

ADVENT.

Advent is the first season of the Western Church which begins the new Church year. It is a short season of only four Sundays. It is the forerunner to Christmas – the birth time or the Incarnation of our Saviour when God became a human being like us except in sin.

The colour of vestments worn are violet – a symbol for penitence. However, on the third Sunday – Gaudete Sunday (or Rejoice Sunday) – the vestments can be rose-coloured to reflect that anticipated joyfulness of the coming Christmas day.

Advent is a two word Latin expression meaning 'to come' or 'a coming'. Thus Advent is a season of expectation - we expect; we await the coming. Not only is it the anniversary of the Lord's coming into our world (the nativity of Jesus) but also an expectation of the second coming of the Lord in the *parousia* at the end of the world both at our own death and at the final judgment day.

So this first season of the Church year is then a preparation time. We prepare ourselves spiritually for the long awaited arrival of the Messiah. Part of this preparation is a cleansing and a re-commitment to Christian principles and practices. We re-check our spiritual 'Gladstone bag' over this four week season.

This is also the season of the 'Jesse' tree. The Old Testament readings from the prophet Isaiah speak about the remnant that will remain faithful to Yahweh, "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse" (Is 11:1) whom the Fathers of the Church claimed prophesized about the coming of Jesus the Christ. The remnant is the new Israel.

John the Baptist is at the forefront of the Advent season. He is the precursor – the herald, the one who precedes yet stands behind. John the Baptist is the example *par excellence* put before us – one who practices a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and on recognition of the Messiah, moves into the background, "He must increase, but I must decrease"(Jn 3:30).

The Gloria is omitted in Advent, again because this season is one of reflection and expectation on our part rather than joy and thanksgiving. And it is the readings from the Old Testament – the first reading – which set the theme for the other two Scripture readings of each Sunday Mass.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

The Immaculate Conception is both a title and an event. The event describes an incident in history very much of importance to us and the whole world. The event describes the natural conception of Mary, the mother of Jesus, by her parents. The event is unique because at the very first moment of Mary's life, she was conceived without Original Sin. This, the Church teaches, has never happened before nor has it happened since to any other human being. By a special privilege, by a special grace, God gave life to Mary – her immortal soul - and it was untainted by the curse of Adam's sin. Why? Since, at a later time in her life, she was to carry inside her womb the God-man – her son Jesus. By definition, God cannot, and does not, live in the midst of sin. So her body and soul - her personhood - had to be sinless. The God-man was to form and grow a human body in her womb for 9 months in an intimate union that only women can appreciate. She had to be sinless, she *had* to be immaculate.

The Church, almost from its beginnings, believed that this was so. The Church has always celebrated the life of Mary in its liturgy because she *was* some-one special. Even Martin Luther and John Calvin believed in Mary's Immaculate Conception. In the 19th Century, during the Enlightenment era, serious questions were raised about the concept of the Immaculate Virgin. On 8th December 1854, Pius IX formulated and declared a dogma of the Church confirming that Mary was indeed immaculately conceived. To be truly catholic, one must firmly believe this dogma of the faith.

The Seymour church is named after the Immaculate Conception. The name is both a title and an event. The statue of Mary, in Our Lady's chapel in the Seymour church, standing on a snake which is coiled around the globe, is traditionally known as the statue of the Immaculate Conception. The design is taken from Genesis 3:15. It also conveys that Mary is triumphant over the devil, something which we can take solace in as we pray to Mary through her Rosary or through her various titles.

SYMBOLS.

In everyday life we have various signs which signify certain things or command certain actions on our part. A simple example of this is traffic lights. The Church also has its own signs and symbols. Again, a simple symbol is the A and W (the Alpha and Omega) meaning the beginning and the end and signifying that Jesus is the beginning and end of all things.

It is very easy to miss the symbolism in Church signs and various elements that the Church uses – even colour! The different coloured vestments worn by the priest during Mass sets the mood of the Church for that time of year. In Lent for instance, the colour of the vestments is purple representing a more sombre attitude. It is a time more of internal reflection than external celebration and a time of seriousness for the coming climax of that season.

Symbols consist of signs or of everyday things but having a different meaning behind them. The candle for instance, gives out light – a useful tool when the electricity fails – but in Church parlance it is a symbol of Christ's service. The candle serves to produce light and in so doing uses up its energy (the wax and wick). This we can see. But the symbolism? Jesus preached this same message – that it is better to serve than to be served; we are to use our energies in serving others and in so doing the reward at the end will be great – this He promised. So the candles inside a church have a meaning altogether different to what secular Society uses them for. Jesus was the light that came into the world thus this is one of the meanings behind the Paschal candle. The Paschal candle is very symbolic. So candles in Church Liturgy are very important because of the symbolism behind them. Candles are carried in procession because they represent service – service for the sake of the Lord; service not only of the person carrying the candle but of the whole Christian community. We, the people of God, are represented by that candle in procession in that our energies are directed to service, in our case, the public example of Christian life to the world.

THE LITURGY OF THE CHURCH.

The Liturgy of the Church is about celebrating the life, death and resurrection of our leader, Jesus Christ. The fullest form of this celebration is the 'Holy Sacrifice of the Mass'. The Mass is a ritual. It is a repetition. Life is full of repetition and rituals – Saturday football, Thursday night bingo, Anzac Day march, Australia Day, etc. Ritual especially, is far more than just remembering past events. In ritual, all of our personality is taken up – mind, body, senses, imagination, emotions, memory. Church ritual is the full experience of a relationship (communion) with God which grounds our very being. Thus the celebration of the liturgical year is a way of ratifying history and time. Our liturgical celebrations function like a meeting tent wherein God and humanity meet, wherein we touch eternity, the fullness of life itself. The liturgical year reveals the very nature of Church – our self image as a redeemed people. 'These celebrations are ways of remembering our past and looking to the future in order to experience in the present the wholeness or oneness for which our being yearns.' (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, n.10*) The liturgical year then, can become a way to release the power of the saving events of Christ's death and resurrection on our life today.

The fruitful celebration of the liturgical year is a way of obtaining a new life in Christ. Hence ritual is about change and the fears and uncertainties that surround life. But ritual is not magic, nor illusion, nor an insurance policy, nor play acting. It is the expression and formation of one's self-definition as part of a Church that lives the paschal mystery of Jesus.

One needs to question what life is all about? This is a deeply fundamental question. Once we truly understand the purpose of life then our spiritual life must increase. The ritual of the liturgical year becomes a focal point in which we celebrate our corporate self-understanding of the passage of time as a metaphor for the dying and rising of Jesus.

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THE ORDINARY TIME OF THE YEAR.

Just as the natural world has seasons, the Church also has four seasons. We are in what is now called the Ordinary time of the Year and by the colour of the vestments, green, it shows us that it is a time of growth and abundance. Green is the sign of growth and nourishment – one only has to watch the grass grow to know what green means! And the green grass gives nourishment to the animals which in turn provide food and life to us humans, not to mention the vegetables and cereals which are part of our staple diet. Green is also a sign of hope; so with the symbolism in the Church's season of Ordinary time.

It is a time of spiritual growth, nourishment and sustenance as we journey on life's way to that eternal home which has been prepared for us before time. The Sunday readings give us that food on which we can feed so that we may grow in the knowledge and awe (fear) of the Lord. Jesus' life is *the* example that we are to strive to emulate. Just as he loved the Father, so we also must love the Father. The gospel readings especially, along with the second reading, give us that example in which Christians are to conduct their lives.

And so, throughout this 'ordinary' time of the Church year, let us feed on the Word of God. Just as God gave the manna to the Israelites on their Exodus, through the teaching and preaching of the Church God is also giving us 'manna' to sustain us on our Exodus to the Promised land. One way we can achieve these spiritual fruits is to go home after Mass and re-read the three

Sunday readings from your home Bible. Sometimes one needs to read the whole chapter to obtain the context of the passage and therefore better understand what God is saying to us.

The Ordinary part of the year is sprinkled with feasts and solemnities just as a reminder that other people, no different to ourselves, have persevered in life's journey and have reached the Promised Land. It is not an impossible feat! We continue to live in hope!

THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS.

Many young people say the Mass is boring, or it's repetitious, or it's dull. Many older people do not quite understand what the Mass is all about yet attend more out of habit or fear of Hell!

To the Catholic Church it is the pinnacle of its Liturgy. Without the Mass, there is no Catholic Church. Why is it so important?

First of all, the Mass is a public communal gathering of the baptized – baptism being the initiation into the Catholic Church. This public communal gathering comes together to acknowledge that there is a God. This God is triune, i.e. there are three persons within the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit

What does it mean to us humans that there is a God? We discover that this God is a Creator, that is, God created the world – the whole universe -out of nothing and everything in it including us. We know through experience that all creatures reproduce yet God is the life force; he sustains life in every living thing and when he withdraws that life-force, the creature dies.

Is there therefore a relationship between Creator and creature? Yes, there is. Can this relationship be meaningful? Yes it can, and this is what the Catholic Church strives for in its Liturgy.

We have now established that there is a God and we publicly profess that we believe in this God by coming to Sunday Mass.

How can we have a relationship with this God? What do we know about this God? We know through the Bible that this God wants to have a 'loving' relationship with us humans and an

encounter is told to us in the Old Testament. Even more importantly, this God, as we read in the New Testament, lowered himself to become one of us to give us the perfect example of a 'loving' relationship between a human and God. This person we recognize and acknowledge as the Jesus of the Gospels.

Therefore, not only do we publicly profess in God, but also we believe that the second person in the Godhead became a man – a human being like us in the person of Jesus – to prove to us that (a) God wants a 'loving' relationship with all humankind and (b) that we humans can have a 'loving' relationship with God, our Creator.

How does all this fit into the Liturgy of the Mass?

Remember, we are present at the Mass because we believe in God.

