

Dear Friends in Christ, the Church solemnly teaches that the Sacrifice of the Mass and the Sacrifice of the Cross are one and the same sacrifice. Why? Because on Calvary and in the Mass, the Priest and the Victim are one in the same Person; that is, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Having said this, it is important to note that there are a few differences between these two sacrifices: 1) On Calvary, Christ offered a bloody sacrifice by shedding His Blood to the point of death; in the Mass, Christ offers an un-bloody sacrifice, since He cannot experience pain in his body or endure agony because of his Resurrection from the dead; 2) Christ offered only Himself on the Cross; in the Mass, Christ unites His Sacrifice with ours and offers it as one to the Father; 3) On the Cross, those present were able to see Christ's humanity (e.g., His corporal Body); in the Mass, we know that Christ is truly, really, and substantially present with us only through the eyes of faith; 4) On Calvary, Jesus Christ merited our salvation, won for us the graces we need to be saved, obtained for us the blessings of our redemption, and He earned heaven for us by His bloody Sacrifice [all these verbs highlight what Christ did for us two thousand years ago on Calvary]. In the Mass, Christ communicates the blessings of Calvary; He distributes the graces won for us; He makes available the supernatural light merited by His death; and He channels the gifts of salvation for each of us [all these verbs highlight what Christ does for us in every Mass]. Why is it that people sometimes say that the "Mass does not do anything for me?" In other words, why does Mass have so little impact or effect on them? The answer is due to the fact that that person has not properly disposed himself/herself to receive the graces from the Mass. Sacramental theology distinguishes between two very important concepts to explain this fact: 1) *ex-opere operato*; 2) *ex-opere operantis*. The first term (translated as: "by the work worked", or "by the work having been done"), means that a sacrament confers grace whenever the sign is validly affected. In other words, the grace from the sacrament is guaranteed by the power and promise of God whenever the sacrament is properly celebrated by the minister, using proper matter and form. Alternatively, one can say that the grace of a sacrament is never dependent upon the celebrant or his disposition (e.g., holiness). The second term (translated as: "from the work of the doer"), deals with the disposition of the recipient of the sacrament. Here, the efficacy, or the fruitfulness, of any sacrament is directly proportion to the way a person participates in it. If a person says that "Mass does not do anything for me," it isn't because Jesus has failed to communicate, distribute, make available, or channel blessings, grace, supernatural light, or the gifts of salvation in the Mass; rather, it is because he/she has failed to properly disposed themselves to all these things which Jesus wishes to offer them in every Mass. The failure isn't in Jesus' actions; rather, the failure is in their actions and the fault is theirs alone. Let us take the time to prepare ourselves so that we might more worthily participate in the Holy Mass, and in so doing greatly benefit from the Sacrifice which Jesus offered on Calvary two thousand years ago.

Pax Christi, Fr. Thomas