

A Step By Step  
Journey  
Through  
**The Mass**

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# MY FATHER'S HOUSE

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## The Mass

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The fulfillment of all the covenants and the symbol *par excellence* for the new and eternal covenant in the blood of Jesus is the Mass, the reenactment of the Last Supper of Jesus. The Mass is the epitome of the Christian life and the climax of intercommunion with God. The Mass is the fulfillment of the tabernacle, the temple and the covenants of the Old Testament.

### The Last Supper

When, at the last supper, Jesus took bread and wine, offered them to His Father, and gave them in communion to His disciples saying, "This is my body, this is my blood in the new covenant," He was creating a new Passover meal. Just as in the Mosaic covenant, the Passover lamb would be eaten in whole by the people; so also in the sacrifice of the Mass, Christ is consumed, body, blood, soul, and divinity under the appearance of bread and wine. Bread and wine offered by the priest would fulfill the sacrifice of Melchizedek, who first offered bread and wine to the Eternal Father.

### The Liturgy of the Eucharist

"At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet "in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us." (CCC 1323)

### The New Passover

At the Last Supper, Jesus changed the Jews' Passover into the Mass. He became the Passover lamb because by his blood we were to pass over from slavery to sin into the freedom of sons and daughters of God. First, He took the bread and the wine and offered it to God (*an offertory*). Second, He took the bread into His sacred hands and said, "This is my body. Take and eat all of you." In a like manner, after a supper, he took the third cup and said these words over it, "This is the cup of the new and eternal covenant which shall be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me" (*a consecration*). And He gave His body to His disciples to eat, just as the Israelites had eaten the Passover lamb; and He gave the cup for them to drink (*a communion*).

### Offertory Consecration and Communion

And so the Catholic Church has held that there are three essential parts of the Mass: the Offertory, that is the offering of the bread and wine; the consecration, that is the words of Christ spoken by Christ through the priests. "This is my body, this is my blood." And also a communion, that is the distribution of the bread and wine to be consumed by the faithful.

## **Transubstantiation**

The Catholic Church, therefore, has held that the substance of the bread and wine is totally changed into the substance of the body and blood of Christ in such a way that the whole Christ, body, blood, soul, and divinity, is fully contained under each species. It is a primary tenant of our faith that Christ is fully present under the species of bread and wine because the substance of the bread and wine has been transformed into the substance of the body, blood, soul and divinity of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

The Council of Trent summarizes the Catholic faith by declaring: "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." (CCC 1376)

## **The Original Context of These Three Essential Parts**

As we have seen, the original context of these three essential parts of the Mass was the Jewish Passover that Jesus had desired to eat with His apostles before His suffering and death. During this Passover meal, Jesus had also given to them a rather lengthy, last supper discourse which is related in John's gospel from the beginning of Chapter 14 to the end of Chapter 17. During that Last Supper discourse, Jesus had made reference to the holy of holies, or the manifest presence of God, by using the expression, "My Father's house." He promised the apostles that there was a dwelling place for them in the holy of holies and He was about to go and prepare a place for them. He promised to send His Holy Spirit and ask them to wait until power from on high was granted to them, so they would be empowered to do what He asked them to do. He compared His unity with them to the type of unity that a branch had with the vine separated from which, it simply could not bear fruit.

He promised to hear and answer their every prayer and make them His disciples and fill them with the fruits of the Holy Spirit. He promised that they would experience His love and peace in an incredible fashion. He promised to enable them to love each other with His agape love so that they would be no strangers to His voice. And He promised that they would be His apostles to bring His wisdom and love to a dark and broken world. And that whatever they asked the Father in line with their ministry, He would give to them.

