



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The second reading from Hebrews is a powerful invitation into the mystery of the Mass. It begins with a reference to when the Israelites were at Mount Sinai, and how God appeared to them:

You have not approached that which could be touched and a blazing fire and gloomy darkness and storm and a trumpet blast and a voice speaking words such that those who heard begged that no message be further addressed to them.

(Hebrews 12:18-19, see Exodus 19).

The people of God were kept at a distance in order to come to a greater understanding of the holiness of God.

The Letter to the Hebrews then contrasts the experience of God by the ancient Israelites to the new dispensation found in Christ:

No, you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel. (Hebrews 12:22-24a)

Instead of being forbidden to enter into the Holy of Holies on Mount Sinai, we approach the new "Mount Zion," surrounded by "countless angels" and the "firstborn enrolled in heaven," and the Holy Trinity. Here, the Blood of Jesus "speaks more eloquently than that of Abel" (which you remember cried out to God from the ground when he was slain by Cain, see Genesis 4:10).

This is the Mass. At every Mass, we enter into Heaven. Though we can't see it, there are countless angels, all the saints, and the Holy Trinity right here surrounding us in the Church. The Church reminds us this through symbols – hints, if you will – of what is so real but so beyond our sight! We have statues and stain glass to remind us of the presence of the saints and angels – and we even have the Trinity stain glass window behind the Sanctuary to symbolize God's presence. We sing the "Holy, Holy, Holy" in a distant echo to the strains of the angels singing around us. We sometimes use incense to remind us of the prayers of the saints rising up to God, and of the glory "Shekinah" cloud indicating the presence of God. We have candles, like in the book of Revelation, to show the light of Christ present. We have all these symbols, but they point to a reality which *is truly there at Mass* – even though we cannot see it – **when we're at Mass, Heaven is only a quarter inch away!** At the crowning summit of all of this, we receive the Blood of Christ which speaks **mercy** more eloquently than vengeance (when we receive Communion under either species [the forms of bread or wine] we receive the fullness of Christ – Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity).

If only we had eyes to see!

I pray that we may all allow the mystery that happens at Mass to open our eyes more fully to God's loving presence in our midst. May it transform us, and call us to see Heaven is among us!