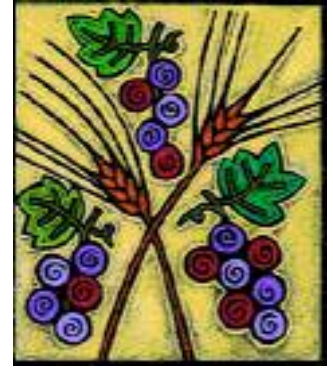


the mass

is the central act of Christian worship.
It's what we do when we come together to worship
God our Father in the name of Jesus Christ.

Why is it so important?
Why do we do what we do at Mass?



the Last Supper

At the Last Supper Jesus took bread and wine and gave them to his disciples.
He said that they were something to do with Him, his body and blood.
His command was to repeat this action in remembrance of him and so his disciples continue to obey that great command from the Lord when they meet.

You will find accounts of the Last Supper in the gospels, but the oldest account is in a letter by St Paul which we use in the **Eucharistic Prayer** at every Mass. (**I Corinthians 11:23-26**)

the earliest mass

We know that Jesus began the idea of the mass at the Last Supper.
As Jews, the disciples were used to synagogue worship.
It was quite natural for them to continue that pattern of worship because they knew and understood it.

The synagogue service had four parts:

1. readings from scripture (i.e. the Old Testament)
2. a homily (talk / sermon based on the scriptures)
3. prayers
4. songs (Psalms)

So the first Christians followed this pattern, but added the **Bread and Wine Remembrance of Jesus** (the supper) on the end. And, they didn't use books, but made things up as they went along.

the mass we know

The Mass we celebrate each day and every Sunday is much the same in form.
Around the world it might look a little different in terms of language, style, music and decoration, but what happens is the same.

At Mass we believe we are united with our Lord Jesus in his death which saved us, and in his resurrection which leads us on in life:

- **Jesus is with us in the words of scripture, the teaching and the prayers we offer.**
- **Jesus is with us in the bread and wine – literally making us a part of him and assuring us of his love. We use his words.**
- **We are with Jesus in the gifts we bring to each Mass: our prayers, our needs, our joys. The bread and wine are symbols of these too, and Jesus makes them a part of him.**
- **We are with Jesus in each other. In our worship Christ makes us ONE: his body in the world (even if it doesn't feel like it sometimes).**

That's why The Mass is the centre of how we do Christianity – it potentially changes the world and everything else we do.

what happens at mass

We have seen the Mass has two main parts:

the Synagogue service

the supper

plus a few other bits like this:

the introduction

greetings:

The priest (who stands in the place of the bishop, who stands in the place of Jesus!) enters and we recall we are here “In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. He greets us and we respond.

confession:

The Mass is introduced and we are asked to call to mind our sins.

kyrie and gloria:

Sometimes we use the ancient response “Kyrie”= “Lord have mercy”. “Gloria” is another ancient hymn but not used in “Penitential” seasons (Advent or Lent)

First Part: Synagogue Service or Liturgy of the Word

opening prayer:

This prayer (usually sung on Sunday) gathers together the themes of the day. It literally “collects” them and is often called the “Collect”!

readings:

We usually sit to hear readings from Old and New Testament, with a hymn or psalm in between. Then we stand to hear a reading from one of the Gospels. This is usually in the middle of church and we turn towards the reader (a deacon or priest) to show the words of Jesus are the centre of our life.

the Sermon:

Sometimes called a homily. Some aspect of the faith or some issue is explained to help us to think about our faith.

the Creed

The New Testament is full of the sheer excitement of the faith discovered by the first Christians, their experience of Jesus.

But it’s clear that they also saw the need to think carefully about their faith and to try to explain (to themselves and to others) the meaning of it all.

In fact, even the earliest Christian preaching was never just about WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO ME but also about what does it mean?

It takes these two things together to make the GOOD NEWS:

*The God of our fathers raised Jesus from death, after you had killed him by nailing him to a cross. And God raised him to his right side as leader and Saviour, to give his people Israel the opportunity to repent and have their sins forgiven **Acts 5:30-32***

So from the start Christians were not just historians recording what happened, but theologians (THEOS= God; LOGIA= understanding), saying what they BELIEVED about Jesus. (**Matthew 16:16, or John 20:28**).

Near the end of his Gospel, **John** explains:

These things here written have been recorded in order that you may hold the faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that though this faith you may possess life by his name.

Notice that Jesus is given different titles to show the different things Christians believed about him. By saying something brief like “Jesus is Lord” (**Romans 10:9**) they could quickly share what we believe.

It helps all of us to know that what we believe is the same as Christians have always believed. It also stops us inventing our own ideas!