The Mass is broken into two sections; first is the Liturgy of the Word where we acknowledge that we are sinners by reciting publicly the Confiteor and that God is God by reciting together the Gloria. Following this public acknowledgement, we listen to the 'Word of God', i.e. the three readings. We hear about God's relationship to our predecessors and a part of Jesus' life as God in human clothes. This is how God acted in previous times and we believe that God is constant and will act in the same way in our times. This is what the homily is about – to explain in our jargon, how God continues to act in that 'loving' relationship towards us today. We complete the Liturgy of the Word by reciting the Nicæan Creed as a public act of faith.

The second section of the Mass is the Liturgy of the Eucharist. *Eucharist* is an old Greek word meaning 'thanksgiving', a word used in early Christian times to translate the Hebrew word meaning 'blessing'. For the Hebrews, 'blessing' was the basic form of all prayer. And their most common time of 'prayer' was at the family meal together which became a ritual, celebrated in bread as grace before meals and in wine as grace after meals. In this ritual, the father of the family led the prayers and the other members responded. So the second part of the Mass – the Liturgy of the Eucharist - has deep roots in an emphasis on prayer and celebration within a family meal.

We know that Jesus had a 'Last Supper' with his disciples – a kind of family meal. We know he used bread and wine at that meal which he, as God, changed into his body and blood. And as his body and blood, he gave it to his disciples, within that family meal setting, and commanded them to repeat this ritual as a remembrance of him and his actions as a 'loving' God/man. Thus the

Liturgy of the Eucharist is a prayer and a celebration. The actions *par excellence* which Jesus did are, of course, his death and resurrection, which we must commemorate and do in the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Now you know why the Mass is so central for the Catholic Church! The Liturgy of the Mass – the public prayer of the Church - is a universe of a two-way loving relationship between God and us.

Now that you have a better understanding of the Mass, how can it ever be so boring or repetitious or dull or misunderstood anymore?

ST. JOSEPH.

The second church in our Parish is called St. Joseph. It is named after the foster father of Jesus and husband of Mary. The statue of St. Joseph is in Our Lady's chapel in the Seymour church. He is usually depicted holding a lily, which was a sign of purity, and the child Jesus, showing that he was a guardian of the foster child. St Joseph is sometimes depicted as an old man, almost a grandfather figure; at other times he is a much younger man. The Gospels do not tell us as his life was not important and by the time of Jesus' public ministry he is no longer on the scene, assumed dead. One legend that grew up with St. Joseph was that he had the perfect death, dying in the presence of Mary and Jesus – a death to be emulated by us. The lily that the statue carries is taken, again from legend, around the circumstances surrounding the acceptance of Joseph of the pregnant Mary.

St. Joseph was a carpenter and like all Jewish fathers of that time, taught his 'son' the same trade. This was the Jewish custom whereby the father taught the son all he needed to know both spiritually and secularly. This oral tradition can also be found in the Gospels and thus shows that the Church is correct in keeping to the oral Tradition as well as the written Tradition. Because St. Joseph was a worker, the Church has deemed him to be the patron saint of workers. In recent times, St. Joseph has been looked upon as patron saint of fathers; he has much to commend to us in that regard.

Not only is St. Joseph the Patron of the Universal Church but he also has two feast days in his honour. The first is on March 19th celebrating his position as spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Confessor and Patron of the Universal Church; the second is on May 1st. This feast day is known as St. Joseph the worker. The Church, by honouring St. Joseph in this way is also honouring the dignity of manual labour and work in general. Just as the Church in the early centuries spiritualized pagan feast days by imposing religious celebrations over that day, Pius XI christianized 'May Day' with the feast of St. Joseph the worker.

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THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS (cntd.)

As believers in God, who is a Trinity, we come to Mass to publicly profess this belief.

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the gifts of bread and wine are processed up to the altar in the Novo Ordo Mass (the vernacular Mass that is commonplace now in Australia) by parishioners because these items are, in reality, provided out of our sacrificial giving money, therefore our gifts. There are few bakers in our midst much less winemakers, all the same, these are gifts "from human hands" which we hope God will change into our "spiritual food and drink". In a symbolic way, we offer our common yet precious foodstuff to God who returns that gift to us transformed via transubstantiation into "spiritual food and drink" as we had asked and hoped for. At Communion, we of course receive this "spiritual food and drink" which is the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus the Christ, the second person of the Trinity. This "food and drink" is needed to sustain us on our journey to the Promised Land at the end of human life. It gives us the courage to "do good and avoid evil" as our informed conscience prompts us.

Without Jesus' resurrection, our faith is useless. Therefore during the Eucharistic Prayer, we call to mind both his death at Calvary and his Resurrection on Easter Sunday. His death is our redemption from hopelessness and his Resurrection is *the* promise of eternal life. His death we recall and observe when the priest shows us the separated body and blood of Christ during the

Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Resurrection is symbolized when the priest drops the small particle of host into the chalice. The broken host and chalice is presented to us as the reality of Christ's death which St Paul tells us, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes"(1 Cor11:26). This is the same public acclamation which we proclaim as a 'Mystery of Faith'.

So two of the rituals involved in the Liturgy of the Eucharist – the Liturgy of Thanksgiving - contain the important elements of our faith – a covenantal love pact in which gifts are exchanged; and the belief that Jesus is God personified and that we immortalize both his death and resurrection which are the means of our salvation.

CHURCH LANGUAGE.

The Novo Ordo Mass of Vatican II (the current Mass) has been based on the Tridentine Latin Mass of our yesteryears. This new Mass has become a dialogue between the Celebrant and the people. This dialogue is Church Language. Just as there is football jargon spoken in football circles only, golfing jargon for golf only, etc., the Church has its own jargon. When dialogue is to be used, the Celebrant greets us with "The Lord be with you," and we respond by saying "And also with you." Then there may be a series of invitations given by the Celebrant to which we answer – we are now in dialogue using Church language. Church language, like golf, football or cricket language cannot be used outside its own sphere because it then becomes unintelligible. Similarly, if one does not understand that particular jargon in its own context, it also becomes unintelligible. When, for example, one begins to play golf, one also learns the 'language'. We need to learn Church language to understand it too.

As Vatican II instructed, "The Church, therefore, desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith [The Mass], should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration." *Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy, n 48.* In other words, we dialogue – we speak Church

language, but if we don't understand Church language then we miss out on what is taking place during the Mass.

The simple 'Amen' that we respond with at the end of the Celebrant's public prayers has an enormous meaning. The word *Amen* is a Hebrew word which has been transliterated through the Greek and Latin language into our English. Its ancient meaning is an affirmation of some previous statement that was made. It is more than a 'Yes'. It is more of a belief statement. Its meaning is more of a "So be it!", "I believe it so!", "I agree with what you say!" The last word in the bible is in fact, 'Amen'(Rev.22:21).

When the Celebrant says the Opening Prayer, or the Post Communion Prayer, we dialogue with 'Amen', meaning, in Church language, that we agree with that prayer request or petition wholeheartedly. Do we understand – do we listen- to that prayer so that we, in all conscience, actually agree with the content?

The 'great' Amen at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer is our affirmation that we have agreed with all the praises, petitions and actions which the Celebrant has done on our behalf. Do we know what has happened within that Eucharistic Prayer? And of course when we receive Holy Communion, our reply to "The Body of Christ" is a firm 'Amen' – "Yes, I believe that it is truly the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus, the Christ!" Vatican II not only wants us to participate in the liturgy but also to understand our responses, our responsibility *and* most importantly, to know what is going on.

The Gloria and the Nicene Creed are two prayers which we can now recite in the English Mass – both finish with the 'Amen.' These are two professions of our faith. By saying "Amen", we agree that what we have just said is true. They contain what a true Catholic believes in and have come from ancient times. Do we comprehend what we recite? Is our 'Amen' a true indication of our commitment?

Similarly, just as there is body language that we perform to signal our intentions, either consciously or unconsciously, there is also a Church body language. The genuflection which is traditionally Catholic, is a body language. Some of us cannot go down that far anymore so a

bow is its replacement. To the Blessed Sacrament, a deep body bow is the replacement of the genuflection. A small head bow is used between peoples. Standing is another body language. We stand up for the gospel as a sign of respect for the biography of Jesus' life but sit for the other readings. We kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer as a sign of adoration. When we pray and dialogue as a people of God, we stand. Silence is another Catholic tradition. A period of silence allows us to reflect on what has occurred beforehand, be it a Sermon or a reading; silence is utilized before the Proper prayers used in the Mass so as to collect our thoughts on God. And silence can be used especially as adoration time.

Church language is important to us because a language does express commitment and understanding. Therefore, the Vatican II changes have allowed us to dialogue in our own language in order to more fully understand the sacred Liturgy.

St PETER – THE FIRST POPE.

The statue to the left of the Tabernacle in the Seymour Church is a representation of St. Peter. Jesus renames Simon bar Jona as Peter at Caesarea Phillipi in Matthew's gospel (16:18) and calls him the 'rock' on which the Church will be built. To Peter, Jesus gives the keys to the kingdom of Heaven. And so, the statue of Peter always has him with 'the keys' in his hand. The book in his other hand is the Book of Scripture. Two letters in the New Testament are attributed to him. Tradition holds that Mark was one of his close disciples and from this relationship, Mark composed his own gospel. Therefore, what we know of Peter comes mainly from the gospels. He was the first apostle at Jerusalem after Pentecost to preach to the Hebrews and he baptized the first gentile convert.

Peter and his brother, Andrew, were partners in a fishing business when Jesus called them both. Throughout the public life of Jesus, as recorded in the gospels, Peter is the leader and/or spokesman for the group of disciples. He is mentioned 182 times in the New Testament compared to the next most named apostle John, a mere 32 times.

Peter is considered to be the first pope as he was the first apostle to preach in Rome, the then capital of the world. Since Peter was the prime apostle, his successors were considered to be the leaders of the Christian Church and in fact, that is how the Catholic Church grew in the first few centuries. We mention the first four after Peter in the canon of the Mass – Linus, Cletus, Clement, Sixtus. Tradition says that Peter was eventually martyred in Rome by Nero and he was crucified upside down – not being worthy to be crucified in like manner to his Master.

