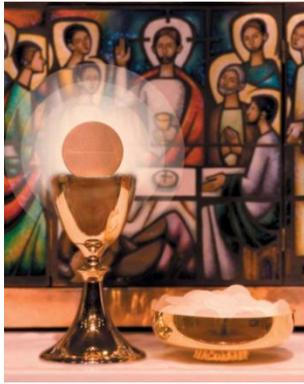


Scriptural Basis for the Mass: Session #1: We Become What We Eat

Written and Compiled by Theresa Lisiecki



Introduction

Throughout my life the Mass has meant many things to me and I suspect to each of us. When I was a child it meant a family outing; as a teen it meant torture and boredom. When I got into college it meant social connections and community. There were many periods of times when I didn't understand the relevance of attending Mass as applicable to my life and other periods that the Mass brought me great comfort and direction. It has only been recently that I have begun to understand and appreciate that my participation in the Mass is not about what I get out of the moment but what I contribute in my honoring and worshiping a God who has honored and continues to be involved in human history... in my history. This study is about not only understanding the bits and pieces of the Mass, where they come from and why they are important, but more importantly in placing the Mass within Salvation History and within our history.

READ Luke 22:14-20. If you are looking for a critical juncture, the climax of all of scripture and in truth all of history it would come in those last moments, the last three days of Jesus Christ. And in that apex of history, it begins here at the Last Supper. This moment, this meal gives expression of the thread that is woven throughout all of history: of God's desire to be one with us, to be in common union with us; to be in communion with us. Yes, Jesus goes on to suffer but why? Yes, Jesus goes on to die on the cross, but why? As sacrifice for my sins, for your sins so that we might be able to receive His salvation and join Him in heaven for all eternity. What came before these three days, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus..... all the way to the Gospels was told to explain why these three days happened. What comes after, in the letters of Paul, Peter and the other disciples explains what we are meant to do with this great mystery of faith. The Mass, each and every time it is offered relives this great mystery, these three days, not just as memory but we once again enter into these three days. Let me explain it in another way.

In 2013-14 the Wednesday Morning Bible study explored and journeyed through, looking at key bits and pieces, the entire bible when it investigated Salvation History. Salvation History is the story of God working through human history to bring about humanities redemption. The story did not end at the Gospels with Jesus dying on the cross and opening the gates of heaven. The story continued as the early Church struggled to become the voice and presence of Christ in the world. The point being here is that the story of salvation history did not end with the Book of Revelation Chapter 22, verse 21. It continues to this day as God works through the Church today, through you and I, the faithful. Our goal is not just to get ourselves to heaven. The mission and ministry of the Church is to bring one and all to Christ. And in that mission, our ministry, the Mass is as the core, is the touch stone, our source of energy, healing, direction and destiny because it unites us with Christ.

So, as we begin this conversation there are four very important concepts that we must understand as our foundational, see as essential to this whole conversation about our role in the Mass. The Mass is not just about what Father does on altar, because if so why so up. Have you ever had a friend or family member make a big deal about you coming to some event, guilt you into being there and then ignore you? In those moments my thought is, why did I come? Which is the question that millions of Catholics ask and answer with their lack of involvement in the Church and lack of physical presence in the Mass. Those concepts are:

1. We PARTICIPATE in Mass, not just attend.

READ: Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12-13; 2 Timothy 2:11

In the document *Sacrosanctum Concilium, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* of the Second Vatican Council the Bishops wrote: *Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.*

We **PARTICIPATE** in Mass not simply attend. Hear the difference? Participate verses attend. To attend something means to be an observer. We attend the theater. We attend a sporting event. While we might find ourselves engaged and involved, all the real action happens on the stage or field. As much as we wish that our actions of hollering and wearing our lucky shirt makes THE difference; in truth little we do as a spectator makes the ball go into the goal or changes the action on stage. Participation means being in the action or in the midst of the play. Our actions, attitude and involvement matter. That is what it means to participate in Mass -- our actions, attitude and involvement matter.

Participation in the communal celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church. The faithful give witness by this to their communion in faith and charity. Together they testify to God's holiness and their hope of salvation. They strengthen one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. CCC 2182

In the same way that Christ gathered the Apostles and disciples around the table at the Last Supper to give testimony, to witness and recognize the significance of this moment; we gather with Christ at the table to witness, to once again recognize the significance of Christ who once again sacrifices himself for our salvation. We gather at the Table of the Lord so that, now strengthen we can go out into our worlds to give testimony through our words and actions of God's saving grace happening in our lives today.