## **The Eucharist in the Economy of Salvation**

In the old covenant, the sacraments were more numerous, more difficult and less efficacious than in the new covenant. In the old covenant, bread and wine were offered in sacrifice among the first fruits of the earth as a symbol of gratitude to God. They receive a new significance during the time of the Exodus when the unleavened bread that the Israelites consumed every year at Passover time, commemorated the haste of the departure that liberated them from Egypt in the Great Passover from captivity to the Promised Land. Bread and wine received further significance through the manna that God miraculously fed them in the desert. The Cup of Blessing at the end of the Jewish Passover meal adds to the festive joy of wine a Messianic expectation of the eternal banquet in the eternal city of Jerusalem.

## **The Eucharistic Promise**

After the multiplication of the loaves when the Lord said the blessing, broke and distributed the loaves through His disciples to feed the multitude, He was prefiguring the superabundance of this unique bread of His body and blood, which He would also bless, break and give to the successors of His apostles to distribute in Holy Communion. This sign of the water turned wine at Cana already announced the hour

of Jesus' glorification, and would make manifest the fulfillment of Christ's promise of a wedding feast in the Father's Kingdom where the faithful would drink the new wine that had been changed into the blood of Christ.

After Jesus multiplied the bread for the 5,000, He promised to give His disciples living bread come down from heaven, his own flesh to eat (cf Jn 6:48). This first announcement of the Eucharist would divide His disciples, just as the announcement of His passion would scandalize them and many of them would walk with Him no longer, finding this too hard a saying (cf Jn 6:66). The Eucharist and the cross are still stumbling blocks. It is the same mystery and it never ceases to be an occasion of division. "Will you also go away?" (Jn 6:67). It is the question of the Lord that echoes through the ages, as a loving invitation to discover that only He has "the words of eternal life" and that to receive in faith the gift of His Eucharist is to receive the Lord Himself. (CCC1336)

### **The Institution of the Eucharist**

The Lord Jesus said that He loved those who were His own and would love them to the end. So knowing that He was about to suffer and die and then leave them to return to His Father, in the course of the Passover meal He washed their feet as a sign of humble service and gave them a new commandment to love one another as He loved them. As a pledge of this love, in order to make them sharers in His Passover, He then instituted the Eucharist as a memorial of His life, death and resurrection and commanded His apostles to celebrate this new Passover until His return. He, thereby, constituted the apostles to be priests of the New Testament (Council of Trent, DS1740).

All three synoptic gospels give us an accurate account of this institution. But John the Beloved reports the words of Jesus in the synagogue at Capernaum, that give us a Eucharistic promise wherein Jesus says, "With all of the earnestness I possess, unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood you have no life in you. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink" (Jn 6:52). Christ, thus, calls Himself *The Bread of Life Come Down From Heaven* (Jn 6:47).

### **St. Luke**

Jesus chose the time of Passover to fulfill what He had announced at Capernaum: giving His disciples His Body and His Blood: Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover meal for us, that we may eat it...." They went...and prepared the Passover. And when the hour came, He sat at table, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ....And he took bread, and when He had given thanks He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after supper, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:7-20; cf. Mt 26:17-29; Mk 14:12-25; 1 Cor 11:23-26).

By celebrating the Last Supper, Jesus gave the Passover meal its ultimate meaning. He transformed it into the Mass. He became the Lamb of God slain for the sins of the world by whose blood we are cleansed. His body became the new manna containing within it all the ingredients of holiness. His blood became the new wine in the new banquet of the Lord. The Passover now also symbolized His passing over to the Father by His death and resurrection and our passing over from slavery to sin into the new freedom of the promised land; and also the final Passover of the Church into the glory of heaven.

### "Do this in memory of me"

When Jesus commanded His disciples to do this in memory of Me, He asked them to repeat His words and actions until He comes. And thus the Mass is both a memorial of Christ--of His life, death and resurrection--as well as a reenactment of His death and resurrection. Right from the beginning, the Church has been faithful to His commands. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read these words, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the *breaking of bread* and the prayers....Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts" (Acts 2:42, 46).