St. Peter is portrayed in the gospels as head strong, bombastic and impetuous. Jesus even called Peter ‘Satan’ because he tried to prevent him from fulfilling his obligation to go to Jerusalem and be killed. On the other hand, Peter was one of the three who witnessed the transfiguration, and was called into closer intimacy in the garden of Gethsemane. Peter denied Jesus three times yet, unlike Judas, repented and was forgiven. He had many highs and lows. St. Peter can indeed be a role model for us today since he was very human. His feast day is June 29th in conjunction with St. Paul.

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THE LITURGICAL YEAR.

The Liturgical Year is based on the climatic seasons of the year. We inherited this from Judaism in which agriculture played an important part in their lives and to which their special feast days were connected. The Liturgical year has no relevance to either the calendar year or the fiscal year.

The Church year begins at Advent, approximately four weeks before Christmas and finishes in the week of the feast of Christ the King at the end of November.

The Church year can be likened to a plant. The seed is planted on the first Sunday of Advent and we wait expectantly for it to appear. The plant breaks through the surface at Christmas and our joy is overwhelming because the seed is alive! The Ordinary time of the Church year is now the growth of the plant. Lent comes along and the plant has now formed a bud. We again wait, this time tending carefully to the plant lest it is damaged or die. Easter time is the time when the bud

busts into full bloom. Our joy and wonder is even greater than before as we appreciate the significance of the flower. Up to the feast of the Ascension, Pentecost and Trinity Sunday, we continue to admire the bloom in all its glory. Then the following Ordinary time up to the feast of Christ the King, becomes a time of consolidation of the plant. We husband the plant with special care until the new seed is fully mature from the exquisite bloom. The plant reaches its finale at the end of the year whereupon we plant the new seed to commence all over again.

The metaphor of course is Jesus the Christ. We not only celebrate his life of some two thousand years ago, but we see that our life is also a journey. St Luke's gospel is a story of journeys – journeys which Jesus makes throughout his public life with the final earthly destination being Jerusalem – the house of his Father. Our life is also a series of journeys and as St. Luke implies, our final journey should be to the Father's house too.

The second part of Ordinary time is punctuated with saints' feasts – ordinary people who has successfully journeyed through life and have arrived at the Father's house. The journey of some has been along the path of martyrdom, others a journey of servitude in the imitation of the Master.

Our journey is guided by the same signposts - the gospels.

CHURCH LANGUAGE.

The Church speaks about Holy Communion – the Body of Christ, the Blood of Christ - in the rich biblical language of Greek and Hebrew. Our modern language does not convey this full message of meaning. Sometimes the Church speaks of the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus the Christ whose meaning is that of the risen Christ whom we receive in Holy Communion under the appearances of either or both bread and wine.

We tend to talk about body and blood in contemporary times as separate entities i.e. different physical parts of a human. This is not so in biblical language. Either word (*sarx* in Greek for flesh; or *haima* for blood) carries the connotation of the entire living human being. Even though the blood can also refer to the whole personality of the human being, it carries the further emphasis on the 'life force' of that human being. We all know that blood is essential for life, so too in biblical terms blood is the life force – God breathes life into the bodily creature, and

that breath of life resides in the blood (Gen 2:8). This is why early in the Bible (Deut 12:23) blood is not to be consumed because it is the 'breath of life' belonging to God alone.

A second layer of meaning in biblical terms is that 'flesh and blood' is another term for describing the human as finite i.e. we will eventually die, unlike God who is infinite. We are just flesh and blood: "Remember Man that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return."

A further meaning refers to our interconnectedness with each other. To Adam, Eve was "Flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23). Husband and wife "become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). "Israel according to the flesh" (1 Cor 10:18) is one people, descended from "Abraham our ancestor according to the flesh" (Rom 4:1). God and Israel were bonded together via the covenant in a blood ritual at Sinai (Ex 24:3-8). Hebrew 'flesh and blood' therefore engenders the notion that we are all in fundamental solidarity with each other and with creation.

A fourth layer of meaning is with sacrifice. Flesh/ body and blood are separated in sacrifice. We know of the sacrificial lambs at Passover and that original event in ancient Egypt when the angel passed over the houses which had the blood taken from the sacrificial lamb pasted on their doorposts. In sacrifice, the flesh is offered to God or is eaten in a communion sacrifice together as one. Blood is a very powerful sacrificial symbol. We even talk about soldiers spilling or shedding their blood in war-time for our benefit. In biblical terms, blood that is shed serves to cleanse and save (Heb 9:22). In other words, life is given for life!

The Body of Christ in New Testament theology can describe three conditions – the physical appearance of the historical Jesus, i.e. his person-hood; the Church in allegorical terms is the torso and the arms and the legs of a 'body' with Jesus being the head; and thirdly, his presence in Holy Communion.

Speaking of the first and third example, the Church always refers to the spoken words of Jesus at the Last Supper, "This is my body to be given up for you" (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24). 'My body' is understood within the Hebrew as meaning his whole person – the total make up of who he is – body, blood, soul and divinity i.e. his whole person-ality. When Jesus says in Jn 6:51, "the bread that I will give you is *my flesh*, for the life of the world," he speaks in a manner that includes those four layers of Hebrew understanding. "Those who feed on me have life because of me" (Jn 6:57) involves both self-gift and sacrifice.

The Blood of Christ is almost always spoken of in terms of being shed – a reference always to his death and its saving qualities. The New Testament writers reiterate those Old Testament themes: his blood is the purchase price (Acts 20:18; Rev 5:4); it is the means of redemption (Eph 1:7; Heb 9:12), expiation (Rom 3:25), forgiveness (Eph 1:7), cleansing (Heb 9:14; 1 Jn 1:7), purification and deliverance (1 Pet 1:2); it sanctifies (Heb 13:12) and justifies (Rom 5:9). All these are summed up in the words of the Last Supper, “This is the new covenant in my blood, which will be *shed* for you”(Lk 22:20). It is not just his blood but, as the Hebrews understood it, it is his God given life! In sacrificial language, this parallels the Passover lamb and the Sinai covenant between God and the Hebrews. Life is given for life.

The restoration that the laity receive both the host, and from the chalice, attempts to revive this ancient belief. Participation in both gives us the opportunity to recall that Christ died for *our redemption*. “When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your death Lord Jesus, until you come in glory” (1 Cor 11:25). The Body of Christ – *Amen*. The Blood of Christ – *Amen*.

ST. PAUL – THE APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES.

The statue to the right of the Tabernacle in the Sanctuary of the Seymour Church is that of St. Paul. He holds a sword, as tradition says, this was the way he was martyred – he was beheaded by the Romans because, even though a Jew, he was a Roman citizen. He holds a book in his other hand which shows he was a preacher.

We all know the story of his unique conversion and his consequent evangelizing throughout Asia Minor (Modern Turkey and Greece). St Paul has three great missionary journeys throughout these areas and left us his many letters to the Churches he founded. Some of these letters were written even before the gospels! St. Paul was a Jew but after a meeting with Peter and some of the Apostles in Jerusalem, he became the Apostle to the Gentiles (non-Jews). Yet at each new town he visited, he always went to the Synagogue and preached that the Messiah had come. And almost always, he was thrown out.

St. Paul was the first Christian theologian. He preached the risen Christ. “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15:17). Without the resurrection, we are wasting our time! From his letters to the various churches and his pastoral letters, the Church has build upon its theology. His letters are so important, that excerpts are usually the Second Reading in Sunday Mass. St. Paul calls the Church, ‘the Mystical body of Christ’ in which all believers are members of that body. This is a very interesting analogy which he carries further in explaining how the Church should operate. All members have different functions to do just as the liver does not see, nor the foot talk, nor the nose hear. All members have their specific tasks – this is why the Catholic Church is hierarchical in nature – all with their specific functions.

St. Paul gives us the first record of the memorial of the Last Supper which the early Corinthians conducted as a Church. The Consecration and the receiving of Communion in a Church gathering dates right back to this time and the procedure is the same with the same effects! We eat and drink the Lord’s body and blood (1 Cor 11:23-29).

St Paul dedicated his life to preaching the ‘good news’. He was a vocal witness, something we need to emulate at times.

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THE ORDINARY TIME OF THE YEAR.

As the Church approaches the end of the Liturgical year, we see some feast days coming up that can direct attention to the eschaton (the end times). We have a sprinkling of some early saints and some later saints of the Church; we have both women and men – a Doctor of the Church St Teresa of Jesus, the great preacher and stigmatist St Francis of Assisi, an early Church Father St Ignatius of Antioch, the martyr from the Catacombs St Cecilia – these are a few of the feast days that we celebrate at this time. It is also the time of the All Souls Day and All Saints Day when we remember the countless people who are either on their way to heaven or who have reached the

Beatific Vision. Some of Our Lady's major feasts also fall in this time – October 7th the Holy Rosary, October 11th the Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and November 21st the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Church year ends with that great feast of Christ the King.

All of these special feast days should direct our attention to the dying and rising of Jesus as reflected in the lives of these saints. What Jesus accomplished in those who have gone before us in faith, he wants to accomplish in us today. It is important to remember that the mystery of redemption is an ongoing reality.

The celebration of a saint's day is not just a history lesson from the past. Its purpose is edification: to build up the Body of Christ. It can be a way of bringing alive or intensifying the life of Christ in us. As Vatican II pointed out in *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*: "By celebrating their passage from earth to heaven the Church proclaims the paschal mystery achieved in the saints, who have suffered and been glorified with Christ; it proposes them to the faithful as examples drawing all to the Father through Christ and pleads through their merits for God's favours." (no.104)

As St. Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." So shall we!

CHURCH LANGUAGE.

