

Mass On the Altar of the World

Teilhard de Chardin

Recast by Elizabeth Jarrett Andrew

Translated into Spanish by Celina Martina

This is a contemporary re-rendering of Teilhard de Chardin's personal mass (The Heart of Matter). I first experienced an abbreviated version (based on an excerpt in Ursula King's Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: Selected Readings) led by Cynthia Bourgeault at the Center for Action and Contemplation's Living School, and was deeply moved. In this rendering, I attempt to remain faithful to Teilhard's soaring language and incarnational theology, contributing economy and flow to create a functioning liturgy, and layering in the principle of the sacred feminine—God-bearer, the Theotokos. I've imagined myself as a translator, making accessible to contemporary Christians a dimension of their mystical heritage that most often remains hidden. It is my prayer that this service reinvigorate the sacrament of communion, reconnecting it to what Teilhard calls "the majesty of the Real itself": our good earth, our embodied lives.

Recommendations:

Participants gather in a circle, ideally outdoors before dawn. Prepare the group to mirror the readers' gestures, repeat their plea, and enter into a period of silence. The readers should sit or stand opposite one another in the circle.

I recommend prefacing and/or following this liturgy with collective song and movement. Eye of the Heart uses [Los Cuatro Elementos by Pedro Vadhar](#) and [choreography by Danza Circular](#). No other words are to be spoken with the exception of an initial welcome with instructions and a segue into dance and song, and a final, simple blessing: "Go in peace."

Ideally the recitation is done over live, non-intrusive background music. Cynthia Bourgeault recommends "[Essence](#)" by Pater Kater, which she describes as "forgiving in the extreme and perfectly adapted to the overall mood and intent."

The duration of silence depends on circumstances, although I recommend 15-20 minutes.

This liturgy is offered freely. If you'd like to make a contribution in gratitude, [please donate to the ministry of The Eye of the Heart Center for Creative Contemplation](#). Please attribute us if you use the liturgy. I also invite you to send us stories and photographs from your worship experience in the spirit of inspiring others: connect@eyeoftheheartcenter.org.

Mass On the Altar of the World

Offering

Both readers: Pulsing Heart of the Universe—

Reader 1: Since once again we've forgotten how to find You at our altars in bread and wine, this morning we raise ourselves beyond these symbols, up to the majesty of the Real itself. We, your creatures, make of the earth our altar, upon which we offer You the labors and sufferings of our world.

Over there, on the horizon, the sun has touched with light the outermost fringe of the eastern sky. Once again, beneath this steady sphere of fire, the sentient surface of the earth awakens, trembling, and begins again its fearful travail. Grant us the remembrance of all those whom the new day's light now touches—those aware and inanimate, growing and still, hidden and manifest. Grant us the earth's mystical presence.

Reader 2: In the beginning was *Love*, intelligent, powerful, energizing; yielding, birthing, self-giving. In the beginning was *the Word*, fused with matter and ever burgeoning into being. Before all else was made, from fertile dark sprang *light*, which patiently, surely, grows in our emptiness. In the beginning was *fire*. You, Holy One, are the blazing heart of creation, without duration or space, from which our cosmos bursts forth and careens toward multiplicity and wholeness. You are enwombed in the earth and in our flesh, always birthing being. Everything is being; everywhere there is being and nothing but being, save in the fragmentation of creatures and the clash of our atoms. Your life pours vigor into the sacrament of the world.

Sacred Heart, we cherish one by one those you've given us who tend and augment our being:

Our communities of affinity;
Those who surround and support us though we do not know them;
The vastness of humanity.

This restless multitude, the immensity of which terrifies us—it is from this deep we cry out. All that lends this day increase, all that diminishes, all that will die, we gather into our arms and hold out to you.

(Pause while Reader 1 leads gestures in gathering and offering.)

Compassion is the substance of our sacrifice, the only sacrifice You desire. Our offering is nothing less than creation—the ripple we make in the great stream of being.

Within these depths you have planted a desire, irresistible, hallowing, from which we cry out, believer and unbeliever alike, "Make us one!"

All repeat once: "Make us one!"

Reader 1: What our hearts crave with so little expectation of fulfillment, you now, with the sun's radiant return, magnificently reveal for us: How your creatures are bound together such that none exists without all others; how we depend on You, our single, central reality, to give us coherence and unity. We inescapably exist in You, universal life, in and through which all things breathe and have their being.

Communion

Reader 2: In the newness begotten today, the Word continues the unending act of its own birth. We place on the paten of our open hands the harvest of our labor.

(Pause while Reader 1 leads the gesture of opening hands to form a plate.)

Into our chalice, the cup of our hearts, we pour the bitterness of limitations and grief.

(Pause while Reader 1 leads the gesture of cupping hands.)

With these humble vessels, we open to You the depths of our being. We gather into a single prayer both our delight in what we are given and thirst for what we lack. Receive this all-embracing host which your whole creation, moved by your magnetism, offers this dawn.

Transfigure the earthly suffering we've gathered in our hearts. Remold it. Only You know how we come into being, like shoots from stems, growing from death new life in endless evolution.

Over every living thing which is to spring up, to transform, to flower, to ripen this day, say again the words: This is my Body. Over every death-force which waits in readiness to corrode, to wither, to cut down, speak again the supreme mystery of faith: This is my Blood.

Reader 1: Help us escape the constrictions of the too narrow image of You which we fashion for ourselves. You who are naught else but love, to you alone we surrender.

Divine influence secretly diffused and active in the depths of matter; dazzling center where all the innumerable fibers of the manifold meet; power as implacable as the world and as warm as maternal comfort... You who gather into your exuberant I AM every beauty, every empathy, every energy, every manner of existence; to You our being cries out with desire as vast as the universe...

Grant that you become for us a real Presence, that in every rock and leaf, drop of water and living creature we may sense You, know You, love You. We beg: Give us faith. Give us hope. Give us love.

Reader 2: We all, from the moment of birth, feel both absence and nearness within us as enduring ache. In our heritage of sorrow and hope, passed through the ages, there is no yearning more desolate than that which makes us weep with vexation and desire as we sense but cannot fully know Your Presence, nameless, impalpable, dwelling within every cell.

What we dare to call our soul is more than we can encompass. Transform our terror at the ceaseless ways you draw close into overflowing joy. Awaken our essence. Draw us into the

secret recesses of your inmost heart, and there keep us, refine us, enfold us, kindle us, until we become our truest Self, which is You.

And so, with all creation, we cry out: Make us one!

[Readers encourage others in circle to join in repeating this spoken petition, standing and lifting up hands. When words subside, enter a period of seated silence.]

Prayer

Reader 1: Once again Fire has penetrated the earth. Flame has lit the world from within. All things are infused, from the inmost core of the tiniest atom to the mighty sweep of the most universal laws. Blazing Spirit—Fire—personal, infinite, the consummation of a union so immeasurably more loving and more desirable than anything we might dream—breathe soul into the newly formed, fragile film of matter with which this day the world is to be freshly clothed.

Speak through our lips your word. Move through our bodies your infinite mercy. May our hearts make your peace.

In this dedication we desire to live, and to die.

Amen.