### The First Day of the Week

Because the resurrection of Jesus was on Sunday, the earliest Christian met to break bread on the first day of the week (cf Acts 2:42,46; Acts 20:7). From that time to our own, the Eucharist has continued so that today we encounter Jesus in the breaking of the bread with the same fundamental structure that He gave to us in the Last Supper. From then until now, the Eucharist remains the center of the Church's life, the source and summit of holiness, and the greatest way to worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

### A Short History of the Mass

Down through the history of the Church, these six parts of the Mass have been reserved: first, Scripture readings, second, a discourse to explain them; third an offering of bread and wine; fourth, a consecration so that the bread and wine become the body of Christ, fifth, a communion and sixth, a final hymn.

### The Roman Church

The Western Rite of the Church, or the Roman Catholic Church, has embellished these parts so that for some time now, there have been at least 23 parts. Let us take a closer look at each one of these parts.

## Part I. The Liturgy of the Word

- 1. An Opening Hymn.** The opening hymn is meant to be a gathering song, which gathers the people together and unites their minds and hearts as they prepare to worship the Lord. Most often, a song of praise is chosen.
- 2. Introductory Prayers.** The introductory prayers begin with a Sign of the Cross, which is an ancient Christian sacramental that not only places us in the Trinity, but calls us to realize that we act and live in them; that is, in their name. The Sign of the Cross is thus a very powerful sacramental that collects us and strengthens us as we begin to worship the Lord.

This is followed by the most beautiful greeting, "The grace and peace of God our Father, the love of Jesus and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." This is taken right out of the Scriptures (cf 2 Cor 12-13). In fact, Paul often, in the beginning of his letters, greeted his people, *grace and peace*. Grace is a very significant word. It means a pure and unmerited gift from God; or, as someone has defined it, "God's riches At Christ's expense." Peace or shalom was also a relational word. In the Hebrew mind it means to be at peace with another person or in correct relationship with love and mercy.

3. **The confession of sins.** Whenever we come before the Lord, we should come with pure hearts; and we do this by confessing our sins and our sinfulness. All of us have fallen short of that perfection that God wants to bring into our minds and hearts. So the word "sin" literally means "to miss the mark" or "to fall short." Like the arrow, which an archer shoots that misses the mark, so do we often miss the mark. So the Church has placed the Confiteor, that beautiful prayer of forgiveness and repentance to be found right at the beginning of the Mass.

The Confiteor contains two elements: a humble confession of sins and a promise to forgive all those who have forgiven us. This confession is followed by three "Kyrie's" or "Lord Have Mercies." St. Paul, writing at least 30 years after the Last Supper, states, "A man should examine his conscience first; only then should he eat the bread and eat the cup. He who eats and drinks without recognizing the body, eats and drinks a judgment on himself. That is why many of you are sick and infirmed and why many are dying. If we were to examine ourselves, we would not be falling under judgment this way; but since it is the Lord who judges us, He chastens us to keep us from becoming condemned with the rest of the world" (1 Cor 11:28-32).

4. **The hymn of glory.** This hymn of praise is known as the Gloria. The Church, realizing that her primary role is to worship the Father through the Son in spirit and in truth, places the magnificent hymn of praise known as the Gloria right here at the beginning of the Mass. The Church wisely realizes that we are, above all, here to give honor and glory, worship and adoration to our God. Sometimes this hymn is recited by the priests in union with the people and sometimes, it is sung. Ideally, it should be sung by all and not just the choir, as the liturgy states.

5. **The Collect.** Next comes a prayer that gathers, known as the collect, because it collects all the sentiments and intentions of the people gathered together. In this prayer is usually stated the theme of the Mass, as well as the name of the saint whose feast is being celebrated. Each Mass has its own particular theme, which shall become clearer through the selection of the readings and the alleluia verse.