All walks of life have their own language in which to communicate its message. One only has to read legal documents to appreciate that the language has familiar words but with different connotations. Just listen to the PGA golf commentary to realize that the language spoken has different meanings which only golf enthusiasts understand. This also applies to the Church. It has a language that needs a knowledge to understand the message. Even place names like Jerusalem, Mount Zion, the holy City, Israel, do not refer to present day Jerusalem or Israel.

These place names have their own religious meaning to which the Church always speaks about. Such that in golf, when a player makes a birdie, it does not mean the feathered kind!

Some important words that the Church continually uses are: Salvation, Redemption, Grace, Faith, Love, Covenant, Incarnation, Suffering, Eucharist, Trans-substantiation, Kingdom of Heaven, the Mystical Body of Christ, the old and the new, Liturgy, the Liturgical year, Life, Death, Eschatology, the Last Judgment.

To comprehend Church language, one must firstly believe in God. Secondly, that God created us unique and for a purpose; and thirdly, that our actions, or non-actions, do make a difference.

What is the message that the Church teaches? Just as a sporting organisation or a Social club has a set of rules in which it explains the purpose of its existence, the Church also has its rule book. The message which lies within its 'rule book' is a love story – sometimes a one-sided love story but still a love story. And a love story with a possible happy ending. The message - throughout the pages, in spite of the failings of human beings –is that God loves us personally.

God is a person, in fact three persons, living in a loving union that is beyond our full comprehension, yet we can share in this loving union. God's love is such that he extended this privilege and created us for this purpose. This is how the love story unfolds. We were created "in his own image and likeness." *Genesis 1:26* And it will be through our own actions or in-actions which will determine our destiny. "For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what is done in the body, good or evil." *2 Corinthians 5:10* St Paul tells us in *1 Corinthians 13:4-8* that Love "is patient, kind; neither envious, boastful, arrogant nor rude; it does not insist on its own

way, nor does it rejoice in wrongdoing but rather rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things and Love never ends." And God is Love, says St. John in *1 John 4:16*. To believe and understand this love story, one must have faith. And when one possesses faith in God, then this Church language becomes comprehensible. Once one understands the rules and the spirit of the game, it becomes intelligible and invites us to participate. And within any game, there is always a prize to be won, be it golf, chess, football or marbles! The prize to be won in the game of life is life itself – God. We were created in his image and likeness, the prize will be to remain in his image and likeness.

This is what Church language is all about. Church language speaks about the love that God has for each one of us individually and what our responsibility is towards God, known sometimes as ‘Covenantal love’. The time and place that we encounter most of this Church language is in the Mass. We need to be attuned to this language and it goes without saying that we must also understand what is being said.

Sometimes rules are a little obscure or appear erratic; in that case, we need an interpreter. As St. Peter says in *2 Peter 3:16* “There are some things in them [the Scriptures] hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.” When we encounter some obscurity, our interpreter is the Catechism. This Church language we can find in any orthodox Catholic Catechism. Then the ‘rules’ become unambiguous. Our responsibilities become clear-cut.

So we need to know what we have been redeemed from; why do we need salvation; what is so special about the Incarnation; why is there suffering in the world; why do we ‘do’ Liturgy; what has Eschatology to do with living; and all those other things which Church language speaks of.

The Church exists because it is the vehicle which Jesus founded to express the love affair. Judaism had the Temple; Christianity has the Church. Therefore the Church and its Liturgy – its language and its worship – are vitally important. It is truly a life and death matter!

THE STATUE OF THE SACRED HEART.

The statue is a representation of the devotion to the Sacred Heart. This devotion is commonly connected to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, a Visitandine nun from France in the seventeenth century. The devotion she promoted, after a vision of Jesus with his heart exposed as in the statue, is what was commonly known as the Nine First Fridays, a devotion in reparation to God for the ingratitude shown by mankind in general to the love extended by God to us all.

This devotion required attendance at Mass and Communion and the consecration of nine consecutive first Fridays of each month and was to be done in an attitude of reparation to the

Divine Redeemer. On completion, Jesus gave twelve promises of spiritual protection to those who practiced and promoted this particular devotion.

If you notice closely the exposed heart is surrounded by thorns – a reminder of the pain endured by Jesus during his passion out of love for sinful mankind. This heart is ‘on fire’ symbolizing the love of God for mankind; it also is bleeding. This depicts the wound inflicted by the centurion with the spear to make sure that our Saviour was dead on the cross. As Scripture says, “... one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out” (Jn 19:34).

The early Church Fathers considered that the birth of the Church is represented by the flow of blood and water from the side of Jesus. Similarly, Vatican II also stated, “The origin and growth of the Church are symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Christ” *Lumen Gentium* 3. We see this same symbolism at the Offertory of the Mass when the priest adds water to the chalice containing wine which is later changed into the blood of Christ at the Consecration. The water is a symbolic representation of the Church and all mankind which becomes ‘lost’ in the sacrificial blood of Christ offered to God the Father as reparation for our sins.

The heart, even today, is recognized as the centre of love. We say in a metaphorical sense the expressions, “to open one’s heart”, “to give one’s heart to” or “to love with all my heart.” As a figure of speech, we use the word ‘heart’ to designate a person. This also applies to the Sacred Heart. Therefore devotion to the Sacred Heart is adoration to the person Jesus, who is the second person of the Trinity – God himself.

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THE EASTER CEREMONIES.

Easter time is the highpoint of the remembrance of our redemption. One must understand fully what Redemption means within the Catholic concept to appreciate these Easter ceremonies.

The English word ‘redemption’ means a buying back. It is a liberation – from bondage to freedom; a transition from one state to another. The third chapter of Genesis explains that we

humans lost that close intimate connection to God which was originally intended in Creation. Adam and Eve lost that sanctifying grace – that intimate relationship – through the first sin which was a disobedience, and since we are all children descended from them, we are born without that sanctifying grace. By ourselves, we could never redeem – buy back - that relationship. Genesis 3:15 tells us that God will send a Redeemer in his own good time, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers,” he tells the devil. From that time on, the Hebrews looked for that Redeemer.

A liberation indeed did come in the form of Moses who ‘liberated’ the Hebrews from the bondage to Egypt. God freed – liberated – the Hebrews from slavery and in so doing showed that they were the people of God. This relationship became known as *hesed* – the meaning which they came to interpret as *a dutiful love and benevolence of men among one another*. God became known as *go’el*, the redeemer of his people. He was looked upon as *next of kin*, a powerful relative who would protect his own people.

God made a covenant with the Hebrews through Moses at Mount Sinai. It was a bilateral agreement and was sealed with the blood of a calf. In this covenant, God said, “If you do this, I will do that....If you obey...you will be my favoured people.” The key word is obedience. In Hebrew culture, blood was *the life* to all flesh (man or animal) and so the sprinkling of blood over the people at Mount Sinai symbolized the union of life between the Hebrews and the God of Israel – they became ‘blood brothers’; blood was the sign that the covenant had been duly sealed. But this was only a forerunner. A second time, the remnant of Israel, Judah – the last tribe of the original twelve – was ‘liberated’ from the Babylonian bondage. Yet, again, this was only a forerunner. This Hebrew nation had now been reduced to one tribe who became known as the Jews (or Judahites) but the promise of a Redeemer was yet to be fulfilled. Jeremiah foretold that God would make a new covenant with his people, “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of IsraelI will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:31). Repeatedly, in the history of the Hebrew people, they broke the covenants through disobedience.

As time went on, the expectation of the type of Redeemer to come was more of a warrior who would, at long last, ‘redeem’ them from bondage and restore the Jews to their rightful position as

number one nation, never again to be ruled by some foreign nation – especially like the Romans, for instance!

We have been taught by the Church that the Redeemer to whom all their signs and prophecies pointed to was Jesus the Christ.

What exactly was his Redemption? “At the Last Supper the Apostles were given the profoundest meaning of Redemption – not simply the sacrifice *by which*, but the new order *into which*, men were to be redeemed – “I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (Jn 14:20). Built into Christ’s humanity, men were to be united with the divine nature which was his, as it was the Father’s and the Holy Spirit’s. That is what it is to be redeemed.” (Sheed: *To Know Christ Jesus*) The new people were to be more than ‘blood-brothers’; in fact they were to be divinized, i.e. to become like God. The analogy Jesus used to emphasize this bond was the vine and its branches (Jn 15:1-8). Vine and branches are one with the same sap – the same ‘blood’ - running through both; the branches produce the fruit, the vine supplies the life! St Paul brings home this point by calling the Church the mystical body of Christ (the vine) and members of this Church (the branches) are like living cells of this body. “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.... for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:27-28).

In biblical theology, the unredeemed world was a world cut off from God (Genesis 3). The direction of all mankind was to death and damnation. This was the lot of mankind since the Fall. St. Paul says, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12). But Baptism is the first step; all the next steps are to live in Jesus i.e. to follow Jesus’ teachings and life – to obey the new covenant! One is therefore liberated from the power of sin (the liberation from Egypt came to be looked upon as a liberation from sin) and has therefore been redeemed from that state of slavery into freedom – “Now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life” (Romans 5:22). So this is what it is to be redeemed – “You have only to live on in me, and I will live on in you.”

How did Jesus bring about this promised Redemption? Jesus said, “This is the blood of the new covenant...” (Matt. 26:28). The first such covenant had been made at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24);

Jeremiah the Prophet foretold of another: “The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel” (31:31). The first covenant was sealed with the blood of calves; this new and final covenant will be sealed with Jesus’ own blood. This new covenant therefore came about through the death of Jesus. It was sealed by the blood of the ‘Lamb of God’ – the ‘Lamb’ who takes away the sin (the loss of sanctifying grace) of the world – Jesus himself who died on the Cross. The act of Redemption did not end there, for it was finally completed by the Resurrection of the Lord. This covenant was made between God and the new Adam who, like the original Adam, was the representative of all mankind.