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2. **The Mass is about being in holy communion or holy union with God and with one another.**

We gather more than just to remember or for support by the community. We gather at the Mass to be transformed into the Body of Christ for our salvation and for the world.

READ: John 14:23; John 15:4-5; John 17:20-21

We gather each Sunday at what is primarily a meal and within that meal we come to literally receive Christ, body and blood, in communion. But there is a point and purpose to this action. Yes, coming to Mass is meant to strengthen us. Yes, it is meant to heal us. But mostly it is meant to UNITE us as one Body, on Blood of Christ. God loves us so much that he literally feeds us with himself in hopes that our lives would be transformed to become more holy, more like Christ, more in union with one another. In the same way the host and wine enter our bodies so does Christ enter joining himself with our souls in a most intimate union. Like Mary we too now carry the Word made flesh within our bodies. We become what we eat! So, while we can offer private prayer the Mass is about uniting ourselves with God and with one another.

The Mass is not just something that happens for our entertainment. As a matter of fact our being entertained has very little to do with why we are there. I realize this is a big reason so many stop going to Mass. How often do we hear "I don't go because it's boring, it means nothing to me". We are at Mass not for the entertainment value. We go to Mass so that we can participate in the mystery of Christ's salvation and redemption in an ongoing way in our lives. We go so that we might be one with God through Christ as we participate in the Mass. Ah, but therein lies the rub. How can we participate if we don't understand what is happening or why we are doing and saying what we are doing and saying and therefore the reason for this study. My hope is that when we are done each of us will have a deeper and better appreciation of what we about when we come to Mass.

3. **The Mass is a Sacrifice:**

We have all heard priest and teacher say "the holy sacrifice of the Mass" but just what does that mean? We read in the bible that from ancient times the Jews would bring animals to the Temple as sacrifice, as an act of worship.

READ: Genesis 4:2-4; Genesis 22:2; Exodus 12:1-5; Mark 10:43-45; Ephesians 5:2; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Matthew 27:28-29

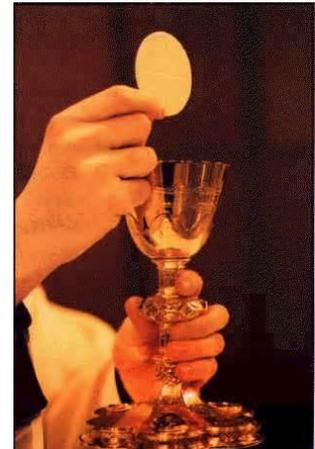
While we are not sacrificing cattle, sheep or doves we are participating in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who in his death on the cross offered his life as a total gift to the Father to redeem the world. Throughout the Old Testament sacrifices of animals was the primary way of showing faithfulness,

prayer and a desire for atonement of sin. In our study of Hebrews we looked at the words of St. Paul who talked of Christ as our “living sacrifice”. According to Catholic teaching, the Mass is not just a remembrance or symbolically re-enacting a moment in history. Through the Mass the Church makes present Christ's redeeming sacrifice so that its power and grace may affect our lives. (See Catechism 1367). Hopefully we will see that the words of Jesus at the Last Supper had strong sacrificial tones. We will talk more about this later in the series. READ: Romans 3:25.

4. Real Presence of Jesus:

It is extremely important for us to understand that Jesus is truly present at the Mass. While there are many ways Jesus is present to us throughout our daily lives (through the scriptures, sacraments, in prayer to name a few), He is uniquely present in the Eucharist

The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as “the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend.” In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist “the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained.” “This presence is called ‘real’—by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be ‘real’ too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present.” (CCC #1374)



The Eucharist is not just a symbol. We have the words of Jesus at that Last Supper when he said: "This is my body...." "This is my blood". We cannot scientifically prove that with the words of consecration that God comes and changes the ordinary host and wine into his body and blood, but the Catholic Church teaches and believes that a change does occur. Stated at the Council of Trent and offered again in Catechism #1376:

“Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation.”



Finally, so that there might not be confusion further down the process let's take a moment to realize there is more than one name for this gift of grace that we experience each weekend. First we have the **Lord's Supper** which comes from 1st Corinthians 11:20 and Revelations 19:9 and speaks to the historic experience of the Last

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Supper. The Mass has been called the **Breaking of the Bread** in Acts (2:42) or **Holy Communion** which draws from 1 Corinthians 10:16-17. In the early Church the Mass was called the **Divine Liturgy** because it was and still is the highest form of prayer. Today we tend to use two terms interchangeably when identifying our Sunday experience. **Eucharist**, which is Greek for "to give thanks" was first used by St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians (11:24) and recalls the Jewish blessings which have as their context the idea of giving thanks for God's work of creation, redemption and sanctification. Finally the word "**Mass**" comes from the Latin translation. At the end of our celebration the priest would say: *Ite, missa est*". Translated means: Go, it is the dismissal. Mass comes from the Latin word for dismissal and has come to be understood as a missioning rite since we are being sent from Mass to share our faith with all those we meet. We come to Mass in hopes of experiencing Christ so that we might be changed and fortified for this mission. We come to be healed and strengthened so that we might be able to go back out into our worlds to live Christ for others by proclaiming God's Word to others and in service to other's needs.