6. **The First Readings.** At Sunday Masses, there are two Scriptural readings in addition to the Gospel, the first of which is taken from the Old Testament, the second from the New Testament. During the week, there is only one first reading. There is a distinct working of these readings by the liturgists to make sure that all of the Scriptures are read in a cycle of three years. Also, there is a unified theme that evolves from each liturgy so that in a course of a three-year cycle, every aspect of Catholic doctrine, morals, and spirituality is presented in the liturgy.

Since Sunday is the Lord's Day and the majority of the faithful are present for this more solemn Mass, there are two first readings. This is also true on special feast days. Once again, liturgists try to show the interrelationship between the old covenants and the new covenants precisely in the way that they juxtapose certain scriptures so that in the old covenant the new is foreshadowed; and, in the new covenant, the old is made clear.

7. **Responsorial Psalm.** After the first reading, there is a *responsorial psalm*, which is based upon the first reading and to which the faithful give a response. The Alleluia verse which follows the responsorial psalm is, once again, a powerful call to the congregation to worship. It contains a one sentence proclamation of the overall theme of the Mass, which, by now, should be become more clear because it was contained in the opening prayer, the first and second readings and the responsorial psalm, as well. It will be fully unfolded in the Gospel and homily message. Once again, liturgically speaking, every

Mass has a specific theme and every fundamental dogma, commandment and principle of spirituality will be proclaimed within a three year cycle.

**8. The Gospel.** The Gospel reading is taken from one of the four gospels, and each of the synoptic gospels have their own liturgical year. Each Sunday reading is taken from the very next section of the specific gospel. For example, if last Sunday's Gospel was Luke 1:1-12, this Sunday's Gospel will be Luke 1:12-21, which is the next full logical section. It is in the Gospel that we have the theme of the day most explicitly proclaimed, and it will be upon the gospel reading primarily that the homily will be usually based.

The Gospels are unique literary forms. They are not biographies, as such, but extended theological proclamations of the words and deeds of Jesus. They, in short, are the Good News that Jesus has come to bring us, namely that He is Lord and Savior and we must be converted to Him so that His Spirit can enable us to think, love and act like Him. Only deacons or priests can proclaim the Gospel and give the homily because they share in the Sacrament of Order. The Sacrament of Holy Order is given to trained deacons and priests to bring about "holy order" within to the church as to its teachings, disciplines and liturgical celebrations.

**9. The Homily.** The homily is a proclamation or explanation of the Good News that Jesus has come to bring us. It's purpose is to inspire and to inform the faithful so that they will be able to know and live the Good News of Jesus. Not only are there good homily aids to assist in the preparation of a homily, but there also are liturgical norms as to its nature and necessity.

**10. The Nicene Creed.** After the Good News is proclaimed, the essential truths of our faith are proclaimed by our priests and people in the Creed, known as the Nicene Creed named after the ecumenical council of Nicaea held in 325 AD to formulate the essential elements of our Christian faith in twelve fundamental articles that are found in the Creed.

**11. Prayers of the Faithful.** After the Creed, the priest initiates the prayers of the faithful, which are simply a gathering of public and private intentions to be prayed for by the whole assembly. Each one of these prayers is followed by an invitation, "Let us pray to the Lord," and a response such as, "Lord hear our prayer."

With the prayers of the faithful, the first part of the Mass, known as the Liturgy of the Word, concludes.

## Part II -- Liturgy of the Eucharist

**12. Preparation of the Altar and Gifts.** After the Liturgy of the Word, the Offertory Song is sung. Meanwhile, the ministers place the corporal, the purificator, the chalice, and the missal on the altar. Sufficient hosts and wine for the faithful are to be prepared. It is most important that the faithful should receive the body of the Lord in hosts consecrated at the Mass they attend and share in the cup, when permitted. Communion is thus a clearer sign of sharing in the sacrifice which is actually taking place.

**13. The Offertory.** The priest, standing at the altar, takes the paten and bread and, holding it up, says the blessing over the bread, praying that it will become for us the bread of life. Then after the deacon or priest pours wine into the chalice, the priest offers the wine to God to become our spiritual drink.