Christ died in obedience to the Father thus negating that first sin of disobedience and his obedience was even unto death – a death on a Cross which at that time was the most deplorable and degrading and agonizing way to die. So Christ made the covenant with God the Father, and sealed in with his own blood. An infinite action merited an infinite treasury of graces. As St. Paul reminds us, “The Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20), means that Christ died for each one of us so that each one of us could merit sanctifying grace and its reward of eternal life- through the covenant. The way we participate in this new covenant is that we ‘put on Christ’. The easiest way of doing this is to become a member of his body – the Church. St Paul says again, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal 3:27). Therefore all who are baptized are members of the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church. We put on Christ. And, as a branch on that vine, we pledge obedience to the Father. Our Redemption lies in how far we are prepared to travel – clothed and united with Christ - in our own obedience to the new covenant.

What has all this to do with the Mass and Easter?

Firstly, the Mass; the Canon of the Mass is the re-pres-en-tation of our Redemption. We have the re-presentation of the Last Supper in which Christ seals the new Covenant with his blood. The Consecration re-presents his death on Calvary by showing us the separation of his Body and Blood – the definitive act of our redemption - the sacrifice of a victim and the sealing of the covenant. Herein we have the constant renewal of the *new* covenant and the covenant sacrifice. This is the constant reminder to us that we have been liberated from the power of sin and death and that we merit eternal life, if we want it! Christ claims our Redemption; we participate in this claim by pledging to be obedient to the Father as Christ was, and by remaining good members of

the Mystical Body of Christ in our daily lives. Holy Communion is the food in which “I am in you and you are in me” – we eat and drink of the glorified and Risen Lord – our sanctification. We put on Christ.

The Easter Triduum is all these events over three chronological days. Here we celebrate the Paschal Mystery of the death and resurrection of the Lord in richly symbolic ceremonies – the heart of our Redemption.

PALM (or PASSION) SUNDAY. “On the first day of Holy Week the Church celebrates the entry of our Lord into Jerusalem, as King and Redeemer, greeted by the people waving branches of palm and olive. This entry into the holy city was the final decisive step towards his saving death and resurrection” (Peter.J Elliott, *Ministry at the Altar.*) Palm Sunday starts in a joyous attitude but at the Gospel reading, it suddenly changes to an ominous mood of foreboding.

HOLY THURSDAY. The concentration is centred around the Last Supper and the Garden of Gethsemane. The emphasis is on obedience (the washing of the feet- “follow my example”) and the re-presentation of the sacrifice and sealing of the New Covenant. ‘You will be my people and I will be your God.’

GOOD FRIDAY. The whole ceremony centres on the ultimate act of obedience of Jesus to the Father – he dies on the Cross to ‘buy back’ us from sin. We venerate the Cross because it is *the* Sign of our Redemption. The everlasting covenant is sealed.

EASTER SUNDAY. We begin in darkness to symbolize the chaos of the world until the ‘Light’ of the Paschal candle enters onto the scene. Then joyfully, we follow the ‘Light’ and celebrate the glorious Resurrection of the Christ as the culminating act of our Redemption.

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THE SEASON OF ADVENT.

The Liturgical season of Advent is a short one. It is usually only four Sundays and culminates in the celebration of Christmas. Advent is a Latin word meaning arrival or visit, and in early Church times was related to the *Parousia* – the Lord's Second coming. Nowadays the season is one of celebrated expectation of the coming of the birth of the Lord. It is a preparation time. The themes of each Sunday in Advent are linked through the readings to hope and expectation.

The first Sunday develops the eschatological message that Christ will come a second time; the world will end and there is to be a final judgment. But when?

The second Sunday conveys the message of Hope. This is one of the three theological virtues. John the Baptist, in prison, asks in the name of Hope – the expectation that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

On the third Sunday of Advent, on *Gaudete* Sunday, there is a spiritual joy in the air. We celebrate in joyful expectation the coming event of not only Jesus' birth but also the coming of the Christ or Messiah. The advent is very near. *Gaudete* Sunday allows us to be joyful in our preparation for 'the coming' – a preparation time of a little austerity and soul searching coupled with anticipation.

The fourth Sunday expects us to now be found ready to accept the coming Messiah. In the last three weeks, we have prepared ourselves fittingly to come to accept Jesus as the long awaited Messiah. However, the world today ignores the first coming of Jesus – we do not. Only through Jesus, can we encounter God and only through Jesus, in discipleship, can we enter heaven. Lord Jesus, come!

Vatican II, and more recently John Paul II in his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, points out that Mary is the disciple *par excellence*. She is the Advent example that we all can copy. Mary's 'advent' was a nine month period as she waited for the coming of Jesus, her Son. She believed first of all, then witnessed the coming. She prepared herself, as any pregnant woman should, for the coming of her child. Her 'advent' consisted of trepidation mixed with joy. In her advent, Mary becomes both the model of the Church which continually brings forth Christ, and the example for us to follow who also can bring forth Christ to others.

SYMBOLS.

The Church's Liturgy is full of symbolism. It takes everyday things and actions and uses them in a symbolic way to express the presence of God to us. The example of the Paschal Candle is an easy symbol to relate to. Church symbols become sacred symbols which lead us into the realm of the Divine.

Symbols function as metaphors. They begin from a first meaning of a something, e.g. the warmth of fire, and refer this meaning to second meanings. Therefore, one can talk about the warmth of friendship. This poetic movement from one meaning to a second meaning is called analogy. By living in and staying with first meanings of something one can be drawn beyond that first meaning. The first meaning of fire, for example, is found by living with fire. Fire warms us, it burns rubbish, it is bright, it is forever moving, it can destroy; it is fascinating. Once we have lived with something in its first meaning then it can become symbolic for us. If we don't live with something then it cannot work for us.

Using the symbol of fire, I can speak of God as:

- a purifying fire – God gets rid of the rubbish in my life;
- the warmth of Divine Love;
- 'lighting up my life'; and so on.

Another thing about symbols is that the same symbol has two opposite meanings. Symbols integrate opposites. Fire warms, but it also burns. Water refreshes, but it also drowns. I can touch someone with love or hit them in anger. So in Christian ritual, sacred symbols can signify death and resurrection, positive and negative forces, and the need for a reconciliation of such forces.

One of the things to note is that the best symbols are universal. When we use fire, water, earth, oil, the sun, smoke, tree, wind, breath, touch, we are using things that are common to all peoples, all human experience. The sacraments of the Church take these basic elements and use them in symbolic ways to express the Real Presence of God who remains invisible to our naked eyes.

Excerpts taken from Anthony Kain, "Symbolism: The Language of Sacramental Life" In *Exploring the Sacraments*. North Blackburn, Victoria: Collins Dove. 1993.

SACRAMENTS.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (C.C.C.) defines sacraments as "efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament." (No. 1131)

In all sacraments then, we see a visible sign or action which we know gives us, through faith and the teachings of the Catholic Church, invisible graces.

The C.C.C. interchanges *signs and symbols* to describe 'the visible sign'. Thus in Baptism, the visible sign is water – the washing over of water to be more precise – giving us the perception of cleansing.

The Eucharist can be seen in the sign of a human meal; Confirmation and Holy Orders are observed through the laying on of the hands of a bishop; Confession by the visible blessing and appropriate words of the Confessor. It is human nature that we need to see something happening.

As an analogy, if we see the figure '300' in the credit column of our bank statement, we know that \$300 has been deposited into our bank and if we further see a figure of '150' in the debit column, we know that we have spent \$150 ! These are visible signs from which we can draw a picture of our finances.

So too with sacraments. We must look with the eyes of faith also to see the 'visible' sacrament. The Mass has as its centre and focal point the greatest sacrament – the Eucharist. We know that Jesus the Christ instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper - in a meal setting; therefore this 'meal setting' is set inside the Mass. We see and hear those same words Jesus said at the Last Supper; we eat and drink from that same table – all these visible signs and symbols go to make up the Sacrament of the Eucharist. When we receive this Sacrament at Holy Communion, we receive those invisible graces necessary for us to journey towards our 'home' with God forever.

The C.C.C. groups the sacraments into sections. Firstly we have the Sacraments of initiation – Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist; secondly the healing Sacraments – Penance and Anointing of the Sick; and thirdly the Sacraments of service – Holy Orders and Matrimony. All have their particular visible signs and all confer grace. And for believers, these sacraments are necessary for salvation.

THE INFANT OF PRAGUE.

This statue is mounted on the right side of the Seymour Church. It is a replica of the statue in Prague and one which is in Faversham, England. The Prague statue, which is still the original one made in the 1600s, is made of wax over a wooden frame. Its history carries many miraculous stories. It is now housed in the Carmelite chapel of the Lady of Victories Church in Prague. The miraculous Infant of Prague is celebrated in the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus on 3rd January each year. Europe celebrates the feast on the 3rd Sunday in May. The statue is small – only 18 inches high – and it is of a child. The face is obviously a child's with rounded cheeks and small mouth; the curly hair softens the image of the magisterial God-child, Jesus. The eyes are wide open and look outwards. The richly jeweled crown and the Orb in the left hand show that the child is a king. There is no sceptre, a sign of regal authority; rather, the right hand is raised in the typical three-figured blessing – Jesus blessing the world rather than ruling it. The three-fingered blessing is a reminder of the Trinity. The heart is revealed in the same manner as in the 'Sacred Heart' statue. The child is robed in vestments – a white alb, a

dalmatic and a red cape. These vestments are changed to correspond with the liturgical year on the statues at Prague and Faversham.

In years past, the devotion to the Infant of Prague was well known and practiced. The history of devotion has many miraculous stories such that it became known as “The Miraculous Infant Jesus of Prague.” Novenas or prayers were always said in the attitude of help. The Child Jesus of Prague has been invoked for success in business, in schoolwork, for the protection of crops, for employment, for good health which is closely connected with earning one’s living. Many stories are related to the miraculous help obtained by praying to Jesus through his title of Infant of Prague. St Teresa of the Child Jesus (depicted by the statue in St. Joseph’s church, Tallarook) had a special devotion to this title. Her name is partly taken from this particular devotion. The statue itself is also a reminder of the Incarnation – that God actually was born like us and grew up through childhood.

