

Healing Through the Mass

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Revised Edition



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Preface

During the meal Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to His disciples. 'Take this and eat it,' He said, 'this is my body.' Then He took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them. 'All of you must drink from it,' He said, 'for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out in behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins. (Mt 26:26-28).

Marsha was a Jewish actress married to a disk jockey in London. One night when she was distraught about some problems a woman appeared to her in a vision and told her to go and find a church. She went out into the night and wandered around, eventually finding herself standing in front of the rectory of a Catholic church. When the pastor opened the door she said simply, "I'm here for the bread of life." The priest was captivated by her story, and began to talk to her about the Catholic faith.

When Marsha was eventually baptized she described it as a cleansing rain soaking through her whole being. When she received the Eucharist she said it was like being totally consumed by the love of Christ. Her amazing conversion had a powerful effect on many people.

The sacrifice of the Mass is the very heart of our faith and central to our relationship with God. In the Mass the great mystery of the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is celebrated in a sacramental way so that we might partake of that life. As we enter in, receive, and apply the benefits of this all-consuming act of love we are changed, converted and healed. A primary purpose of this book is to help Catholics to do just that. It is written for all Catholics—priests, religious and laity. It is also for those who may

be observing the Church from a distance for various reasons.

Throughout the book I will discuss the essential parts of the Mass and emphasize the healing dimensions. In this newly revised and expanded edition we have included results from 100 respondents to a survey on *Healing through the Mass*. The purpose of the survey was to gain "bits of wisdom" on healing elements in Mass from people around the country, and find out what they would like amplified in the current edition. They requested amplification on many areas in the book. They want to know about mercy, covenant, the sign of peace, and want a deeper look at *The Lord's Prayer*. They have asked for more testimonies from people who have been healed through the Mass. There was a sense of frustration in some respondents—an awareness that healing ought to be a natural outflow of the Mass, but somehow it was eluding them. They want to know why, and what to do about it.

We also received several responses to a priests' survey that included the same basic questions with one exception. We asked the priests, "What can we, as priests, do to open people to the Mass?" Responses to all the questionnaires are summarized in the Appendix as well as referenced in various places throughout the book.

The traditional Catholic teachings on the Eucharistic celebration as a banquet of the Lord and also as a sacrifice are familiar to many. As the Second Vatican Council states: "At the Last Supper, on the night He was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His Body and Blood. This He did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the ages until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us." ¹

In recent years there has been renewed focus on the Mass as a healing service. Ted Dobson speaks of the heritage of healing through the Eucharist in *Say but the Word*: "But in the earliest Christian days, the Eucharist was seen as a sacrament of healing and transformation, a rite that brought wholeness to the people who celebrated it. For example, St. Augustine in his greatest book, *The City of God*, as well as in his last book, *Revisions*, witnessed to the healing he had seen in his own church as a result of people receiving Eucharist." ² Barbara Shlemon, R.N., in a booklet, *The Healing Power of the Eucharist*, states: "Each time we attend the celebration of Mass, we are at a healing service. As we approach the altar, we pray, 'Lord, I am not worthy to receive You, but only say the word and I shall be healed.' This is a prayer of confidence in the power of Jesus Christ to transform our physical, emotional and spiritual needs. If we truly believe that Jesus is present in the consecrated bread, then we should expect to obtain wholeness as we accept His body into ourselves." ³

Since 1986 I have conducted seminars for priests in various parts of the United States as well as in the Philippines, Australia, Malaysia, India, Indonesia, Spain, Central and South America. In these "Healing Power of Holy Orders" retreats, I emphasize aspects of the Mass that offer healing. As the priest becomes aware of the healing potential in the Mass, he communicates that increased faith and knowledge to the congregation, and healing begins to be manifested in a greater degree.

I pray for my brother priests that they will receive increased faith in the healing power of the Mass. I pray for everyone who reads this book, that each will become, like Marsha, totally consumed by the love of Christ. I pray, too, for those who have no knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and no understanding of what it means to receive the Bread of Life. Lord, bring them to Your banqueting table, for Your banner over them is love. (Sng 2:4).

This work is dedicated to St. Margaret Clitherow

who was martyred in York, England in 1586. As a non-Catholic, she let her home be used for the celebration of the Eucharist. Seeing the faith and devotion of the persecuted Catholics, she embraced the faith. At 30 years of age she was sentenced to be crushed to death for harboring priests and having Mass in her home. When apprehended, she chose not to deny her faith but embraced the martyrdom of leaving a loving husband and three small children. May we have the faith of those who died for the Mass!