So the Church gradually and carefully developed written statements of the basic truths of the faith, called CREEDS (from the Latin **CREDO= I BELIEVE**). It went a bit like this:

the New Testament

You can see the process beginning in the pages of the New Testament.

e.g. **I Corinthians 15:3-4**: “...that he was raised to life on the third day, according to the scriptures...” This formula is later quoted almost word for word in the Nicene Creed that we say on Sundays and major festivals.

Also look up **Colossians 1:13-20** or **John 1:1-14**. (There’s more about the Nicene Creed later...)

2nd century AD

In the generation or two after St Paul and St John we find people like St Ignatius (a bishop and teacher) summing up the earthly career of Jesus so that his flock could say what “WE BELIEVE” happened to him:

“...Jesus Christ, who was of the family of David, and of Mary, who was truly born, both ate and drank, was truly crucified and died in the sight of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth; who was truly raised from the dead...”

Again, there are phrases here which sound familiar, but the great Creeds were far from being written yet.



baptism services

Meanwhile, a special kind of mini – creed grew up out of a single verse of the New Testament. **Matthew 28:19** shows Jesus telling his disciples to baptise in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

A tradition grew: at Baptisms the convert would be asked three questions to see if they knew what this meant.

We still do the same today:

Do you believe in God the Father (who made the world)?

Do you believe in God the Son (who redeemed mankind)?

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit (who gives life to the people of God)?

agreement

Those three questions showed one thing a proper Creed would need: three sections to say something about God as **FATHER**, God as **SON** and God as **HOLY SPIRIT**.

however

One section needed to be much bigger than the others ...what exactly are Christians to believe about **Jesus**?

How is he both God and Man?

How can He be God when the Father is already the only God?

Great Christian thinkers wrestled with these ideas all their lives. At times some of them were tempted to compromise their beliefs for an easy answer and say that Jesus was *either* God or a human being, or maybe neither one thing nor the other.

But the Church as a whole knew that easy answers didn't explain how Jesus brought us salvation. In the end our creed tries to use words to sum up a great mystery...



In the 4th century A.D. a council of the whole Church was held at **Nicea**, near Constantinople. The bishops there agreed what we call the **NICENE CREED** (we say it every Sunday and on major festivals). This Creed (and others we use) goes out of its way to defend belief in Jesus as both fully God and fully human. It takes a lifetime to try to understand, but still we believe.

do we need a new creed?

Notice how at the end of the Nicene Creed we say we believe in the Church herself. The Church we believe in is a growing, changing thing, made wiser by her history.

Maybe one day our traditional Creeds will have outlived their usefulness. Certainly, there are bits in them which today can confuse us.

But the process of writing a new Creed would be enormous. It certainly shows that the Churches would have to be more unified before we could possibly agree. In the meantime it is vital to hold onto what Christians have always said, that: **WE BELIEVE.**

prayers of the faithful:

In the light of what we have heard in readings and sermon we bring to God the needs of the Church, the world, ourselves and our neighbours, the sick and the dead. Remember we pray together with all the company of heaven.

peace:

We express our desire that we may share God's peace and acknowledge that we are one community with a sign of friendship.
(We don't have to pretend to be best buddies, but show other people we think of them as God's children too).

second part: the supper

Remember: Jesus **took the bread, he blessed it, then broke it, then gave it.**
We do the same...

the offertory:

Bread and wine are taken to the altar and given to God. We usually sing a hymn on Sundays.
(Other gifts, like money offerings, are often brought too, but they are add-ons to bread and wine)

the Eucharistic Prayer: (Prayer of *thanksgiving*).

The gifts are prayed over by the assembled people, led by the priest. We ask that they become the body and blood of Jesus. We give thanks for what Jesus has done for us and ask that our prayers become part of his prayer.
Everybody says or sings together **AMEN.** = so be it (make it so!)

the Lord's Prayer is said or sung together to sum up all our prayers.

breaking bread:

The bread is broken as we sing **Agnus Dei** = Lamb of God; calling on Jesus as God's lamb of sacrifice who saves us (**Exodus 12**).

giving and taking:

We come to Jesus to make our communion with him or receive his blessing.

dismissal:

Having done what Jesus told us we say a prayer of thanks and are sent out to be Christ in the world...

food for thought:

There are different names for this liturgy:

Mass = sending out

Eucharist = giving thanks (Greek)

Holy Communion

The Lord's Supper

As the first Christians had no books, we don't need them really except for singing hymns.

Try to learn the bits we say together off-by-heart, it helps to make you feel involved.

Volunteer to read (become a Lector) or lead the prayers.

**Coming to mass we come to JESUS who saves us.
Like a little Easter, every mass is a journey
to the centre of the world.**

Something to do at home:

- 1. How many readings are there from the Bible at Sunday mass, and what are they?**
- 2. What does Credo mean?**
- 3. Where is Nicea?**
- 4. Name the four parts of a Synagogue Service.**
- 5. What does the word 'Eucharistic' mean?**