

# 82. MASS

## Summary

### 1. The Eucharistic liturgy in the 17th century

1.1. The meaning of the word Mass 1.2. The rite prescribed by St Pius V 1.3. De La Salle celebrated frequently and with fervour.

### 2. Eucharistic theology in the 17th century

Strong distinction between Mass as a sacrifice and Mass as a sacrament. Numerous speculations regarding the sacrificial aspect of the Mass.

### 3. The theological position of De La Salle

3.1. In his writings 3.2. Sacrifice and sacrament 3.3. A disputed question 3.4. The Eucharist as a source of grace.

### 4. De La Salle's instructions for assisting at Mass

4.1. Physical presence is not enough 4.2. The meaning of rituals and symbols 4.3. With the help of a book 4.4. Daily Mass in schools 4.5. Frequent communion

### 5. The Mass in De La Salle's writings for his Brothers

The Founder invites his disciples to attend Mass with fervour and to communicate frequently.

### 6. Conclusion

Despite some outmoded aspects, De La Salle's writings on the Eucharist are interesting for what they have to say about the interior dispositions for assisting at Mass.

## 1. THE EUCHARISTIC LITURGY IN THE 17th CENTURY

### 1.1 The meaning of the word Mass

"The Mass" is the term used most commonly in the Latin Church, at least up until recently, to refer to the celebration of the Eucharist. Especially after the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century, it has become standard for Roman Catholics to use the fuller expression, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Eastern churches have preferred the term "Liturgy" for the Eucharistic rite, a usage that is gaining currency in the Latin Church since Vatican Council II.

The word "Mass" is derived from the rite of dismissal, *missa* in Latin. Recent commentators have not failed to point out how strange it seems to designate the entire rite in terms of the dismissal. That is why contemporary usage prefers the term "Liturgy" for the celebration.

### 1.2. The rite prescribed by St Pius V

After the Council of Trent, Mass in the Latin rite was celebrated generally throughout the Western Church according to the ritual in the *Missale Romanum* promulgated in 1570 by Pope Pius V. Thus the Mass was everywhere celebrated in Latin, with the priest facing the altar, even for the readings, with his back to the congregation. All the responses to the priest were made in Latin by the acolyte or altar boy. The ritual provided for sung solemn high Masses, with the priest assisted by a deacon and subdeacon (who often were themselves priests), sung high Masses, and low Masses. On Sundays and Feasts the pastor was obliged to celebrate the solemn parish Mass for the intention of his people.

Ever since Lateran Council IV in 1215 Catholics have been obliged under pain of sin to assist at Mass on Sundays and Feasts of Obligation. The evidence seems to indicate that in seventeenth-century France large numbers attended the parish Mass on Sundays and Feasts. Even on weekdays, the low Masses were well attended and it was part of the routine in parish schools to have all the children attend daily Mass. In the parish of St Sulpice, for example, the first Mass would begin as early as 4:00 a.m. to allow workers to attend and to allow for multiple Masses to fulfill the provisions of contracts and wills. Since everything, except the sermon, was in Latin, and since vernacular translations of the Mass texts were forbidden, the people in the congregation were more or less left to their own private prayers and devotions.

In the foreword to his book entitled *Instructions and prayers for Holy Mass*, De La Salle himself notes that although the Mass is "the principal and most excellent" of all our daily actions, yet "very few people assist at it with devotion and very few are instructed in the best manner to do so" (CL 17,3 = I 1,1,1.). In such circumstances, it was easy for children especially to become restless and distracted, even disorderly, as can be seen in the repeated directives given by John Baptist de La Salle to the Brothers to supervise carefully their pupils at Mass.

