The "Mysteries" of the Mass

Introduction

1. <u>Familiar</u>: for many, the Mass is *not* a mystery; it is very familiar; a weekly obligation
2. <u>Cradle Catholics</u>: we know what to do and what to say; but not *why*
3. <u>Mystery</u>: however, the Mass itself also tells us that it *is* a "mystery":

The "Mysteries" of the Mass

1. <u>Penitential Act</u>:

   Brethren, let us acknowledge our sins,

   and so prepare ourselves to celebrate *the sacred mysteries* (Latin *sacra mysteria*).

2. <u>Offertory</u>:

   By the mystery (Latin *mysterium*) *of this water and wine*

   may we come to share in the divinity of Christ

   who humbled himself to share in our humanity.

3. <u>Consecration</u>:

   [The priest] shows the chalice to the people, places it on the corporal, and genuflects in adoration. Then he says: *The mystery of faith*. (Latin *mysterium fidei*).[1]

Catechesis on the Mass = "Mystagogy"

<u>Catechism</u>: The Greek word *mysterion* was translated into Latin by two terms: *mysterium* and *sacramentum*. In later usage the term *sacramentum* emphasizes the visible sign of *the hidden reality* of salvation… *Liturgical catechesis aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ* (*It is "mystagogy."*) by proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the "sacraments" to the "mysteries" (CCC 774, 1075)

Visible	→	Invisible
Sign	→	Thing Signified
Sacraments	→	Mysterie

Scripture, Tradition, Mystery

1. <u>Scripture</u>: Where do the words/actions of Mass come from in the Bible?
   - a. Our Father, Words of Consecration, but Other Parts of Mass
   - b. Not just NT, but OT: Jewish roots of Catholic Liturgy; Temple/Synagogue
2. <u>Tradition</u>: Where do the words and actions come from in Tradition?
   - a. Ancient Mass, Medieval, Modern Times from Trent to Vatican II
   - b. Not just any Tradition, but the Roman Liturgy in particular
3. <u>Mystery</u>: what is the hidden reality/invisible mystery of each part of the Mass?
   - a. Visible → Invisible
   - b. Signs of Heavenly Realities

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[1] *Roman Missal*, Order of Mass, nos. 4, 24, 91. For an accessible edition of the original Latin text of the Order of Mass, see *Daily Roman Missal, Third Edition* (ed. James Socias; Woodridge, Ill.: Midwest Theological Forum; Huntington, Ind.; Our Sunday Visitor, 2011).

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Along the Way—Contemporary Debates
1. <u>Language</u>: Sacred Language and Vernacular
2. <u>Sacred Music</u>: sacred hymns, psalms, Gregorian chant
3. <u>Ceremony:</u> gestures, postures, orientation/direction of prayer
4. <u>Development</u>: How has the Mass changed over time? Additions/subtractions?
5. <u>Vatican II</u>: What about the changes of Vatican II? What changed and what were the reasons? By what authority?

Goal
2. <u>Understanding</u>: of the liturgy; not just *what* to do, but *why* we do it.
2. <u>Prayerful/Reverent Participation</u>: not just active participative, but contemplative participation; *praying the Mass*

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Do you ever think of the Mass as filled with "Mysteries"? What are some of the most puzzling or mysterious aspects of the Mass in your experience?

2. Has learning about the meaning of the various rites and ceremonies of the Mass ever helped you pray the Mass more intently? Can you give an example?

For Further Reading

1. Saint Ambrose of Milan, *Theological and Dogmatic Works* (trans. Roy J. Deferrari; Fathers of the Church 44; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1963)
2. Amalar of Metz, *On the Liturgy* (2 vols.; trans. Eric Knibbs; Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 36; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014).
3. Guillaume Durandus, *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* (5 vols.; trans. Janet Gentles; s.l.: Paschal Light, 2019).
4. St. Robert Bellarmine, S.J., *On the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass* (trans. Ryan Grant; Post Falls, Idaho: Mediatrix Press, 2020)
5. Pope Francis, "The Holy Mass," General Audiences, November 8 2017—April 4, 2018. Available at www.vatican.va.