

Anamnesis is kind of like a spiritual way of traveling through time to the moment of Christ's sacrifice but instead, because the Lord is eternal, he brings that moment to you rather than you moving toward the moment. That is the power of a sacrament. It is a real act of God.

Another natural comparison is the human need to commemorate big events like wedding anniversaries. We hope to rekindle the joy and love or some other significance that was present at the beginning of important events in our lives.

Sometimes the marriage is even re-enacted on the anniversary. It strengthens us to "recapture" the goods of the beginnings of things like birthdays and anniversaries.

God can do far more than we do to touch important and life-giving acts of the past because he is not constrained by time or space. God is able to do what he wishes. Therefore, God can refer to a moment in the past and open it up again to the present. This is anamnesis. In English, in our liturgy, we use the word memorial. The Eucharist is a memorial of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross; the Eucharist makes present the sacrifice of Christ in a sacramental way.

At the Last Supper, Jesus pre-enacted the sacrifice of the cross. He willed his sacrifice and presented his Body and Blood as already given and poured out. At each Mass, Jesus re-enacts the sacrifice of his Body and Blood sacramentally.

Because this is intended to be a spiritual ritual that everyone can participate in, the Lord does not appear in a human body. He does not unfold all the circumstances of that particular time and place in which he lived. But the Lord makes present again the reality of his obedient and sacrificial flesh in love to make it accessible for those who love him to touch him and be touched by him. Touching can be a very powerful way of loving. But what happens is much more than touching.

The life of Jesus and his sacrificial love — the love of His infinite heart — is opened to us to enter and live. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass has a unitive power. We participate in the self-giving love of God at Mass.

Philosophers and theologians endow the word "participate" with a special (technical) meaning. Participation is an important idea in the philosophical teaching of Plato for example.

When we *participate* in something with our free will, we will what is willed by others. We join our will, we join our desires, our heart, with others. We will, we desire, what is desired by one other than our selves. So we allow our desires, our hearts, to come to rest in the heart of an other. We do what the other does. We enjoy what the other enjoys or mourn what the other mourns. Our hearts become *conformed* to that which we love and we become sharers — participators — in the life of the one to whom we have given our will, the one we love. To participate then, is to allow our selves to be *formed*, to *give* our selves to be formed. We become like that which we love.

Parents are cautious over the choice of their children's friends for this reason. We even see this power of participation of the will at work in people who are very interested in sports teams. What happens to the team has an effect on them. There are many other such examples on a natural level.

Participation bestows a likeness, a oneness of being.

The point is that when we participate with love at the Mass, we become participators in the life of Christ especially in the climactic act of His love. This is the goal of the Christian life: to be an "other Christ", an *alter Christus*.

In the Bible, St. Peter tells us, "He has granted to us his precious and very great promises that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). We are to partake of

the life of God; to participate in the divine.

In the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we intend to offer our selves through Christ, with Christ and in Christ to the eternal Father. In offering our selves in love to the Father through Christ, the Lord give us his Spirit to live in a mystical unity with him to the degree that we surrender our selves. This is the very reason why Mass comes to a climax in Holy Communion. Maybe we have become to familiar with the word "communion". Communion ought to be the character of our life. We are people of communion. We want to live in communion with others and with God.

The reason we are alive

The reason we still draw breath is that we can still be converted to the love of God.

Every day, we try to live up to the title of "Christian". Some believe that to be a Christian is a one-time decision. But that is not consistent even with the Bible.

St. Paul said, "I pummel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27). A little later in that same letter (or epistle as it is called in Scripture), St. Paul reminded those to whom he preached the Gospel to hold fast to it otherwise "you believed in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:1-2). In fact, the Apostle Paul speaks repeatedly in his Letter to the Philippians about the efforts believers make to stay on the path to God (see chapters two and three of that epistle).

So, the time we are here on earth is given to cooperating with God's grace for our ongoing conversion to his love.