Opening Rites

Mass should actually begin well before we get to church. What do you do to prepare to receive God in Word and Sacrament? **READ: Romans 12:1-2** Before ever stepping into the Church we should be preparing our hearts, minds and souls for what we are about to receive. I always recommend that well before Mass everyone should familiarize themselves with the readings. All too often the first time we hear the readings is at Mass. I don't know about you but I read and reread important documents and letters so that I can get everything out of them that I can. And then, once at Mass do we really listen with intension or are we proof texting. What does that mean? At Mass I watch everyone with their noses in the Missal following along in the Missal making sure the Lector is reading what they are suppose to read but if I were to ask immediately after what was read most cannot say... but they know that they read the right words. **Preparing the mind** means to take the time BEFORE coming to Church to find some silence and read each of the readings slowly and with thought and reflection. And not just once but several times.

Preparing our hearts is an act of investigation and humility to see if we are in the right moral state to receive God in Holy Communion. This means looking back over the week and asking ourselves if we are in the state of serious sin, or in some way moving toward that. In this age we have gotten away from going to confession and if we are doing our best to live a good and righteous life we may not need to go often but it is a good idea to assess that each and every week before going to Mass and on a regular basis going to Confession. Finally **preparing our souls**



means an act of obedience by fasting one hour before receiving Holy Communion. Technically that means at least a half an hour before Mass begins but it could mean more depending on what each individual is called to do. I remember the day when it was expected to fast from everything from midnight the night before. One reason those early Masses were so popular. People wanted to eat!

One more thing before we get into actually being in the Church. The main entrance of a Catholic Church is important and in most Catholic Churches is often elaborately decorated and very different than the other doors of the Church. Here at St. Colette there are bronze doors (that all too often we hear people complaining about because they are so heavy). Some Protestant Churches have red doors and others are carved with scenes from the bible or angels. Why? **READ Revelation 3:20; Acts 14:27.** Coming through the doors of a Church is very significant. Many churches actually will have three sections or doors -- three doors represents the Trinity. Often the door is heavy as a reminder that accepting and living faith is a heavy responsibility. Red symbolizes the blood of Christ through which in baptism we find salvation. Walking through those red doors reminds the faithful that it was through the blood of Jesus their salvation was won. In other words, we must accept or "walk through" the blood of Christ to appreciate what we find through the doors of the Church. There can be more meaning but this should remind us not to take for granted anything we see, hear or experience when we experience church.

Now inside the Church the first thing we should do as baptized Catholics is to bless ourselves with the holy water that we find just inside the doors. We do that to remind ourselves of our baptism and that we belong here, in Church. Do you know that as I prepare those who wish to become Catholic, if they have NOT been baptized in any Christian denomination I have been instructed to train them NOT to do what is so basic to each of us – not to dip their hands into the holy water nor cross themselves because they have not yet received the waters of baptism. This simple act (all too often taken for granted) is a privilege of our faith. Mass then begins with a song. We are meant to sing and participate. The songs are chosen to prepare us for what we are about to experience with theme and content. At the very least we should read the words and reflect on their meaning.

Introductory Rites

Sign of the Cross: We begin the Mass with the priest inviting us to "show a sign of our faith" by making the sign of the cross. Whether at Mass or at home whenever we make the Sign of the Cross we are not just initiating prayer. I have heard some teaching very young children to think of the sign of the Cross as dialing a phone number initiates the call. The act of "signing ourselves" we are making ourselves a prayer. With the Sign of the Cross we are doing three things:

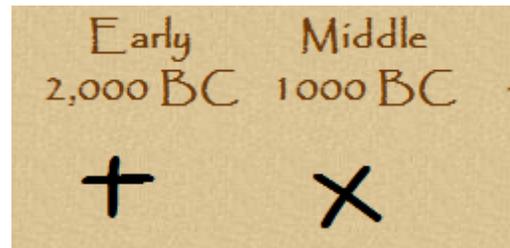
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1. remind ourselves that God is present in our lives
2. we invite God to bless us, assist us, to guard us from harm.
3. we are *marking* ourselves as God's faithful people