### 1.3. De La Salle celebrated frequently and with fervour

De La Salle was ordained a priest on Holy Saturday, April 9, 1678, in the chapel of the Archbishop of Reims. He celebrated his first Mass the following day, Easter Sunday, in the Lady Chapel of Rheims Cathedral. His biographer, Canon Blain, uses this occasion to devote three whole pages to the fervor that De La Salle brought to the celebration of the Eucharist. "The air of sanctity which he wore on the occasion of his first Mass was not something that he soon lost. He

never lost it. Its root was within him in the fund of grace and virtues which he had acquired, while the presence of the Holy Spirit was its source. This attitude only grew stronger in him with every Mass he celebrated" (CL 7, 131f).

The Founder regularly celebrated Mass for the Brothers, with or without their pupils, as the occasion demanded. Since the communities did not usually have their own private chapels, but only an oratory for community prayer, the Founder would celebrate Mass in the nearest parish church.

Blain recounts how on one occasion De La Salle and Father Bauyn, his spiritual director and the superior of the Sulpician minor seminary, celebrated Mass one after the other on the patronal feast of the church of Saint Lambert at Vaugirard. The biographer comments: "Never was there a devotional spectacle more striking and more edifying than to see at the altar these two holy priests of the New Law renewing in an unbloody manner the sacrifice of the cross. [...] One might have supposed that they saw Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament with their own eyes. Both held themselves before him in total annihilation" (CL 7,330).

Another interesting bit of evidence relates to the sojourn of the Founder in Grenoble in the autumn of 1713 as described in Brother Leo Burkhard's book on Parménie. The source is a deposition made to the authorities in Rome for the beatification process by a certain Brother Patrice. Speaking of what he had learned in Grenoble from old men in the city who had been pupils of De La Salle, Brother Patrice testified: "He himself led his pupils to the parish church where he celebrated Mass for them. The pupils, and especially anyone who served his Mass, were all struck with the piety and devotion of this priest. Whenever he was spotted on his way to the church with his young scholars, people could be heard to say: 'Let us go to Mass. See, there, the holy priest on his way to celebrate it'".

## 2. EUCHARISTIC THEOLOGY IN THE 17th CENTURY

The traditional context for the development of a theology of the Mass is the theology of the sacrament of the Eucharist. Especially after the controversies with the Protestants in the sixteenth century, Catholic theology tended to isolate three mysteries contained in

this sacrament: the sacrament itself and its efficacy, the real presence of Jesus Christ in the consecrated elements, and the Eucharist as a sacrifice. The last of these three mysteries would be the usual context for developing a theological understanding of the Mass.

Since the Eucharist has such a strong scriptural base, the Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century did not deny that the Eucharist was a true sacrament instituted by Christ. Although they all rejected the idea of transubstantiation, they were divided among themselves on the reality and the manner of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. But with regard to the Mass, or the "Lord's Supper", as they preferred to call the rite, they were vehement in their denial that the Mass is a sacrifice. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross is the one and only once-for-all sacrifice of the New Law.

The response of the Council of Trent was to insist on four points: 1. The Mass is a "true and proper sacrifice". 2. In the Mass the "bloody sacrifice of the Cross is represented and its efficacy applied". 3. In the Mass there is "an unbloody immolation" which is seen under the "visible signs", the "species of bread and wine". 4. The sacrificial oblation in the Mass is different from the oblation on the cross "only in the manner of offering".

The Catholic theologians of the seventeenth and subsequent centuries have consistently used the four pivots of the Tridentine doctrine as the framework for

elaborating a theology of the Mass as a sacrifice. Within this framework, however, extensive theological discussion arose on several questions that Trent left unanswered. The theological speculation of the time presumed that, in order to explain how the Mass is a sacrifice, it had to be shown that in the Mass there occurred an offering and an immolation of the victim being sacrificed to God. Some authors sought some kind of real immolation or destruction of the victim in the breaking of the host and the eating of the species. Other authors speculated that in the Mass there is a true immolation but a virtual one, that is the representation of the sacrifice of the cross by the separate consecration of the species.

The position favored by the French Oratorian school of the seventeenth century, and developed extensively by Bossuet was that the Mass is a sacrifice with a true but virtual immolation. In this view, the Mass represents the sacrifice of Christ on the cross in the mystical separation of the body and blood of Christ symbolized by the double consecration of the bread and wine. In the Mass, Christians can unite with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in this state of annihilation.