The motto of the statue is “ The more you honour me, the more I will bless you.”

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THE LITURGY OF THE CHURCH.

Since Vatican 2, the Liturgy, that is, the way we perform our public prayer, has changed. In pre Vatican days, the public Liturgy was all said in Latin. We now have the vernacular language – in Australia it is English. One of great things to come out of the reform of the Liturgy is the people's ability to participate in the public celebration. This is seen especially in the Mass where the people now have the responsibility to reply to certain invocations and chants performed by the priest. Even the simple response of 'Amen' is now ours to say. No longer are these responses left to the altar servers. We can now recite all those great prayers inside the Mass – the Confiteor, the Gloria and the Nicene Creed. The laity now has the ability to profess their Catholic faith in public. The secret is for us to start to understand what it is that we are actually saying.

What is also important for us is that we can listen and understand the Readings in the Mass, viz., the first reading, the second reading and the Gospel. As Vatican 2 pointed out, God is present to us in his 'Word'. It behooves us to now listen carefully and try to comprehend what is being read to us. This is truly the Word of God and this part of the Mass is called the 'Liturgy of the Word'. The readings are especially chosen and they are on a 3 year rotation. We have Year A, Year B and Year C; we are currently in Year C. Weekday readings are divided into Weekday 1 & 2. This Liturgical year we are reading Weekdays 1.

The Liturgy of the Word consists of 3 readings – one from the Old Testament, the second from one of the various 'letters' and the third is taken from one of the Gospels. The Theme usually centres around the Gospel reading with the other two readings complementary to this Gospel reading. However, in Advent, the theme is set by the reading from the Old Testament as it is a time of anticipation of the Messiah's coming.

Therefore the Mass is no longer a passive attendance. The Mass is community orientated. As a community we publicly acknowledge that God exists. We belong to the Mystical Body of Christ and by participating in the Liturgy to the best of our ability, we join with Jesus, in the Mass, in offering worship to the Father.

St. THERESE OF THE CHILD JESUS.

The statue to the left of the sanctuary in the Tallarook Church is that of St. Therese. She is also known as St. Therese of Lisieux. Her full title which she chose at her final profession is Therese of the Child Jesus and

Holy Face. She obviously was a Carmelite nun. Therese died on September 30th, 1897 aged just 24. She was canonized by Pius XI in 1925. She was declared a Doctor of the Church by John Paul II in 1997 – one of few women who carry that title. This is how she understood herself before the Lord – simple and hidden from the greater population but blooming where God had planted her.

Marie Frances Therese Martin was no academic, in fact she came from a poor family whose mother died when she was just four years old. She entered the Carmelite convent in Lisieux in France at Age 15 and died nine years later in the odour of sanctity. Therese became known as ‘the little flower’ because she loved nature and often used the image of nature to explain that God is everywhere. She especially considered herself as a ‘little flower’ of the forest rather than an elegant lily or rose, yet in God’s eyes just as important. Therese saw the world as God’s garden and each individual as a different kind of flower enhancing the variety and beauty which Jesus delighted in. Just as there are large and small flowers, so too are there small and greater souls created by God. Perfection consists in doing His Will, in being what He wills us to be. Therese prayed simply.

She insisted on talking to God and Jesus in direct, personal and heartfelt ways. She spoke to God in child-like ways and called Him “Abba” (which literally means Dad) rather than Father. She disliked long prayers. The lesson she teaches us today is simplicity and trust, and doing the mundane things well. The roses falling from her arms as depicted in the statue and holy pictures have been a visible sign of Therese’s intercession that your prayers and petitions are answered by God, thus her trademark, yet at other times it may only be the fragrance. Conversely, by the example of her life, she teaches that the desire for signs or portents are a weakness of faith; instead, life is more about child-like trust in God and gentle love.

The Church calls St. Therese a “Prodigy of Miracles ... the Greatest Saint of Modern Times”.

CHURCH LANGUAGE.

Many times we hear Israel, Mt. Zion and Jerusalem mentioned. These are meant to be understood as metaphors. Nowhere in the New Testament or in our understanding should we equate Israel, Zion or Jerusalem with their present day counterparts.

In 722 BC, the northern kingdom of Israel was captured and exiled by the Assyrians. The southern kingdom, Judah, remained as an independent state under Assyria. Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar, overthrew Assyrian rule and eventually fought with Judah. In 586BC Babylon invaded, captured and exiled Judah and destroyed the Temple at Jerusalem. Sixty years later, these Hebrew people were allowed to return to Jerusalem and began to rebuild the Temple. The original twelve tribes ceased to exist after this exile and only a remnant returned.

This remnant consisted of Judahites (which later was shortened to 'Jews') and they adopted the old national name of Israel, taken from the time of Moses. The Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell us the story of their return.

This 'Israel' was the one which Jesus was born into. The second Temple was finally completed just before the time of Jesus – in fact Herod the Great, an appointee from Rome, was the one who finally completed the Second Temple building in approximately 25BC. This Roman province was known as Palestine with Jerusalem as the centre. The Temple was the centre of worship and was claimed by the Jews as, again, the abode of God, in which the daily sacrifice was made.

The Holy of Holies, the central chamber where the Ark of the Covenant originally rested, was also where God's spirit – the glory cloud of the Exodus, the *Shekeniah* – had settled. Access to this Holy of Holies was allowed only to the high priest and only once a year at *Yom Kippur* – the Day of Atonement - when he sprinkled the blood of the sacrificial lamb on the lid of the Ark as a sin offering. In Second Temple times, an altar replaced the Ark. *Yom Kippur* falls in late September/early October each year.

The gospels and especially St. Paul's letters speak of a 'new' Israel. This new Israel is also a remnant – a remnant of the Jewish people who converted and believed in Jesus whom they recognized as God. When Jesus selected twelve apostles (Matt. 19:28), the inference is that he was forming a 'new' Israel based on the twelve apostles instead of the twelve tribes. Gentiles who joined the 'new' Israel also became part of that remnant. Just as the Israel of old was renewed following the Exile, so Israel is again renewed by the teachings and crucifixion /resurrection of Jesus.

St. Paul, in his epistles, makes this analogy time and time again to bring home the point that the Jesus' followers were not a new sect but instead were the renewed remnant of Israel – that holy nation especially selected by God to be the example to all other nations of the love of God for mankind; thus the new Covenant

Therefore, the Israel we speak of in Church language is the Israel selected by God and constantly renewed through covenants – “And you shall be my people and I will be your God” (Jer 30:22). Jeremiah prophesized that the remnant of Israel would return to the Promised Land to again become prosperous, but only if it remained faithful to God. This Israel is the Israel of St. Paul – the new Church - and prosperity is now a spiritual condition rather than just a secular one.

Jerusalem was called the holy city, especially in the Psalms from which we read at Sunday Mass as our Responsorial Psalm. In the Hebrew Exodus in the desert, the presence of God was seen because of the '*Shekeniah*' and the Ark of the Covenant, which was finally housed in the first Temple built on Mt. Zion at Jerusalem. There the Ark of the

Covenant and the 'glory cloud' remained amongst the people and Jerusalem was always referred to as the 'holy city of God'(Pss.2, 46, 48, 84) because God was there – just as God is in our tabernacles because we 'see' his presence there. This is why the Jerusalem of the Bible is called 'the holy city of God.' Nowhere should we equate this Jerusalem with the present city of Jerusalem in the country that is recognized as the State of Israel today.

Mount Zion was the mount on which the Temple was built. It was the city of David, 'the city of God'. Because it was above the surrounding countryside, one had to 'go up' to Mount Zion to worship the Lord in the Temple. Mount Zion became known then as the holy mountain where God resided and the direction to go to God was up! Zion became known as the spiritual Jerusalem. In the Psalms and the Prophets, Mt. Zion and Jerusalem were special places of holiness. But the present secular Zion, Zionists and Jerusalem that we hear and read about today have no relevance to these Biblical terms whatsoever.

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St. Mary's Parish, Seymour April 07 Catechesis. Vol 2. No. 3

LITURGY.

Just what is Liturgy? Liturgy is ritual; and by this definition it is repetitive. This is why all the Church's public prayers do not alter. Repetition is part of life in that we do certain things the same way all the time – it becomes second nature. This is what the Church wants us to do – it wants our public prayers to become second nature to us. The danger with repetition is that one's attitude becomes blasé and we do things without thinking. This danger is prevalent in the Liturgy of the Mass. For instance, because we recite the Gloria, the Apostle's Creed and the Our Father each Sunday, we may not be consciously thinking of the meaning of the words, simply because of repetition. Or worse still, we may not be consciously thinking about our intentions when receiving Holy Communion.

This second-naturedness is everywhere in our own lives. If one was to play golf, this second-naturedness automatically puts us on the golf course, going the right way and using the right equipment. One does not suddenly become innovative and reverse the golf stick to hit the ball with the handle! Nor in tennis, do we substitute a baseball in place of the tennis ball to change the game a bit. Yet in both these examples, even though ritual is involved, we still need concentration to successfully play the game. The same applies with the Liturgy of the Mass.

The Mass is an encounter with God; or rather many encounters with God.

The Ritual first presents us with the written Word of God – the Liturgy of the Word. This is why the Book of the Gospels is given such an important position in the Entrance. It is held high for all to see and because of its high esteem in the Church. Even though the authors of the Gospels were ordinary human beings like us, the Church teaches that these authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write down their 'good news'. During the Liturgy of the Word at Sunday Mass, we hear three 'inspired' writings – something that God caused to be written down and therefore to be listened to carefully. The homily that follows can give us that interpretative meaning to these readings in such a way as to be productive in living our own lives today. The Church teaches us that we encounter God through those spoken Words. "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" (Luke 8:8).

GOD LANGUAGE.

Communication between people is normally conducted with language. We can talk about Shakespearian language, legal language, even slang

language. Nino Colutto in his books “There’re a Weird Mob” talks about Australian language! Even our sense of humour is hard to grasp by other nationalities. Golf has its own language, football, horse racing, cricket as well as Soccer. Any sport has its own language and to understand it one must know some of that language to appreciate what is spoken of.