With this Offertory comes the first of the three principle parts of the Mass. The Offertory was first performed by Jesus at the Last Supper when He offered bread and wine to His father. This is essentially the same now as each priest offers first the bread and then the wine to the Father in union with Christ, the principal celebrant at every Mass. Every Mass is a direct participation in the Last Supper and in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Every Mass is a reenactment of both the Last Supper and the Calvary; and every priest acts only in the person of Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest. Since everyone of the actions of Jesus touch both time and eternity, the Mass is an unbloodied reenactment of the Last Supper and the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

*Offertory Procession.* Usually at Sunday Mass there is an offertory procession and a collection of the gifts that the faithful offer up to Jesus. Every Christian is called upon to offer his or her time, talent and treasure to God. It is precisely here during the Offertory that this Offertory collection of the gifts and monies takes place.

**14. Prayer Over the Gifts.** Here follows the second specific prayer of the Mass-- the Offertory prayer--which prepares us to offer our time, talent and treasure, as well as our very selves to the Lord (cf Rom 12:1-2).

### **The Anaphora (The Canon of the Mass or The Eucharistic Prayer)**

These terms are more commonly used in reference to Eastern rites. They comprise the principle prayers of Eucharistic liturgy, and they extend from the opening dialogue between priest and people just before the Preface and extend all the way to the final Doxology and Amen. In the Canon or Anaphora (Greek: Offering), the Church recalls the whole saving act of Christ by recalling the Last Supper and Christ's sacrificial death. The priest calls down the Holy Spirit and consecrates the bread and wine into the body of Christ.

**15. The Preface.** Immediately following the Prayer over the Gifts and the Offertory, the Preface initiates the Canon of the Mass and is an integral part of it. More than 90 Prefaces are available for various feasts and seasons. The Preface is an extended poem of praise and thanksgiving. Each Prefaces elaborates on God's work in creation and redemption, while focusing on a particular aspect of the saving work of Jesus. It is followed by the acclamation, "Holy, Holy, Holy." The whole community thus joins in the unending praise that the Church in heaven (the angels and saints) sing eternally to the thrice holy God (cf CCC 1352).

**16. The Sanctus.** The angelic salutation of "Holy, Holy, Holy" spoken of first in Isaiah 6, as well as by the angels of Bethlehem, as well as the whole heavenly host in the Book of Revelation, is a magnificent hymn of praise and worship to the Triune God.

**17. The First Highlight -- the Consecration.** The highlight of every Mass takes place at this moment when the priest consecrates the bread and wine. Under a singular miracle of the Holy Spirit, they are transformed into the very body, blood, soul and divinity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Not only is this a great miracle, but also it is a great mystery. It is the "mysterium fidei" (the mystery of faith). This is called the *Epiclesis*, when the priest asks the Father to send the Holy Spirit on the bread and wine so that they are transformed. In this *institution narrative*, the power of the words and action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit make sacramentally present under the species of bread and wine Christ's body and blood, His sacrifice offered on the cross once for all.

This is immediately followed by the *Eucharistic acclamation*, which acclaim the death, resurrection and second coming of Jesus. This is called the *anamnesis* (Greek: memorial). The function of the *anamnesis* is twofold. It not only recalls something which is done in the past, namely the death and resurrection of Christ; it also renders those memorialized actions truly present now. In short, they make Christ's sacrifice truly sacramentally present in the now time on earth. As the new Catechism says, "In the liturgical celebration of these events they become in a certain way present and real" (CCC 1363).