### 3. THE THEOLOGICAL POSITION OF DE LA SALLE

#### 3.1. In his writings

De La Salle treats of the Mass from a doctrinal and theological point of view in two of his major works: *The Duties of a Christian*, and his *Instructions and Prayers for Holy Mass, confession and communion*.

The *Instructions for Holy Mass* has two main sections. The first is devoted to an explanation of the meaning of the Mass and its ceremonies; the second has two sets of prayers that might be used during Mass in order to assist at it with attention and devotion in union with the actions and prayers of the priest at the altar.

The first part of the first volume (DA) of the *Duties of a Christian* treats of our duties to God under the heading of faith (the Creed) and charity (the commandments). The second part indicates the means of nourishing faith and charity by the sacraments and prayer. The doctrinal material from the first part is then presented in catechetical form of question and answer in the second book of the *Duties of a Christian* (DB). The third book of the *Duties* (DC) puts in

catechetical form the practical material relating to the exterior worship of the Church, especially the parish Mass.

#### 3.2 Sacrifice and Sacrament

De La Salle treats of the Mass under the heading "of the Eucharist as a sacrifice" (CL 20,261 = DA 305f), distinguishing it from "the Eucharist as sacrament" (CL 20,241 = DA 304f). In fact, he puts great emphasis on the distinction between the two. Thus the Eucharist is a sacrament "because God gives to the faithful the body and blood of Christ" under sensible signs for their sanctification; it is a sacrifice "when the body and blood of Christ under the appearances of bread and wine are offered to God the Father in the Mass through the ministry of priests in memory of the passion and death of the same Jesus Christ" (CL 20,261 = DA 305,1,1).

For De La Salle, "the Eucharist is a sacrifice only during the time the body and blood of Christ are actually offered to God, that is, in the consecration [...] when the priest pronounces the words by which the

bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ" (CL 20,261 = DA 305,1,2).

After the consecration of the Mass, the Eucharist is a sacrament and no longer a sacrifice. In explaining the difference further, De La Salle explains that the Eucharist as sacrament is intended to sanctify persons and profits only the faithful who receive it worthily, whereas the Eucharist as a sacrifice is intended to honor God as the Creator and profits everyone, even sinners and unbelievers (CL 20,262 = DA 205,1,3).

De La Salle's formal treatment of the Eucharist as a sacrament follows the theology traditional since Thomas Aquinas and the doctrinal decrees of the Council of Trent. Thus, the Eucharist is the greatest of the seven sacraments (CL 20,242 & 401 = DA 304,1,1 & 310,5,11). It was instituted at the Last Supper by Christ (CL 20,248 = DA 304,2,1; CL 17,237 = I 5,2,1), who is living and present in the sacrament (CL 21,209 = DB 3,16,5). The bread and wine constitute the matter of the sacrament, while the words of institution are the form (CL 21,150 = DB 3,2,2f). The Eucharist should be received with the proper dispositions (CL 21,215 = DB 3,18,3) so that it can produce its proper effects in terms of grace (CL 20,258 = DA 304,4,7f). The Eucharist unites us to Jesus Christ in an intimate way and is the nourishment for the soul (CL 17,273 = I 6,26).

### 3.3 A disputed question

Following the usage of the post-Tridentine theologians, De La Salle applies to the Mass the traditional definition of sacrifice: an exterior offering to God alone whereby "something agreeable to him is destroyed in his honor by a person with the right and the commission to do so in order to witness to God's sovereign dominion over all his creatures" (CL 20,262f = DA 305,1,4).

The crucial question, much disputed among theologians, is where in the Mass the immolation or destruction of the victim is to be found. De La Salle maintains that the destruction in the Mass consists in "the changing of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, thereby destroying the substance of the bread and wine through the words of institution" (CL 21,263f = DA 205,1,6).