But when it comes to speaking about God, there is no God language that we know. It is a spirit language and as yet, no living person understands – let alone can speak – spirit language. Then how can we speak about God? It is impossible to speak God language in human terms. It is like trying to describe a circle with only straight lines.

Yet human language does have the ability to allow us comprehension about God. It is through the technique of metaphor. Metaphor is like a simile but has a puzzle of “is and is not.” For example, when we say, “He is a sly old fox,” a person ‘is not’ a fox but rather portrays attributes which resemble a sly old fox in that we know what sly foxes can do. He ‘is’ like a sly old fox but really ‘is not’ a sly old fox.

The metaphor gives us the language ability to describe one thing in terms of another knowing that it is not true in the strict sense. “The Lord is my shepherd” is a metaphor. We know that God is not a shepherd yet within the metaphor, God ‘is’. It is a mental picture that we can call on to comprehend God. Therefore God ‘is and is not’.

Even the name of God is a metaphor. From the burning bush God told Moses his name – YHWH “I am Who am” – a metaphor within a riddle; a name so sacred that the Hebrews eventually lost the ability to even pronounce it, for when they came across the name in their Scriptures they would say ‘Adonai’. We pronounce it as ‘Yahweh’ but scholars still do not know for sure whether this is the correct way.

We speak of God as kind and compassionate – attributes which we understand as human qualities. We call God a just judge, again understanding what ‘just’ and ‘judge’ mean through our human language and human experience. Through metaphor therefore, we can come to know the unknowable God.

SYMBOLS

The garb that the priest wears at Mass are symbolic. Firstly he puts on an Amice, a short oblong linen cloth with two long ties. This Amice was originally designed to cover the head and shoulders and most probably was used as a protector for the ornate chasubles worn in Medieval times. It may be symbolic of a helmet or hood to dispel the ‘wiles of the enemy’ (the devil). Next, the white alb, which is symbolic of purity. It covers from top to bottom so that the sinfulness of the wearer is covered – it is like the wedding robe in the parable of the Wedding Banquet

(Matt.22:1-15. cf v11). It is also similar to the baptismal garment or shawl used by the newly baptized. The cincture (the cord with the two tassels) is a sign of service - of being girded in the service of the Lord. The altar servers wear these two garments and carry that symbolism on our behalf. They serve the priest. The priest wears the Stole which is a sign of authority. Whenever the priest acts in an official capacity, he wears the Stole, especially seen at baptisms, wedding ceremonies and confession. It is that piece of same coloured material as the chasuble worn around his neck and falling to the front of the body. Some of these stoles have elaborate patterns sown into them as a decoration. The chasuble is used to denote the season of the Church year by its colour; it is a one piece material similar to Our Lord's tunic in John 19:23. It represents the Church – as one; and it also represents the third cardinal virtue of charity in that it covers all things. (Colossians 3:14).

The bishop wears a Mitre which is a symbol of the tongues of fire which rested on the Apostles on that first Pentecost Sunday. It is his authority to teach as the Apostles taught because he is a successor to them. The two tails attached to the Mitre represent both the Old and New Testament – the new and old treasure of Matt 13:52. In his official capacity, the Bishop carries the Crozier, the sign that he is the shepherd of his flock. In early Church history, it was the bishop who presided over the Eucharist; no bishop – no Eucharist. It was only as the Church grew that the bishop appointed presbyters to preside in his absence. These 'presbyters' or priests were ordained by the bishop to act on his behalf; even today the priests – to be able to carry out their functions legally – must be in communion with their bishop.

THE CURE/ d'ARS.

The statue depicting an old grey man in Our Lady's chapel in the Seymour Church is that of St. John Vianney – the Cure/ - the parish priest of the Parish of Ars, a small village of about 250 persons, not far from Lyons in France. He is dressed as a priest who hears confession – thus the Surplus and the Stole around his neck.

Even though his education was poor and he struggled to pass his Seminary exams on time, his knack of practical knowledge over academic knowledge was the secret to his popularity as a Confessor. He campaigned strongly against what he considered occasions of sin in his times; namely, blasphemy and obscenity, drinking, dancing and immodest dress. (nothing changes!) But his special gift lay in the confessional. He was blessed with extraordinary insight and knew when to tell someone, "You are worrying too much about your sins and failing to trust in the mercy of God"; yet at other times to say, "You are not worrying enough about your sins and are treating the mercy of God as a moral blank

cheque.” He would often tell people, “Your spiritual problems do not lie in the matters you have mentioned, but in another area entirely.” His direction was characterized by common sense, remarkable insight, and supernatural knowledge. His instructions were simple in language, full of imagery drawn from everyday life and country scenes, but breathing faith and that love of God which was his life principle.

He was physically attacked by the devil many times and even had his bed set alight. Other marvels attributed to him included the miraculous multiplication of food, especially for the orphanage he founded. He promoted the Love of God and the virtue of the public Liturgy of the Church. The holy Cure/ of Ars is quoted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1589, “The priest continues the work of redemption on earth... If we really understood the priest on earth, we would die not of fright but of love... The Priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus.”

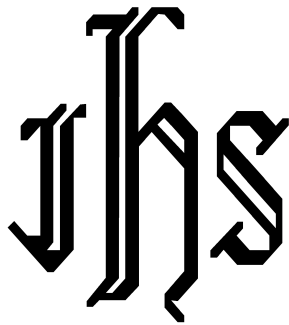
In the latter part of his life he would spend up to 18 hours hearing confessions. He tried to leave his parish 3 times to retire to a monastery, but each time he felt bound to return to deal with the needs of his Parish. John Vianney died on 4th August 1859 at the age of 73.

He was canonized in 1925 and made Patron saint of priests.

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St. Mary's Parish, Seymour. June 07. Catechesis Vol.2.No.4

This is one of the universal signs that you will find in any Catholic Church. Because the Church was formed in a Greek speaking world, these early signs and motifs are Greek. This motto is taken from the Greek word for Christ – **Xristoj** – by using the first two letters and combining the second over the first. **X** – pronounced ‘chi’ and **r** pronounced ‘r’. The Greek word is pronounced ‘Chris-tos’. So wherever you see this sign or monogram, behind it stands the meaning ‘Christ the Messiah’ or ‘Christ the Saviour.’



Similarly, this sign is also well known and used throughout

Christendom. Again it is Greek, the common language used by both the Jews and

Gentiles in first century Roman world. Latin had not by this time taken over as the

official language in the Near East of the Empire. Jesus' name written in Greek is

Ihsuj – J-e-s-u-s. There was no ‘j’ in either Greek of early Latin; ‘i’ was used for both

letters. In capitals, Jesus is spelt IHSUS.

Shortened, it is spelt Ih..j – I (iota), h(eta),

j (sigma). Thus wherever you see this

monogram ‘IHS’ it is an abbreviation for the

name of Jesus; and of course meaning Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

throughout This is another common monogram used throughout Christendom. It is the Latin inscription written on top of the Cross of the crucified Jesus. Again no ‘j’ but an ‘i’.

Iesus Nazarenus. Rex Iudaeorum. Jesus of Nazareth. King of the Jews. The whole

inscription “was written in Aramaic, in Latin and in Greek” (Jn 19:20). Tradition has

given us the Latin inscription because the Crucifix (not the Cross) as such only came into

popular devotion during the Medieval Times when the Church language was Latin.

THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS.

In Old Testament times all religions offered sacrifices to their god or gods. This sacrifice was usually an animal, but even in Biblical times, human sacrifice was known (even Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his only son, Isaac to God cf.Gen.22:6-10). The Jewish nation, the descendents of Abraham offered animal sacrifice to God daily in their Temple and on certain feast days – during the Passover feast especially - a lamb or kid was killed and offered to God as a sacrifice.

All nations knew that their God did not need a dead animal for nourishment, but part of the ritual was to bleed the animal to death then roast the animal and eat it. By eating the sacrificial animal, they participated in the sacrifice and became part of that sacrifice. Similarly, a covenant (agreement – contract) in ancient times was ‘signed’ by the same ritual meal. Each party to that covenant shared in the meal. The blood, which to the Hebrews at least, was the sign of life – no blood, no life – and they argued that since all life came from God, blood was that God-given life and was sacred. Therefore they could not drink the blood but rather it was sprinkled over the altar as a sign of returning that life back to God or in a covenant, the people were sprinkled with the blood of the animal. At the original Passover feast in ancient Egypt, the lamb’s blood was smeared around the lintels of the door of the house, to ward off the ‘angel of death’(Ex 12:1-27); in other words, it became the ‘sign’ which gave protection to the inhabitants of the house.

At the Passover feast, lambs – unblemished lambs – were taken to the Temple and were slaughtered by the priests by bleeding. The lamb was returned to the family who then went home and roasted and ate the lamb. The blood was sprinkled over the altar in the Temple both as a sign of returning the life back to God and of seeking protection for the family for all evils. At this annual Passover feast, unleavened bread and wine were also consumed as part of that memorial meal (a very strong remembrance of the original Passover meal in which the Hebrews were set free from captivity *and* protected from the angel of death!).

This Passover meal is a memorial of when God came to them, defeated their enemies and made them his special People. It is their Exodus event - a passage from darkness to light; from slavery to freedom; from a literal death to life.

What has all this to do with the Mass?

