



## **What We See is What We Don't See** **by Joe Sixpack**

A father gave a beautiful crucifix to his young daughter. Then he asked her, "Annie, what's the difference between the figure of Jesus on the crucifix and the Host which the priest holds up at the Consecration of the Mass?"

Annie didn't hesitate a moment, "When I look at the figure on the cross I see Jesus, and He isn't there. When I look at the Host, I don't see Jesus, but He is there."

This is the true nature of the Most Holy Eucharist in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, but how much do we really know about the Mass? Before we look a little deeper into the Mass, let's first look at a couple of the mechanics.

Let's look at the matter of the Mass. In case you don't recall, the matter of any sacrament is some concrete thing or action. In this case we're talking about the bread and wine used at the altar. For the Mass to be valid the matter has to be valid; that is, the Church telling us what type of bread and wine must be used. The bread for a valid Mass must be made of pure wheat flour and water. It cannot have other ingredients such as milk, honey, sugar or eggs. It must also be unleavened; no yeast or baking powder.

The wine for a valid Mass must be natural grape wine of very high quality. It can't be strawberry, watermelon or muscadine. In other words, Boone's Farm is out of the question. Most dioceses publish a list of wines their priests are authorized to use, and there are several religious orders that support their communities by making altar wine that is of a great enough quality to be on the altar.

There are many people today who prefer the old Latin Mass, also called the Tridentine Mass or the extraordinary form of the Mass. Some of those people are so devoted to the old Mass that they go so far as saying the ordinary form of the Mass (aka, Novus Ordo) is not a valid Mass. That attitude crept into the thinking of a larger number of Catholics than we like to think because of the disobedience of some priests in the '70s and '80s.

There was a lot of unauthorized liturgical experimentation going on in the first 25 years after Vatican II, and all of it was bad. Of course, any disobedience to the Church is bad, especially when that disobedience is perpetrated by priests. The abuses ranged from beginning the custom of Communion in the hand (more on that next week) to liturgical "dancers" at the altar. This level of "experimentation" put a lot of people off to the point that some became schismatics. A few got so carried away that they were even excommunicated. One such person was a bishop in France who was excommunicated by St. John Paul II.

I sympathize with those people who miss the old Mass. I've been to a lot of the extraordinary form Masses, and I personally love them. You get the feeling that you're somehow at the gate of heaven during one of those Masses. Of course, Latin Masses are again authorized for any priest who is trained for them, without special permission, thanks to Pope Benedict XVI. However, if one understands the origin of the Novus Ordo one cannot possibly find it to be an inferior Mass. Indeed, an understanding of the origin makes you realize you're traveling through time and space back to the first century each time you hear Mass.

The Mass is divided into two parts: the *Liturgy of the Word* (also called the *Liturgy of the Catechumens*), and the *Liturgy of the Eucharist*. In the first part, Jesus speaks to us through the Bible. In the second part, Jesus offers Himself to the Father for our salvation.

The *Liturgy of the Word*, or *Liturgy of the Catechumens*, and the two parts of the Mass has its origins from the ancient Roman persecutions. When the Church was forced into the catacombs by the persecuting Roman emperors, the Church's leaders had to be cautious about the infiltration of spies. The common Roman belief about us was that we were practicing cannibalism, which stems from a misunderstanding of our reception of the Body of Christ. So spies were paid to infiltrate our underground groups to gather evidence to that effect and turn us over to our persecutors.

Catechumens, those learning the faith with the intention of joining the Church, were permitted to stay during the first half of the Mass. You see, the very last thing catechumens were taught was the Holy Eucharist, because we feared spies would cause the Mass to be raided by authorities who would desecrate the Eucharist. So at the close of the *Liturgy of the Catechumens*, those not in full communion with the Church would be asked to leave with their catechists to continue their instruction. The hope was that if a spy was in that group of catechumens he would actually be converted by the time he learned about the Holy Eucharist.

After the *Liturgy of the Catechumens* is finished, we then witness the priest's celebration of the *Liturgy of the Eucharist*. This is the point, of course, when Jesus offers Himself to the Father in a re-presentation of the sacrifice of the Cross. Then we receive Him in Holy Communion, which will be the topic of our column next week.

God is not bound by time, space and dimension like you and I. He knows no yesterday, today, or tomorrow. Everything is happening for God in the present. You and I can recall what happened a moment ago, anticipate what will happen a moment from now, and experience the present now. For God, though, everything is in the present. That means He experiences the creation of the universe, the end of mankind, and everything in between—all at the same time. Due to the divine and mystical nature of the Mass, when we attend Holy Mass we are simultaneously present in the Upper Room at the Last Supper, at the foot of the cross while Jesus offers Himself to the Father for our sins, and present at the altar where Jesus perpetuates His sacrifice to the Father on our behalf.

If you were actually there in the Upper Room with Jesus and the apostles, what would your demeanor have been? If you had been on Calvary at the foot of the cross, standing next to the grief stricken Mother of God, how would you have behaved? How much respect would you have shown in those situations? Would you have or express sorrow for your sins, or would you act and dress like you were at a company picnic? Well, you really are present for those events. That is something we should really keep in mind at every Mass. That's What We Believe...Why We Believe It.

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