

“YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST” — by Fr. Steve Lape

In continuing our reflections for our diocese’s “Year of the Eucharist,” let us now take a moment to clarify some basic words that have to do with this central act of our Catholic faith. Today’s topic: Mass terms.

Eucharist—from a Greek word “eucharistia,” meaning “to give thanks.” In this celebration of thanks & praise to God, we fulfill what Jesus told His Apostles at the Last Supper (and tells all of us as his disciples) to keep doing: “Do this in memory of me.” (Luke 22:19). The Eucharist is not only a memorial of Our Lord at the Last Supper, but it is also a sacrifice, as we share in the Body and Blood of Jesus Himself, His very flesh laid down and sacrificed for the salvation of the world. The Eucharist is not a repeating of Jesus’ dying over and over again, but it’s a celebration that brings us all, as Christian disciples, into the Upper Room on that one night when they shared that one Last Supper, as Jesus prepared to offer Himself as the One true sacrifice to save humanity.

Mass—from a Latin word “missa” meaning “dismissal,” meaning we’re sent out after celebrating together in the Eucharist to live the Good News about Jesus Christ through good words and deeds.

Liturgy—from a Greek word “leitourgia,” which basically means “work done for others.” It’s a general term for any formal church worshipping service (Mass, baptism, wedding, funeral, Penance Service, Prayer Service, etc).

Transubstantiation (pronounced TRANS-sub-STAN-she-YAY-shun) - this means the “transforming of a substance” - This is the Catholic belief in the miracle of God’s changing the substance of bread & wine at Mass into the substance of Christ’s Body & Blood.



Most other Christian denominations do not believe that the bread and wine actually become Christ’s Body & Blood, but is merely representing it. Lutherans believe in “consubstantiation,” teaching that the bread and wine coexist with Jesus’ Body and Blood. Catholics believe that is contrary to what Jesus said to His Apostles at the Last Supper: “This IS my body...this IS my blood” (Mk 14:22,24/Matt 26:26-27). It’s a part of the mystery of our faith, that although it may still look, taste, or even smell like bread and wine at Mass, we

believe that the priest’s speaking the words of Jesus Christ during the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass, and invoking the power of the Holy Spirit, somehow mysteriously transforms the inner substance (the true essence) of the bread and wine into something much greater—Jesus’ actual Body and Blood (food from Heaven). As

Jesus says in John 6:56, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.” In John 6:53, He warns, “Unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life within you.” St. Paul reinforces this central belief in the early Christian Church in his 1st letter to the Corinthians: “For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night He was handed over, took bread, and, after He had given thanks, broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same way, also the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord till He comes.” (1 Cor 11:23-26). It shows that the earliest Christians held firm on this belief of transubstantiation, even though they didn’t use that exact word at that time.