going to work their

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

way eventually into the Roman liturgy, so that by the time we get to our own day, the custom of kneeling at the consecration and elevation among the faithful, and then the priest himself genuflecting after consecrating each of the elements, becomes a way of expressing faith in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, at this most holy moment in the Mass.

Okay, so that's the history of the consecration and elevation. What about the mystery of it? What's happening invisibly at this moment? Well, I'll end with just a few insights from the Saints and Popes on this solemn heart of the Eucharistic Prayer. First, back to St. Ambrose. In the 4th century he is already emphasizing that at the consecration, the mysterious change of the bread and the wine into the body and blood, soul and divinity of Christ is taking place. St. Ambrose says this:

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.*⁹

So you can already see in the theology of St. Ambrose, an emphasis on the fact that the word made flesh, through the words he pronounces at the Last Supper, has the power to change the bread and the wine (with the water) into his body and his blood. So this has always been an emphasis in the Roman tradition, to highlight the solemn words of institution as the time during the liturgy when the change from bread and wine into body and blood of Christ is taking place. So it's fitting that we express that mystery through some act of reverence, veneration and adoration.

If you fast forward to the 13th century, another great mystical commentator on the Mass, William Durand in his treatise on the *Rational Explanation of the Mysteries*, says this about the consecration and elevation. This is a really beautiful, mystical interpretation. He says:

⁹ Ambrose, *On the Sacraments* 4.23. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 2:57.

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...

So this is the 13th century, the practice of elevating has come in.

...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.¹⁰

So notice what he's doing here. He's kind of giving a Biblical mystagogy to the whole thing. So he's saying that just as the Levites sounded the trumpet to let people know the sacrifices were happening in the Temple, so we ring the bells to let the faithful know that the consecration has taken place and that Christ has descended upon the altar. And just as St. Paul says that every knee will bow when Christ comes at the end of time and judgment, so too, when he comes upon the altar, the people fall down and worship on their knees in the presence of the Lord. And last but certainly not least, just as Jesus said that when he was lifted up on the cross he would draw all men to himself, so too every time the Mass is celebrated, when he is lifted up in the elevation, he is fulfilling that prophecy and drawing all people to himself through the sacrifice of the Eucharist. So there's a real sense in which, especially the elevation, I'm thinking here of the host in particular, because it often has the sign of a cross on it, that there's a kind of visible manifestation of the fact that we are at the foot of the cross, we are at Calvary, and we are being drawn through Christ to the mystery of His sacrifice in the Holy Eucharist. So that's the 13th century.

¹⁰ Durandus, *Rationale of the Divine Offices*, 4.41.1, 51-52. In Durandus, *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, 3:275, 300-301.

Fast forward to the 20th century. The theology is still the same in the liturgy. Nowhere is this clearer to me personally than in John Paul II's great encyclical on the Eucharist called *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, on the Eucharist in Its relationship to the Church. This came out in preparation for the Year of the Eucharist back in 2003, 2004. John Paul, the last encyclical he wrote was on the Eucharist. And in the opening paragraphs of that he talks about the fact that when we go to the Eucharist, when we go to the Mass, we are in a real sense being brought back in time to the hour of Christ's passion, death and resurrection. This is what John Paul II says. It's a long quote, but it's worth it. Trust me:

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....

He then goes on to describe Jesus's agony in Gethsemane, and he says:

[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” ...¹¹

And then he is going to go on with the rest of the encyclical to try to cultivate this thing that he calls “Eucharistic ‘amazement’”. So for John Paul II, what he sees at this point in the Mass in particular, at the consecration, the elevation, the mystery of faith and then the acclamation is really an expression of the priest and the people at the amazement and awe we experience, our should experience, every time we go to Mass. Because every single Mass is a participation in the Paschal Mystery of his passion, death, resurrection and ascension. In every Mass we are not only being brought back to the upper room and the awe-inspiring event of the institution of the Eucharist, we’re being brought back to Golgotha, we’re being brought back to Calvary, right? And the sacrificial nature of the Mass is really coming to its climax at this point: the consecration, the elevation, the mystery of faith and the acclamation.

Now it could stop there, but I have to show this one last thing. Recently I was reading one of the general audiences of the Holy Father Francis, that he gave way back in 2017 and 18. He did a series of catecheses on the Mass, and I was really struck by how clearly he put the reality of our participation in Calvary in the Mass. So I’ll end with this final quote from Pope Francis. He says this, because he he was concerned in this general audience about people’s distraction during the liturgy, people talking, people not paying attention, and one of the things he emphasizes is that we need to, every time we go to Mass, we’re not just at Mass, we are at Calvary. This is what the Holy Father writes:

"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

¹¹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on the Eucharist in Its Relationship to the Church, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (April 17, 2003), nos. 5-6 .

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."¹²

¹² Pope Francis, General Audience (Wednesday, 22 November 2017) .