We depend on the grace of God for our conversion. We confess we need God to do the work of changing our hearts. Of course, God will



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not work in our soul without our cooperation.

But the whole story of the Old Testament is the story of *our failure to be able to be converted*, failure to do God's will without an interior change of heart. Our nature is wounded by selfishness. We need grace to change our hearts.

The Eucharist is the greatest possible source of grace. We believe this because we believe that the Eucharist is *Jesus himself* present to us as a sacrament under the appearance of bread and wine.

In the Mass, we commune with God. The climax of the Mass is "Holy Communion". God Himself organized the elements of our worship in the Mass. He prefigured the Mass when he gave the Jewish people the Passover liturgy in the Old Testament (see Exodus 12). But the Mass is a *fulfillment* of the Old Testament Passover.

Jesus emphasized the importance of eating and drinking the flesh he would give to the world in sacrificial love, in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John. Jesus is the infinitely effective Lamb of God who takes

away our sins. He infuses us with his very Self in an objective way by means of the Eucharist. He shows us that he does not want to leave us to our own efforts to be converted to his way of life.

Some Christians apply a special name for this process of conversion. In the Christian tradition of the West, it is called *sanctification, divinization* or *deification* (from deity). Some in the East call it *theosis*.

In the early Church, many wrote about divinization. St. Athanasius wrote (as did others), "The Son of God became man so man could become God." This does not mean that we will ever become God the way God is God; we will never be infinite and omnipotent and although we are immortal, we will never be eternal. It does mean that in our own uniquely personal

way, our love will be holy and like God's love. We can be holy (Matthew 5:48).

Divinization is a two-fold process of growing to be like God. The first step is the removal of sin in our lives, according to St. Athanasius, and the second step is growing in charity (which is the theological word for love).

The first step is achieved through the attentive use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The second step is achieved through a faithful spiritual life of prayer, spiritual study and the practice of charity. These steps are interdependent. But when it comes to prayer, the Church teaches that the Mass is the highest prayer. *It is in the liturgy that the power of divinization is activated.*

Blessed Pope John Paul II wrote, "In the Eucharist, the Church's inner nature is revealed, a community of those summoned to the liturgy to celebrate the gift of the One who is offering and offered: participating in the Holy Mysteries, they become "kinsmen" of Christ, anticipating the experience of divinization in the now inseparable

bond linking divinity and humanity in Christ". (*Oriental Lumen 10*)

Because God is so compassionate and gentle, he gives us a way to receive grace that is kind of easy. God knows how difficult our life can be. He gives us the Mass as a comfort and a source of power.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks about the unmatched power of the liturgy (#1070, 1540, and 1997-2000). The liturgy does not work *automatically*, so to speak. God does not impose himself but requires our desire to surrender to him totally.

In *Sacramentum Caritatis* (*The Sacrament of Love*), Pope Emeritus Benedict describes the way to participate in the liturgy, "certainly *the spirit of constant conversion* ... must mark the lives of all the faithful. Active participation in the Eucharistic liturgy can hardly be expected if one approaches it superficially, without an examination of his or her life.

"This inner disposition can be fostered, for example, by recollection and silence for at least a few moments before the beginning of the liturgy, by fasting and, when necessary, by sacramental confession. A heart reconciled to God makes genuine participation possible.

"Catholics need to be reminded that there can be no *actuosa participatio*, no active participation in the sacred mysteries without an accompanying effort to participate actively in the life of the Church as a whole, including a missionary commitment to bring Christ's love into the life of society".

The Mass is the primary way in which the *power of conversion to the love of God* ("sanctification" or "divinization") is available. This happens according to our receptivity — the humility that makes us hungry for God's love.

Pope Benedict said that the Eucharist reveals the loving plan that guides *all of salvation history* (Ephesians 1:10; 3:8-11). God gives it as a gift to guide our path to heaven and to *be* our path.

Peace, Father Gerald