This act of signing or marking ourselves is as ancient as the Old Testament. Where does that come from? **READ Ezekiel 8:9-13.** The Prophet Ezekiel lived in the southern nation of Judah, after the twelve tribes of Israel split into two nations, around 625 BC just before the Babylonian exile. In a vision God showed Ezekiel the hypocrisy and faithlessness of not only God's people but those charged with leadership as priests of the Temple. These men of the priesthood had become so faithless before the one true God that they would worship other gods in the Temple corridors. That would be like Fr. Gary or Fr. Mike using the Church as a place to hold pagan rituals. **READ Ezekiel 9:1-**

6. In this passage we see that God distinguishes the righteous from the wicked and those who were in right relationship with God (righteous) by placing a mysterious mark on only the faithful. Scholars hold that this mark was the Hebrew letter *tahv*, which had the shape of a cross ("+"). This mark of God would distinguish the good from the bad so that God's punishment would reign down only on the bad. We see this action of God marking the good earlier in scripture with the Israelites in Egypt. Remember the Ten Plagues? The last was the death of the first born but to protect the faithful God instructed the Israelites to mark their doorposts with the blood of a sacrificed lamb. (Read Exodus 11:1-12:30). In the New Testament we read of a similar pattern. **READ Revelations 7:1-3 and 9:1-4.** Making the sign of the Cross as we enter and leave the church, as we begin



prayer is based in these biblical texts. There is nothing magical about the Sign of the Cross. It is, in and of itself a prayer that is meant to do two things. First, it reminds us and the world that we desire or seek to be set apart from the corruption of the world. Unfortunately, all too often it is an empty gesture that we perform automatically. But, if we stop ourselves and stay within the moment of this prayer, if we "sign" ourselves with intention we are making a profound statement of faith. We are telling ourselves and the world that we belong to Christ and that the standards we seek to live by are not the corrupt ways of the world but the righteous ways of God.



The second thing we are doing when we sign ourselves is invoking God's protection for our lives. We should see this act of prayer as not only a "badge of faithfulness", using the words of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, but as a terror to evil. God's holy name has power. Throughout scripture and in the Church

today a name is held as significant and holy. It is believed that a name mysteriously represents the essence of the person and that, (while trivialized today), each of us is named uniquely by God. There is power in a name. Therefore when we make the sign of the Cross and invoke God's name we are calling out for Him to be with us and to protect us. But it is not just God alone we call. **READ: Matthew 28:16-20.** At Baptism each of us received the life of the divine Trinity. We begin Mass with this sign and statement as a proclamation and acknowledgement that we are approaching this Triune God in the sacred liturgy. We come not by our own power but by and through the power of God who dwells within us. We make the sign of the Cross as a statement of faith and in hope that we will grow in our understanding. Therefore we should not rush through, or act mindlessly as we make this sacred gesture. In the words of Romano Guardini:



When we cross ourselves, let it be with a real sign of the cross. Instead of a small cramped gesture that gives no notion of its meaning, let us make a large unhurried sign, from forehead to breast, from shoulder to shoulder, consciously feeling how it includes the whole of us, our thoughts, our attitudes, our body and should, every part of us at once, how it consecrates and sanctifies us... Make a large cross, taking time thinking of what you do. Let it take in your whole being --body, should, mind, will, thoughts, feelings, your doing and not-doing...

Roman Guardini, *Sacred Signs*, 1955

Greeting: Immediately following the Sign of the Cross we move into the greeting words of the Priest. There are options but the one we hear most often is:

Priest: The Lord be with you

Us: And with your Spirit

While we tend to think of these words in the same way as "Good morning" or "Hello" there is a much deeper meaning to this greeting. First, we are acknowledging that God is here with us. **READ: Matthew 18:20.** We hear in these words of Jesus himself that if we gather in God's name God is there present. But these words *The Lord be with you* are found throughout the Bible. There is a whole list of saints within the lines of scripture that are called by called into an important mission. Think of Isaac as he faced Abimelek (Genesis 26:24) and Moses as he was being sent back to Egypt (Exodus 6:6). These words were on the lips of Pharaoh as we dealt with Moses (Exodus 10:10) and Joshua as he prepared the Israelites to enter into the Promised Land (Joshua 1:1-9). There was King David (2 Samuel 7:3) and the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:6-8). But the most well know

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acknowledgement of God's presence come from the lips of the angel Gabriel as he greets Mary (Luke 1:28). In these biblical moments the individual was acknowledged in their holiness by the identification of God's presence. In the greeting the priest is offering a wish and a prayer that God be with us, not only in this moment but throughout our lives. And why are we here at Mass? Most are seeking strengthening in our weakness and resolve in our uncertainty and we desire God's presence by participate in the sacrament.