The objection that could be made to this and similar theories is that the destruction concerns the bread and wine, and not the true victim who is Jesus Christ.

Aware of this De La Salle goes on to say: "The victim of the sacrifice in the Holy Mass is not the bread and wine, but the body and blood of Jesus Christ under the appearances of bread and wine. It is in the consecration that this victim is offered to God, and consecrated and destroyed as well in God's honor. Since Jesus Christ can no longer actually die, because he already died on the cross, he dies to the extent possible in the Holy Mass in a manner which is called mystical, in so far as his body and blood are separated in this sacrifice. In virtue of the words of consecration only the body is in the host and the blood in the chalice, even though in reality the blood is in the host with the body and the body is in the chalice with the blood" (CL 20,264 = DA 305,1,7).

Elsewhere, De La Salle speaks of the "abnegation" and the "humiliation" of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist (CL 17,263 & 268 = I 6,1 & 6,21). It seems that here, in effect, De La Salle is espousing two opposite theories: a theory of real immolation centered on the destruction of the substance of the bread and wine, as well as a sort of "mystical death" of Jesus annihilating himself by being present in the Eucharist, and a theory of virtual immolation centered on the sacramental separation of the body and blood in the double consecration.

### 3.4. The Eucharist as a source of grace

Following the Tridentine doctrine that the Mass is efficacious for the living and the dead, De La Salle provides a long list of the graces and benefits that come from offering the sacrifice of the Mass.

In the Mass, we give the greatest honor to God, offering the sacrifice of Christ as the best possible thanksgiving to God. This in turn brings new benefits from God; souls are thereby freed from Purgatory; the Mass remits the temporal punishment due to mortal and venial sin; we obtain the remission of sin and the grace of conversion; we obtain the graces needed to quit bad habits and to avoid sin and its occasions; we obtain the gift of union and reconciliation with our neighbor; the Mass is a powerful help to fulfill our duties in a Christian manner; we can recover bodily health and other temporal benefits. Finally, he says, it is through the Mass that we can more easily obtain from God what we ask, "more by one Mass well attended than by all our other holiest actions put together" (CL 17,7f = I 1,2,5f).



#### 4. DE LA SALLE'S INSTRUCTIONS FOR ASSISTING AT MASS

##### 4.1. Physical presence is not enough

In his book of *Instructions on the Mass*, De La Salle seems to be concerned as much with an adult congregation as with children. Thus, after insisting on the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and feasts, he urges that workers should also make it their first care to attend daily Mass (CL 17,10 = I 1,3,3). He suggests that sick persons on feasts, and those unable to attend Mass on weekdays should unite themselves in spirit with the priest and the assembly, offer themselves in sacrifice, and act as if they were present and as if they really preferred to be at Mass (CL 17,10 = I 1,3,4).

De La Salle is equally concerned that mere physical presence at Mass does not suffice to fulfil one's obligation, that the Church intends not only that we be present but that we be attentive to God and our duties to God (CL 17,11 = I 1,4,1). He then distinguishes three kinds of dispositions that would satisfy the obligation to hear Mass, and the corresponding obstacles or sins. First, to fulfil the minimal requirements of this commandment of the Church, one must be present for the entire Mass, fully attentive in a religious spirit. The two related sins would be not to be present, or being present but inattentive and without a prayerful spirit. The second disposition, i.e., the state of grace and a hatred of sin, is needed if one is to reap the benefits from the Mass. Mortal sin, or the will to sin and frequent its occasions would be the corresponding obstacles. The third disposition, the best possible, is to have not the least affection for sin and to unite with the priest in accord with the intention of the Church in the Mass (CL 17,12 = I 1,4,2f).

