



Episode 28: The Mystery of Faith

SUMMARY

During Mass, immediately after the consecration of the Bread and Wine, the priest, with the Eucharist on the altar in front of him says, “The mystery of faith.” Why is this done? What does it mean?

Mysterium fidei was at one time translated as “Let us proclaim the mystery of faith.” And yet, the Latin text does not mean that we should “do” anything. It is simply a statement of fact, a statement about what is present before the priest on the altar.

In order to understand this, we must consider closely the directions given by the *Roman Missal*. The priest says his part, then remains silent. The people, the *Missal* says, *continue* by acclaiming one of the formulas. Why does the priest not join the people? To appreciate this, we must understand that the meaning of the root word of mystery, “*muo*,” literally means “to shut the mouth.” “*Muo*” is also the root word of the English cognate “mute.” It carries with it the nuance of being dumbfounded. Mystery, then, has the notion of being silent or being rendered speechless when confronted by the awesome majesty of God.

Imagine yourself at Mass, the consecration has just occurred. The priest stands from his genuflection. And it is as if he recognizes that before him, on the altar is the Body and Blood of Christ! The mystery of faith! And being so overwhelmed by this miracle, he is rendered speechless. The people rush to his help and conclude the acclamation.

This is a marvelous combination of people and priest working together in celebration of the Mass. It is a perfect example of how a deeper understanding of the different parts of the Mass can lead to a fuller and more intelligent participation. This deeper internal participation nurtures the spiritual life of both priest and people.

Roman Missal

After the Consecration when the Priest has said, The mystery of faith, the people pronounce the acclamation, using one of the prescribed formulas.

General Instruction, n°. 151

Then [the priest] says “The mystery of faith.”
And the people continue, acclaiming...

Order of Mass, n°. 112

Prosper Guéranger, osb.

“Yea, verily, we are indeed offering something very great, for we have here before us the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. We call to mind His Passion which has been so blessed a boon for us; here too the Victim is immolated; but more than that, the Victim which we here possess as ours, is also He who rose again.”

IN THE TRADITION

“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 until he comes.”

I Corinthians 11:23-26

“The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ’s faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, 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. They should be instructed by God’s word and be nourished at the table of the Lord’s body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves; through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all.”

Sacrosanctum concilium, n°. 48

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

✠ “The mystery of the most Holy Eucharist which Christ, the High Priest instituted, and which He commands to be continually renewed in the Church by His ministers, is the culmination and center, as it were, of the Christian religion.”

Pius XII

Mediator Dei, 66

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

We proclaim your Death, O Lord,
and profess your Resurrection
until you come again.

When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup,
we proclaim your Death, O Lord,
until you come again.

Save us, Savior of the world,
for by your Cross and Resurrection
you have set us free.

Eucharistic Prayer, Order of Mass

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How conscious are you of the awesome mystery on the altar after the consecration?
2. How can we deepen our appreciation of the Real Presence of Christ?

FOR FURTHER READING

Prosper Guéranger, *On the Holy Mass*,
(Farnsbrough, UK: St. Michael’s Abbey
Press, 2006).