

# THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

The Sacrifice of the Mass actually starts with the opening prayers of the Canon. The uncovering of the chalice by the Celebrant indicates that preparations for the Offertory are about to begin. From the very start of the Canon there are two dominant themes in the action of the Mass: (1) Giving to God and (2) RECEIVING FROM GOD. The gifts that we give are ourselves and the Crucified Christ; the gifts that we receive are the Body and Blood of Christ.

By giving bread, which is the very marrow of the earth, and by giving wine, which is its very blood, we are giving the two substances which have most traditionally nourished us, and thereby we are equivalently giving ourselves.

The ancient and unchanging sequence of the Canon Prayers contains the heart of the Mass, namely, the Consecration. Through the words and the action of the Canon, the celebrant accomplishes the great work of the Mass: the bringing of Christ, Himself, down on our altars that we may offer Him to God - - - in the Mass we offer God to God! Our gifts of bread and wine, representing ourselves, are transformed - - - (transubstantiated) into the Body and Blood of Christ. Then the celebrant offers Christ, and ourselves in union with Christ, to God.

Communion follows the Consecration, for throughout the universe, the sacrament follows the sacrifice. Before the food we eat can become the sacrament which nourishes us, it must first be sacrificed; that is, plucked up from its roots, and then admitted to the knife and the purging fire. By receiving Holy Communion, after the sacrifice of the Mass, we come to realize, in the truest sense of the word, that we live by what we slay. For Christ on the Cross is the Victim slain by our sins. Through His merciful power we live by His death. In Holy Communion the celebrant and the people have consumed the Divine Victim offered to God in sacrifice. And thus it is now completed, for Christ, the Light of the world, has been sacrificed, and because of His sacrifice we have life in us.