##### 4.2 The meaning of rituals and symbols

To help his readers understand the ceremonies of the Mass and to join with the priest in offering Christ's sacrifice of himself to the Father, De La Salle explains the symbols and summarizes the prayers used at Mass. He suggests, for example, that the candles are lighted to symbolize the charity with which Christ is immolated for us and with which we ought to assist at the Mass (CL 17,16 = I 1,6,4). The priest appears vested for Mass to represent Christ carrying the cross and about to offer himself for us by his death (CL 17,16 =

I 1,6,5). During the offertory rite, when the bread and wine become separated from profane use, the bread "represents all Christians [...] incorporated into the body of Jesus Christ by this sacrifice" (CL 17,27 = I 1,6,25). The change of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ takes place with the words of consecration (CL 17,33 = I 1,6,37), while the prayer immediately following reminds us of the three mysteries of the passion, the resurrection, and the ascension as the sources of our salvation (CL 17,34 = I 1,6,39).

##### 4.3 With the help of a book

Following the explanation of the various ceremonies, De La Salle supplies his readers with prayers to be said during Mass: the French texts of the psalms and the hymns and Creed that would often be sung in Latin, and very personalized paraphrases of the prayers prescribed for the priest throughout the Mass (CL 17,43f = I 1,7,16f).

For example, there is this act of adoration to be made at the elevation of the host:

"My savior Jesus,  
who obey the words of the priest  
so promptly and so exactly  
that you change the bread and wine  
into your body and blood  
the minute the priest pronounces these words,  
I adore you really present in this sacred host,  
I adore your submission  
and your total abnegation in this sacrifice,  
and I ask you to give me some share  
in the holy dispositions that you here make manifest"  
(CL 17,62 = I 1,7,45).

Since the assigned scriptural readings for each day were read by the priest in Latin and facing the altar, and since translations of the readings for each day were not readily available, De La Salle supplies the French text of Romans 12 for meditation during the reading of the Epistle, and the text of the Sermon on the Mount in Chapter 6 of Luke for meditation during the Gospel (CL 17,49f = I 1,7,17f).

In the same manual *Instructions and prayers*, De La Salle then offers a second set of "Other prayers during the Holy Mass that correspond to all the actions and prayers of the priest" (CL 17,71f = I 1,8).

These are shorter and much simpler than the others, more suitable perhaps to young people, but still characterized by a highly personal and intimate address, designed to unite the reader to the person of Jesus Christ in union with the actions of the priest at the altar.

#### 4.4 Daily Mass in schools

Chapter VIII of the *Conduct of Christian Schools* is devoted to daily Mass for the pupils that formed part of the regular school schedule. The schedule should be so arranged that the pupils could hear Mass every day in the nearest church and at the most convenient hour. The best time is said to be 10:30 a.m. After Mass, the people could go directly home for their midday meal. If Mass could not be scheduled for 10:30 a.m., it is recommended that the Mass be at 9:00 a.m. or thereabouts (CL 24,84 = CE 8).

On Sundays and feasts, the Brothers should bring their pupils to the parish Mass and later to Vespers in the nearest church and at the most convenient time (CL 24,95 = CE 8,7,1). The same supervision should be exercised by teachers and the same incentives to devotion and attention provided as at the daily Mass (CL 24,96 = CE 8,7,10).

On the last day of the school year, the pupils are to be reminded to be faithful to their religious practices during the time of vacation. Specifically they should be encouraged to attend Mass daily and to use the book of Mass prayers, to attend the parish Mass on Sundays and feasts, to go to confession and communion at least once during the vacation period, and to make a 15 minute visit to adore the Blessed Sacrament every day (CL 24,202 = CE 17,3,5f). A Mass of the Holy Spirit for the intention of the students is to be celebrated on the first day of school after the vacation (CL 24,203 = CE 17,3,15).

Strict rules are laid down for the conduct of the pupils on the way to Mass (by twos and in silence), during Mass (attentive and prayerful), and after Mass (orderly dismissal). Before leaving for Mass, the Brother should remind the pupils how they should behave and to provide them with motivation to do so (CL 24,86 = CE 8,1,11). During Mass, rosary beads are distributed for the pupils who have not yet learned to read, and collected afterwards. Those who can read are instructed to use the book of prayers for Mass,

probably *Instructions and Prayers* (CL 24,89 = CE 8,3,7). At the consecration the rosary beads and the books are to be set aside in order to bow and adore Christ present in the host and chalice (CL 24,90 = CE 8,3,9).