In light of Jesus’ resurrection, the early Christians looked on Jesus as *the* Paschal lamb within the Passover Festival which was celebrated at

the same time as his crucifixion (Jn 19:14). As narrated in St. John's gospel, this was Preparation day when all the lambs were being slaughtered for the Passover meal that night. However, in the Synoptic gospels, they have Jesus at his 'Last Supper' which was the actual memorial Passover meal (Matt. 26:17-30; cf. Mk 14: 12-21, Lk 22: 7-13) at which Jesus instituted the Eucharist – the changing of the bread and wine into his own body and blood. The early Christians celebrated this 'Last Supper' as the memorial meal. St. Paul explains this early ritual and adds a corollary, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes [in glory]" (1 Cor. 11:26). We use this same statement as our third Eucharistic acclamation after the Consecration. They saw in the 'breaking of the bread' Jesus as the Paschal Lamb, and in the cup as that life-giving blood of the victim lamb; both being separated therefore denoting a death yet giving life! The blood was that God-given life but it came from no ordinary life – it came from Jesus who was God himself! It was a sharing in divine life itself! No wonder they were eager to consume both the Body and Blood of Jesus as he had commanded them to do at his 'Last Supper'. By eating and drinking, they became part of that sacrifice and entered into the new covenant – as their old customs had taught them from ancient times. Not only were they participating in the Lord's death but were also hoping to participate in his resurrection as well. This is the food of eternal life which is the goal of life's journey.

During the Mass the Sacred Host and Chalice are raised three times. The first time is at the Consecration. After the words of Consecration are said, the Host and chalice are raised separately. Here is the crucifixion of Jesus. The Body and Blood are separate. Jesus actually died from lack of blood. We know this because of the soldier's spear wound. The elevation of both the Host and the chalice shows to us the death of Jesus – a death which he willingly went to for the forgiveness of our sins – a willing sacrifice, an atonement. This sacrifice, as was the original sacrifice on Calvary, is again offered here to God the Father. The Apostles and the early Church realized that herein was the beginnings of our Redemption. Jesus had defeated the Devil, paid the debt due for sin, and had won Heaven for us all.

The second elevation occurs before the great 'Amen'. Both Host and chalice are brought together in that elevation. The Host and chalice are presented to us as one which symbolizes the Resurrection of Jesus when his body was brought back to life – body and blood again in union. However, at the Resurrection, Christ's living body was glorified – it was transformed (as at the Transfiguration) and the Divine nature now shone through. The Resurrection is the completion of our Redemption. No wonder we answer with the great 'Amen' for "[t]hrough Him, with Him and in Him, and in unity with the Holy Spirit," we give all honour and glory to the Father" – *for ever*.

The third elevation occurs after the *Agnus Dei*, the thrice recited ‘Lamb of God...’ The broken Host is presented to us – we recognize Jesus in the ‘breaking of the bread’ – and therefore can look upon it and say,

“Lord, ...” At the climax of the Mass we are now offered food of eternal life. We are called to the Lord’s Supper. We can recall the words of our Lord when he said, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink” (Jn 6:54-55). When we go up to Holy Communion, we are receiving true food and true drink - for our souls, like our bodies, need nourishment for the journey through this life. The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity becomes part of us and we in turn become part of him.

In the actions within the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we see the crucifixion, we rejoice in the Resurrection and finally participate in the ‘Last Supper,’ and therefore should be happy when we are called to the Lord’s Supper because we eat and drink eternal food.

Is it any wonder then, that the Church holds the Mass as the most important public declaration of those Divine Mysteries!

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St. Mary's Parish, Seymour. Aug 07 Catechesis Vol 2. No. 5.

The last one of those ancient symbols which has come to us from early Christianity and is especially found in the Catacombs is 'the fish'. It became a symbolic sign for the risen Christ. 'Fish' in ancient Greek, spelt in capitals is:

IXQUS pronounced ick – th-us. It was used as an acrostic which means that each letter spells a word.

I	Ihsonj	Yair-sous (Jesus – remember no 'J' in Greek)
X	Xristoj	Chris-tos (Christ)
Q	Qeon	The-ou (God)
U	Uioj	We-os (Son)
S	Swthr	Soo-ter (Saviour)

So the sign of the fish immediately meant to the early Christians - 'Jesus Christ, God's Son the Saviour.'

The 'fish' became a universal secret sign amongst early Christians especially as a burial sign. This symbol found its way into Christian Iconography over the centuries and is still used as a symbol in some Churches and even on vestments today.

It is another remnant from the Greek past. Even though all the gospels and the rest of the New Testament were originally written in what was called 'Koine Greek', we now only read the Bible – and especially the New Testament – in our own vernacular language. These ancient traditional Greek symbols remind us of that past and from where the Catholic Church came. They also remind us of what happens when we lose that sense of meaning to symbols and that through that loss, we also lose some of our roots. Symbols are meant to direct our attention to something behind the image – so too will these ancient symbols awaken in us the very long history of our Church if we but understand their first meaning and their ancient useage.

SACRED SIGNS.

It has been a long, long time since any of us has been reminded of the Sacred Signs used by Catholics both in the Liturgy and in private prayer. Here is a timely reminder.

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS.

We perform the Sign of the Cross almost as second nature when we enter the church and dabble into the Holy Water font then proceed with the Sign of the Cross - or at the start of the Mass – maybe in some haphazard fashion!

To the Greeks who considered the Cross an embarrassment and the Jews a scandal, St Paul says, "Christ crucified, a stumbling block to

Jews and foolishness to Gentiles but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:23-24); to us it has become just another swish ... or maybe not.

As Romano Guardini explains in his little booklet, *Sacred Signs*, the Cross is *the* sign of our Redemption. The image of the Cross reminds us of the length that Jesus the Christ, the God/man, went to in his effort to prove the love of God for humanity and our own individual worth.

The Sign of the Cross is used in some of our Sacraments. For instance, in Baptism, the newly baptized is anointed with small Signs of the Cross; in Confirmation, the Bishop makes the Sign of the Cross with holy Chrism oil on the forehead of the confirmand; in Holy Orders, again the Bishop anoints the priest’s hands by using the Sign of the Cross; in the Anointing of the Sick, the ill person is anointed, again with the Sign of the Cross. To non believers, a stumbling block, to believers the definitive sign of Redemption.

Cardinal Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, in his book, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, calls the Sign of the Cross, “a confession of faith.” In it, we acknowledge that Christ died on a Cross converting a sign of shame into a sign of hope; acknowledging also in a public way our Yes to God through his Son Jesus. The Sign of the Cross also brings out the essence of our faith – our belief in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

By making the Sign of the Cross on the way into Church, or on the way out, pause and let all these things come to mind as you say, “In the name of the Father....”

STANDING.

To those of us who can remember the Latin Mass before Vatican II, there was a lot of kneeling. In the Ordo Novo Mass of Pope Paul VI (the Mass we have nowadays) there is more standing when compared to the Tridentine Latin Mass.

Standing, as well as kneeling, is a Liturgical movement. Standing is also a natural trait; but, inside say, the Mass, standing takes on a different interpretation. It is a sacred symbol and therefore has another meaning to it within the Liturgy. It is a sign of reverence.

If you were sitting down to rest or just chatting and some-one to whom you owe respect comes into the room and turns to speak to you, at once you would stand up and remain standing so long as that person is speaking to you in conversation. Why do we do this?

Firstly, out of respect for the person, we stand to show our respect or esteem. Secondly, standing is a posture in which we are in control of ourselves – that is, at attention, geared ready for action. Thirdly, it is the respect of a servant in attendance; of a soldier on duty.

We stand as a sign of servanthood when we recite the Confetior and the Gloria; we stand as a sign of reverence when we listen to the gospel reading; we stand like a soldier on duty during the Nicaean Creed and as a person who knows their mind for the Prayer of the Faithful. We stand at the end of the Offertory because we dialogue with the priest then as an action position to proclaim the ‘Holy, Holy, Holy..’ We stand, with respect and esteem, when the priest directs our prayer petitions to God our Father at the Opening Prayer and the Post Communion prayer.

Our stance portrays our intention, our acceptability. Therefore our stance needs to be upright, not leaning, both feet on the ground, knees firm, in control. Our prayer made thus is then portrayed symbolically as free and obedient, reverent and serviceable.

The whole purpose of the Liturgy is to praise God. The whole point of Liturgical signs and symbols is to draw our attention to God. The symbol becomes a sign with a hidden meaning. As St. Therese of the Child Jesus implied, “If one ‘looks’ one can see God in all his creation.” Liturgical action and signs were meant to do just that – we just need a re-education on how to ‘look’ at those signs so that we can see God everywhere.

St. VINCENT de PAUL.

The small statue on the left side of the Seymour Church is that of St. Vincent de Paul who is usually depicted with ‘poor’ children. He is best known through the St. Vincent de Paul Society yet this movement was originally founded by another person, Frederick Ozanam. St. Vincent lived mainly in the 17th Century in France. The gap between rich and poor, as usual for those times, was immense.

St. Vincent de Paul founded the Order of Vincentians and were known as “the Missions.” As the name implies, these priests went into country parishes to preach. He discovered - what was already known at Rome - that most priests were ill-equipped not only in theology but also in pastoral sacramentality. Seminaries for secular priests as we know them were virtually non-existent in Medieval Times. This problem of uneducated clergy also existed within the towns of France and elsewhere.

The problem was compounded further because care of the peasants was usually left to these uneducated priests. To alleviate the lack of spiritual nourishment amongst the peasantry, St. Vincent established the Tuesday Conferences for the education of the clergy in Christian virtues and in particular in relation to their priesthood. By educating the educators – the priests – Vincent was also educating the peasants. His Tuesday Conferences extended into the secular sphere as well wherein people from all walks of life attended on an equal footing.

His next step was to temper the actual preaching. These were the days of ornate and phrase-filled pulpit preaching with little substance

but much noise! St. Vincent developed the “Little Method.” Simple in style but large on content. The Fathers of the Mission were “to speak to convert and not to be esteemed, and if men are to be converted they must understand what is said.”

St. Vincent revolutionized the hospitals; he cared for the unfortunates – the lunatics and galley slaves – and was instrumental in having the Sisters of Charity, whom he founded, act as nurses to the French armies in the Thirty Years War. He organized ransom monies for the Christian captives in North Africa from the wars of the time.

He mixed with both the rich and poor, especially the poor. St. Vincent was a man of enormous compassion for the poor, especially children, a further example of that ‘love of neighbour’.

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