Following the Eucharistic acclamation are commemorations of the living, especially the pope and the bishops, followed by a commemoration of the faithful departed. The Great "Amen" here signals the end of what is called the Canon, which began with the Preface. This *Great Amen* is preceded by a beautiful praise ode to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**18. The Our Father.** Now, as we prepare for communion, the priest exhorts us to pray that most exquisite of all prayers that Jesus, Himself, has taught us, known as the *Our Father* to be followed by a prayer of deliverance, a prayer of peace and the sign of peace during which the faithful are encouraged to offer some sign of support, encouragement and affection to each other, which usually is a hand shake.

**19. The Lamb of God.** The Church, with great wisdom, encourages us to plead for mercy to Jesus, who is the Lamb slain who has taken away our sins.

**20. Another Highlight - Communion.** Now comes the second highlight of the Mass, the point at which the faithful actually receive Jesus and participate in the very body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus. Every time they receive the Eucharist, they should be transformed more fully into Christ and share more deeply in His divinity. Since Christianity is the divinization of human nature by the spirit of the Living God, the Eucharist is the high point and most effective, singular way for this transformation to take place. Every time we receive this Eucharist, we become what we have received -- that is bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh, humility of His humility, and holiness of His very holiness. Thus, the Eucharist is the summit of the Christian life.

**21. Communion Song.** During the distribution of the Eucharist, a Communion song is sung to be followed by a definite period of silence, wherein the faithful and the priest are encouraged not only to praise God but also to listen as He speaks from within. These precious moments, when the faithful meditate on the full-blown mystery that has just taken place--namely that they have just received the very body, blood, soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus, should not be interrupted by singing or talking. This period of silence can be the most fruitful part of the Mass and the time for the greatest inspiration and healing.

**22. Closing Prayer and Dismissal.** Once this silence has taken place, the priest then leads the people in the closing prayer, final prayer and dismissal, which includes the encouragement to go and live what they have received.

**23. Recessional.** The last part of the Mass is the singing of the recessional song, which should be evangelistic in nature sending forth the people to bring Christ's light to a darkened world and to be His instruments of wisdom and power.

### **Fruits of the Mass.**

Communion with the body and blood of Christ increases the communicants union with Christ, forgives venial sins, and preserves them from grave sins. It strengthens the bonds of love between the communicant and Christ and, thereby, reinforces the love and unity of the Church as Christ's Mystical Body. Therefore, "the Church warmly recommends that the faithful receive Holy Communion *each time* they participate in the celebration of the Eucharist; she obliges them to do so once a year" (CCC 1417).

### **Eucharist Adoration.**

Because Christ Himself is present in the sacrament of the altar, He is to be honored with the worship of adoration. "A visit to the Blessed Sacrament is a proof of gratitude, an expression of love and a duty of adoration towards Christ our Lord" (Pope Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei* No. 66).

### **Pledge of Future Glory**

Having passed from this world to the Father, Christ gives us in the Eucharist the pledge of glory with Him. Participation in the Holy Sacrifice identifies us with His heart, sustains our strength along the pilgrimage of this life, makes us long for eternal life, and unites us even now to the Church in heaven, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the saints. (CCC 1419)

"At the Last Supper, the Lord Himself directed the disciples attention toward the fulfillment of the Passover and the kingdom of God; 'I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit from the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom' (Mt 26:29). Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she remembers this promise and turns her gaze to *Him who is to come*. In her prayer, she calls for His coming: *Come Lord Jesus*. The Church knows that the Lord comes even now in His Eucharist and that He is there in our midst. However, His presence is veiled.

"Therefore, we celebrate the Eucharist 'awaiting the blessed hope and awaiting the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ' asking 'to share in your glory when every tear will be wiped away. On that day we shall see you, Our God, as you are. We shall become like you and praise you forever through Christ Our Lord.' There is no surer pledge or clearer sign of this hope in the new heavens and new earth than the Eucharist. Every time this mystery is celebrated, 'the work of our redemption is carried on' and we 'break the one bread that provides the medicine of immortality, the antidote for death, and the food that makes us live forever in Jesus Christ'" (St. Ignatius of Antioch cf CCC 1405).