The Brothers are reminded that their principal role on the way to the church, during the Mass, and after is to supervise their pupils. They do not attend Mass for themselves but only to watch over their charges. That is why they will not use books and pay attention to the sacrifice only in a general way (CL 24,92 = CE 8,4,3f). The students should be so placed that they are far enough apart and in full view of the teacher (CL 24,88 = CE 8,2,10). In particular, the Brother should make sure that the pupils do not speak together, exchange their books, assume a slouchy posture, or bring anything into the church that would prove a source of distraction. The best means to prevent these faults is to oblige each pupil to hold his prayer book in front of him with both hands and to read it continually during the Mass (CL 24,91 = CE 8,3,7).

In the section of the *Conduct* on correction, certain penalties are indicated for violations of discipline in connection with Mass. Corporal punishment with canes is indicated for serious misbehaviour. It is interesting to note that expulsion is the penalty for habitual absence from Sunday Mass "through the fault of parents and make it a habit" (CL 24,148 = CE 15,1,22).

#### 4.5. Frequent communion

In his pastoral role as a priest, De La Salle was in favour of frequent communion, a fact that is clearly revealed by his writings. In the *Duties*, one of the chapters is entitled: "Of the Obligation Christians have of receiving the Eucharist and how often they should do so".

After reminding his readers of the obligation of receiving communion at least once a year, he goes on to quote St Ambrose: "Receive it every day so as to benefit from it every day", and then an anonymous writer: "I do not approve of receiving communion every day, but I do not disapprove either. I advise [...] people to receive communion every Sunday". He ends by saying: "To decide on the frequency of receiving communion, one should follow the advice of a wise confessor" (CL 20,251f = DA 304,3).

In *Instructions and Prayers*, De La Salle speaks of the obligation of receiving the Eucharist. He refers here to the canonical obligation of doing so once a year, which derives from "the intention Jesus Christ had" in instituting this sacrament, wanting it "to serve as nourishment for our souls". That is the reason why "the Church has always considered the reception of the body of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist as a religious exercise and an obligatory act" (CL 17,237f = I 5,2).

De La Salle urges his readers to overcome their fear of sacrilegious communion, a common attitude

at the time. He suggests a number of "acts" to them, that is, short prayers to recite before and after communion so as to be filled with suitable thoughts and feelings. These texts are permeated with reverential fear, but especially with trust in God. They reveal the writer's familiarity with Jesus Christ with whom he speaks. By their tender tone reminiscent of the writings of St Francis de Sales, they could (and still can) lead communicants to develop a correct understanding of the Eucharist and a more interior life of faith, the source of spiritual progress.

## 5. THE MASS IN DE LA SALLE'S WRITINGS FOR HIS BROTHERS

In the *Rules* of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, two days each week were "communion days". These were normally Thursday and Sunday, days when the Brothers could attend Mass without having to supervise the pupils at the same time (CL 20,23f = RC 4,5). In the Church of the time, lay people, even if consecrated to God by vows, did not use to go to communion so frequently.

The Founder rarely refers to the Mass in the *Meditations* written for the Brothers, except in reference to the real presence or the reception of the sacrament. Speaking of St Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, he recalls that "her confessor allowed her to communicate from the age of 10 onwards", and that later, when she became a religious, she chose the Carmelite Order because the Sisters communicated often (MF 130,2). In his meditation on St. Louis of Poissy, De La Salle praises the saint's faith in the real presence of Christ in the host at Mass (MF 160,1).

The meditation for November 2 reminds the Brothers that the Mass is an effective means to assist the souls in purgatory and obtain their deliverance (MF 185,2,1).

