

Ask Fr. James

How is the Mass a Celebration and not just a worship?

All the Sacraments are a celebration. The Mass is a sacrament. The Holy sacrifice of the Mass is the highest form of worship in the Catholic Church. It is also a joyful celebration in thanksgiving for Jesus' offering of his Body and Blood for our salvation. Every Mass we attend, we the Church on earth (Church Militant) are in holy union with the Church in Heaven (Church Triumphant) in worship and in joyful celebration with the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the angels and saints, seeking the intercession of Christ for our intentions. As we worship and celebrate, we also pray for all the faithful departed who have died in Christ but are not yet wholly purified (church suffering or church in purgatory), so that they may be able to enter into the light and peace of Christ and join in the liturgical worship and celebration going on in heaven (Revelations 4: 1-8). This is the reason why we book Masses for the departed.

In heaven, God is seated on the throne and Christ at his right hand and all the angels and saints are singing Holy! Holy! Holy! (Revelations 4:8). Jesus presides at every Mass just as he presided at the First Mass at the Last Supper with his disciples. At the Eucharistic celebration we unite ourselves with this ever on-going heavenly banquet liturgy and anticipate our participation in them in eternal life, when we arrive heaven (see Catechism of the Catholic Church #1326). At Mass, the priest, while lifting the Body and Blood in the chalice, says; "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World and happy and blessed are those who are invited to the supper feast..." Our response before holy communion reminds us that though we are not worthy to be in the presence of these heavenly hosts... we are indeed blessed and happy to have been invited by God just like the people God invited to the wedding banquet of His Son in Matthew 22: 1-14.

The early Christians celebrated Holy Eucharist (breaking of bread) everyday (see Acts 2: 42) and evidences from the writings of St. Justin Martyr in the 2nd Century shows that the basic lines of the Order of the Eucharistic celebration have stayed the same until our own day.

From those early church documents, we read that at the Mass:

"... all gather together. Christians come together in one place for the Eucharistic assembly. At its head is Christ himself, the principal agent of the Eucharist. He is high priest of the New Covenant; it is he himself who presides invisibly over every Eucharistic celebration. It is in representing him that the bishop or priest acting in the person of Christ the head (in persona Christi capitis) presides over the assembly, speaks after the readings, receives the offerings, and says the Eucharistic Prayer. All who attend have their own active parts to play in the celebration, each in his own way: readers, those who bring up the offerings, those who give communion, and the whole people whose "Amen" manifests their participation... Those who are well off, and who are also willing, give as each chooses. What is gathered in donation is given to assist orphans and widows, those whom illness or any other cause has deprived of resources, prisoners, immigrants and, in a word, all who are in need" (St. Justin, Apologia. 1,67: Patrologia Graeca (PG), 6,429).

You may email/send your faith questions to Fr. James and he would answer them in our Sunday Bulletins.