

# Roman Missal, 3rd Edition

## Looking at the text 7

*Take this, all of you, and eat of it,  
for this is my Body,  
which will be given up for you.*

*Take this, all of you, and drink from it,  
for this is the chalice of my Blood  
the Blood of the new and eternal covenant,  
which will be poured out for you and for many  
for the forgiveness of sins.*

*Do this in memory of me.*

### **For many**

When Jesus fed the multitude how many people did he feed? Surely the answer is easy; five thousand. If you remember, St Matthew and St. Mark tell us there was a second miracle in which four thousand were fed. But is that all there is to it?

In his accounts of the two miracles (Chapter 14 verses 15-21 and Chapter 15 verses 32-39), Saint Matthew says something we might wince at in our day and age. Each story gives the number of men adding ‘to say nothing of women and children.’ In fact he is telling us something that is fascinating and surprising for the time. Jesus had women and children among his disciples. If we add these into the number fed at the miracle there must have been far in excess of four or five thousand.

There is something else to think about. We are told that at the end of each meal Jesus told them to collect the scraps and there were twelve and seven baskets full. Is this about not leaving litter or taking a doggy-

bag home? No. We should think about the numbers twelve and seven. Twelve could stand for the twelve tribes of Israel – in other words Jesus would have fed the whole of the Jewish people if they had sat down on the ground that day! Seven is the number of days of creation and a perfect number – Jesus would have fed all the world if they had been there!

So when we think of how many Jesus fed using numbers and the word ‘crowds’ or ‘multitude’ we see it’s more than doing sums. Also in ancient cultures a common way of numbering was 1, 2, 3, many – which could mean beyond counting.

At the Last Supper Jesus gave us his body and blood saying his blood would be shed ‘for many’. We have been used to translating this as ‘for all’ because that is what he intends. So why use the words ‘for many’ in the new translation?

It is an exact translation. Also it reflects this idea that there are some surprises in store for us – just as Jesus had disciples who would not normally be included in the count – he died for far more than we might imagine. In the book of Revelation when John has a vision of the multitude who are saved by the Blood of the Lamb he first sees 144,000 representing the twelve tribes and then a huge number ‘impossible to count’ (Revelation Chapter 7)

It seems strange at first saying ‘for many’ means ‘for all’. But it is not only more accurate it also makes us think about countless numbers extending back through history, across creation now and stretching forward into eternity.

# Do this in memory of me

Do you ever wish you could have been there? Sometimes this comes into our minds as we hear stories of Jesus and the wonderful things he said and did. The telling of the story on television and in movies makes us feel as if we are seeing what it was really like – what experience could be greater than that?

In fact there is an experience so much greater that it can take your breath away.

When Jesus said ‘Do this in memory of me’ he was doing more than asking the disciples not to forget. ‘In memory’ has a special meaning at Passover. In that annual celebration the story is told how God rescued the people from slavery, poverty and death and gave them freedom, the Promised Land and life. The understanding is that those gathered are present to those saving events long ago and God’s mighty hand stretches out and rescues them. This sharing in God’s saving work made present in the here and now is described as doing it ‘in memory’.

So Jesus’ command to remember means that every time we do so we share in the great work that he undertook for us. In the Mass we offer with him his sacrifice. As we share in the miracle of the Mass we are present at his saving death. At the same time we are present at his life-giving Resurrection and glorious Ascension.

In the Eucharistic Prayer the whole Church joins with Jesus who offers the perfect act of worship to his Father. This is the centre of our worship and the gateway to eternity. It is so important that we all participate fully and consciously in this great action of the Mass. To help us there are parts of the Prayer for both priest and people. The ministry of the priest is essential as he draws his priesthood from Jesus the head of the Body, which is the Church, and its great High Priest. At the same time all members of the Church share in Jesus’ priestly dignity. By our Baptism we are all part of a ‘royal priesthood’.

The priest leads us in the Eucharistic Prayer and says the words of Jesus as bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. We join in by making the prayer our own in heart and mind. There are words for everyone to sing or say. We have the 'Holy, holy' which reminds us that our prayer is joined to heaven's worship. There is the Acclamation as we proclaim Jesus' Death and Resurrection and look forward to our being with him for ever. The priest raises the Host and Chalice in offering during the 'through him and with him' and we proclaim our great 'Amen' to say we share in the offering and its promise of everlasting life.

Do you ever wish you could have been there? At every Mass you are.



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