As a way of sharing his own devotion to the Eucharist with the Brothers, De La Salle wrote eight meditations for the feast of Corpus Christi and its Octave. One of the meditations concentrates on the duty of adoring Christ present in the Eucharist. Two others warn against more or less "useless communions" and "bad communions". The five others encourage the

Brothers to communicate frequently. After recalling that the first Christians communicated every day, he wrote: "You cannot find a more prompt or effective remedy for your temptations and failures than the reception of the body of Jesus Christ. Receive him often" (MD 54,2,2).

De La Salle's most extensive writing on the Mass directed to the Brothers can be found in the *Collection*. The manner in which the Brothers assists at Mass is a matter for the reddition of conscience to the Director (CL 15,36 = R 8,2,15). One example of performing an action through custom rather than by the spirit of faith would be to assist at Mass in a routine manner through force of habit (CL 15,92 = R 11,2,36). The *Collection* has two very lengthy sections on how the Brothers should unite themselves interiorly with Christ and the priest in order to fulfill the ends of the Mass, namely sacrifice, thanksgiving, propitiation, and impetration. The same basic ideas are repeated in the "reflections the Brothers have to make from time to time, and especially during the retreat" (CL 15,219f = R 16,8).

De La Salle wanted everyone, and especially the Brothers, to assist at Mass with the best possible interior dispositions and to use the *Instructions and Prayers* that he had written for this purpose. Thus, in the earliest letter to a Brother that has survived, he writes: "You know that Holy Mass is the most important exercise of religion. That is why you should bring to it all possible attention" (LC 102,10).

## 6. CONCLUSION

It is not surprising that many aspects of De La Salle's understanding of the Mass have become outdated as a result of the liturgical movement in this century, new approaches to sacramental and biblical theology, culminating in the revision of both doctrine and ritual brought about by the Constitution on the Liturgy of Vatican Council II. In particular, the emphasis today is on the Eucharistic action in its entirety as a sacrificial memorial meal, rather than an arbitrarily separated sacrifice and sacrament; there is less concern to fit the action to a prior definition of sacrifice; there is sensitivity to the presence of Christ in the assembled congregation and in the proclamation of the word as well as in the Eucharistic elements. The Eucharist is no longer seen as an occasion for private devotional practices, but rather an action of the assembled Christian community, with active participation and understanding made possible by having the priest celebrate the Mass in the vernacular facing the people.

There is, however, an enduring element in De La Salle's writing on the Mass and the Eucharist. The fundamental teaching of De La Salle on the nature of and efficacy of the Mass and the importance of assisting at it with understanding and devotion remains permanently valid. It might even be said that he shows a

sensitivity, rare for his time, to the need for instruction and prayer books to induce lay people to participate in the sacraments in a personal way, without fearing to receive communion, an attitude which was common in the Church of the day, especially in France.

De La Salle often refers to the ancient origins of many of the details of the rite to help make them comprehensible to his readers. The prayers that he suggests to accompany the various actions and prayers of the priest are very close in spirit and sometimes to the letter of the official Mass texts, which was not always the case in the prayer books of the time.

Lasallians today, therefore, could profitably use the *Instructions and Prayers* as spiritual reading before Mass to become attuned to something of the Founder's reverential awe before the mystery and his tender familiarity with Jesus Christ. De La Salle's continued insistence that the Eucharist is the most excellent of the sacraments and that the Mass is the most important act of religion is not far removed from the statement in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of Vatican II that "the liturgy is the summit toward which all the activity of the Church is directed and the source from which all her power flows" (Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10).

### Complementary themes

Correction

Mystery

Prayer

Sacrament

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AQUINAS, St Thomas, *Of the Sacrament of the Eucharist* in the *Summa* III, Q. 73.
- FINK, P. E., in Peter E. FINK, ed., *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1990.
- MICHEL, A., *La Messe chez les théologiens postérieurs au concile de Trente, Essence et Efficacité*, in art. *Messe* in DTC, Vol. 10, Col. 1143-1315, 1928.
- MILLER, J., *Mass* in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 9, 1967.
- VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 1963.

Br Luke Salm