Our response to the priest is: *And with your Spirit*. This is one of the reforms of the new translation of the Mass which came out a few years ago. It was changed because it more adequately reflects the words of St. Paul in Galatians 6:18. But there is more to it. In the old translation: *and also with you* alluded to equality between the laity and the priesthood. With the new translation we, the faithful are acknowledging the unique activity that happens through the priest. I am not speaking here of the man but of the role or responsibility that comes by virtue of ordination through the sacrament of Holy Orders. In the context of the Mass as well as the other sacraments the priest is in *Persona Christi* -- in the person of Christ. It is interesting to note that the vestments the priest and deacon wear have a purpose. Part of that purpose is to remind all that in this moment it is not Fr. Gary or Fr. Mike who stand before us, but one who has been chosen and consecrated to lead in prayer and to God. This does not mean they are Christ here on earth. They are human just like us but during Mass and the other sacrament experiences it is like they lend Jesus their body so that He might be present to each of us. Our response reminds us that, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, God's Spirit is already with the priest.

So, this begins our conversation. We have a wonderful journey ahead of us and lots to cover. Hopefully the time you commit to this process will bring you much closer to Christ in the Mass.

QUESTIONS:

1. Name one thing that really struck you about today's conversion – one thing you learned or that you want to make sure you remember?
2. Does it make sense of how the Mass is tied into the overall experience of Salvation history?
3. Is there something else that you see or do at Mass (like the sign of the cross or the heaviness of the Church door) that you want to make sure that is covered in our discussion?

RESOURCES:

- *Living the Mass: How One Hour a Week Can Change Your Life* by Fr. Dominic Grassi & Joe Paprocki, Loyola Press, 2005
- *A Biblical Walk Through the Mass: Understanding What we Say and Do in the Liturgy* by Edward Sri, Ascension Press, 2011
- *The Mass in Scripture: Lectio Divina Bible Study* by Stephen J. Binz, Our Sunday Visitor, 2011

- *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist* by Brant Pitre, Doubleday, 2011
- *What Happens at Mass* by Jeremy Driscoll, OSB, Liturgical Training Publications, 2005
- *If Your Mind Wanders at Mass* by Thomas Howard, Ignatius Press, 1995

Catechism of the Catholic Church

1324 The Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life.” “The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.”

1325 “The Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in the divine life and that unity of the People of God by which the Church is kept in being. It is the culmination both of God’s action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men offer to Christ and through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit.”

1362 The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ’s Passover, the making present and the sacramental offering of his unique sacrifice, in the liturgy of the Church which is his Body. In all the Eucharistic Prayers we find after the words of institution a prayer called the *anamnesis* or memorial.

1366 The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it *re-presents* (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross, because it is its *memorial* and because it *applies* its fruit:

[Christ], our Lord and God, was once and for all to offer himself to God the Father by his death on the altar of the cross, to accomplish there an everlasting redemption. But because his priesthood was not to end with his death, at the Last Supper “on the night when he was betrayed,” [he wanted] to leave to his beloved spouse the Church a visible sacrifice (as the nature of man demands) by which the bloody sacrifice which he was to accomplish once for all on the cross would be re-presented, its memory perpetuated until the end of the world, and its salutary power be applied to the forgiveness of the sins we daily commit.

1367 The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*: “The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different.” “And since in this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and offered in an unbloody manner... this sacrifice is truly propitiatory.”

Confession Before Communion:

1457 According to the Church’s command, “after having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year.” Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received sacramental absolution, unless he has a

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grave reason for receiving Communion and there is no possibility of going to confession. Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time.

1458 Without being strictly necessary, confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church. Indeed the regular confession of our venial sins helps us form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit. By receiving more frequently through this sacrament the gift of the Father's mercy, we are spurred to be merciful as he is merciful:

Whoever confesses his sins... is already working with God. God indicts your sins; if you also indict them, you are joined with God. Man and sinner are, so to speak, two realities: when you hear "man" – this is what God has made; when you hear "sinner" – this is what man himself has made. Destroy what you have made, so that God may save what he has made.... When you begin to abhor what you have made, it is then that your good works are beginning, since you are accusing yourself of your evil works. The beginning of good works is the confession of evil works. You do the truth and come to the light.

St. Augustine