Healing Places

Anthropologists tell us that men of all faiths, all religions, have always had a sacred place. The earliest holy places were piles of stones, erected as memorials in places where God met man.

The later sacrificial altars were built of earth or stone. In the Greek, the word "altar" means "place of sacrifice."

In the Old Testament we see God calling His people to a sacred place. "When all the work undertaken by Solomon for the temple of the Lord had been completed, he brought in the dedicated offerings of his father David, putting the silver, the gold and all the other articles in the treasuries of the house of God" (2Chr 5:1). The priests consecrated themselves and stood near the altar with cymbals, harps, trumpets and other instruments. Singers praised the Lord, singing: "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his mercy endures forever." The priests were not able to continue, because "...the Lord's glory filled the house of God" (v.14). They were overwhelmed by the power of the Lord.

The Lord is present with His people today in sacred places. Our churches are sacred because of the healing presence of Jesus. In ancient days the glory descended on the temple that contained only symbols of the Lord's presence. How much more should we experience the healing presence of the Lord with the Eucharistic presence of God in our own churches.

From time to time many of us experience anxiety and agitation before walking into a church, we sense

the presence of the Lord, and all the tension and anxiety disappear. I have had that same experience many times, especially in the Church of the Immaculate Conception, the Jesuit Church on Baronne Street in New Orleans, Louisiana. Sometimes I visit that church on a hot summer day. The coolness and quietness of the church speak powerfully of the Lord's waiting presence. His presence is felt in that church because it is a long-time gathering place for people of prayer.

As you enter a Catholic church, consider the healing elements in the environment. The crucifix on the wall brings to mind the sacrificial love of Jesus, made powerfully evident in the Mass. The reconciliation room is a reminder of the healing power of forgiveness. The themes of the stained glass windows and the stations of the cross are reminders of the unconditional love of Christ. We need signs and symbols to help us focus upon deep truths of our faith and fathom something of their mystery.

Throughout the centuries the healings and miracles of Christ have remained a part of the collective faith of the Christian community. In the timelessness of God, experiences of faith and healing and acts of love still linger like fragrant incense in our churches, and contribute to the sense of God's presence.

Feeling at Home in Church

A woman said once that when she visited a Catholic church after many years of absence, she felt like she had truly "come home." As she sat in the back of the church in quiet prayer, just soaking up the atmosphere, she realized that the deep loneliness that had plagued her life for years, was actually a homesickness for God and the faith of her childhood. When she entered the church the prayerful environment had a drawing power that captured her heart again.

We are "at home" in our churches because of the presence of Jesus. Our churches are healing places because of the presence of Jesus. Perhaps you have been

away from the Catholic Church for a period, and are exploring the possibility of coming home again. Or maybe you go to church, attend Mass and leave with little awareness that you have even been present. Perhaps it's just a routine to fulfill an obligation.

The Lord is inviting you to come to Him, to open to His healing love, to come and worship. There is a deep need in each of us to worship. You may find that the Lord will speak to you in His sacred place, and draw you into a powerful experience of healing through the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

Mary Ann's Story

Mary Ann Cortes was healed through the Mass. She spent seventeen years in mental hospitals in the New Orleans, Louisiana area, on every drug treatment program available for manic depressive patients except shock therapy. She encountered the healing Jesus during Mass, and over the course of several months was totally healed. The Lord took away the illness, and took away the fear, so that she could truly say, "I'm not afraid of the morning anymore." The Lord accomplished what no psychiatrist had been able to do. The testimony of her healing has deeply touched hundreds of lives.

"I am coming to know that the Eucharist is the greatest healing sacrament," Mary Ann says, "and that every Mass is a healing service. For seventeen years I was in and out of every mental hospital in the region of New Orleans, Louisiana. I was diagnosed as manic depressive and given almost every treatment available to psychiatric patients. The doctors gave up hope of my recovering my mental health, and doomed me to a life of mood- altering drugs. When I went to bed at night I would pray that I would die in my sleep. I was so afraid of waking up to another day of terror. After I was baptized in the Holy Spirit and began to attend healing Masses, I became mentally, emotionally and physically well. Today I am a new person in Christ. I'm not afraid of the morning anymore.