

Why Attending Mass is the Most Important Thing You Can Ever Do

By: Deacon Greg Ollick, M.A.

Dr. Scott Hahn is a well-known Catholic speaker and author, and he's a professor of Biblical Theology at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. But Scott Hahn was very anti-Catholic in school and in his seminary days. He even gave out anti-Catholic literature, ripped apart a rosary and tore up a Catholic prayer book. After his seminary training, he became the pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Fairfax, Virginia. He also became a part-time instructor at a local Presbyterian seminary.

The first course that Scott was assigned to teach was the Gospel According to John. While he was preparing his class for chapter six, and reflecting on the Bread of Life Discourse, something happened to him. He began to question what he had been taught – and was now teaching others – about the Eucharist: that it was only a symbol of Christ's body and not the real Body of Christ. This questioning was the start of a journey that led him into the Catholic Church.

The first big step on that journey came when he persuaded his wife Kimberly to go with him to study at Marquette University in the 1980s. He wanted to learn firsthand about the Catholic Theology of the Eucharist. The more he learned, the more he became convinced that Christ is really present in the Eucharist – Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. Then, one weekday, Scott decided to do something that he never dreamed he would do. He decided to attend a Mass in the weekday chapel on the campus.

He got there early and sat in the back pew as an observer. He didn't want anyone to notice him, and he made sure that there was an easily accessible escape route in case of an emergency. As he observed, he was amazed at the number of people arriving and with their sincere devotion. Then the Mass began....and, as he listened to the readings, he was struck by how they took on a special meaning in the context of what was about to take place: the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Scott wrote in his book, called *Rome Sweet Home*, that all of a sudden he realized that this was the setting in which the bible was meant to be read. Then came the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Scott said that when the priest held up the Host, after the words of consecration, all his doubt about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist vanished completely and forever. Later he wrote, "With all my heart, I whispered, 'My Lord and my God.'" He concluded by saying, "I left the chapel not telling a soul where I had been and what I had done. But the next day I was back, and the next, and the next...I don't know how to say it, but I had fallen in love with Our Lord in the Eucharist.

Justin the Martyr is one of the very early Church Fathers. He lived at a time when the Roman Senate was very suspicious of the Christians. At that time, the Romans saw the Christians as a sect that grew out of Judaism, and the Jews had revolted against Rome in the year 70 A.D. The Roman Emperor wanted to make sure that the Christians were not conspiring against the Roman government. He asked Saint Justin to submit a list step-by-step of exactly what Christians did when they meet on Sunday mornings. Here's the list:

- ▶ Christians gather on Sunday
- ▶ Writings of the Apostles and prophets are read.
- ▶ The presider challenges the hearers to imitate these things.
- ▶ All then offer prayers of intercession.
- ▶ They exchange the kiss of peace.
- ▶ What is gathered is given to the presider to assist those in need.
- ▶ The gifts of bread and wine (mixed with water) are brought forth.
- ▶ The presider prays for a considerable time as he gives thanks. (Eucharist)
- ▶ At the end all say "Amen".
- ▶ The deacons give the "Eucharistized" bread, wine and water to all present and take some to those absent.

Sounds like the Mass, doesn't it? But the year was 145 A.D.!!!

But there's more..... The Roman Senate was satisfied that the Christians were not conspiring against the government. But they wrote back to Justin and said, "We don't understand how you are using this word Eucharistia." This Greek word normally meant *to give thanks*, but he was using it in another way. Here's what he wrote:

"We call this food Eucharist. And no one is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true and who has been washed in the washing which is for the remission of sins and for regeneration, and is thereby living as Christ has enjoined." For not as common bread or common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by him is both the flesh and blood for that incarnated Jesus. This we have learned from the apostles."

This one paragraph could sum up our Eucharistic today. And the year is 145 A.D.!!! The Church has believed that the Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity from

the very beginning, from the lips of the apostles themselves! And don't ever let anybody tell you anything different!

Scott Hahn, calls Holy Communion, *Covenant Union*. It is *union* because in it we are intimately *united* to Christ and to one another. It is a *covenant* because Jesus declared that what we are doing at Mass is the "New Covenant in His blood."

This is the covenant that all of the previous covenants of salvation history were leading up to, beginning with Adam, Noah and Abraham, continuing through Moses and King David, and finally fulfilled in Christ. It's the ultimate covenant; it's an intimate and sacred family bond between God and us, and each of us with one another. "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."

So when someone holds the Sacred Host out in front of you and declares that "this is the Body of Christ" and you say "Amen," don't take it lightly, because it is at that very moment that you are renewing your part of the *covenant*. You are pledging your *commitment* to live in loving *union* with God and with your neighbors.

When we receive Holy Communion and renew our *commitment* to *Covenant Union* with Christ and with one another, when we hear what he says and do what he does, when we walk out of Mass as a sacrament, as a visible sign of God's invisible grace, this is when we are what we are called to be as Catholic Christians. If every Catholic knew what you know now, we could change the world.