

The Mass (Part IV)

by Fr. Tim Church

PREPARING FOR THE MASS

The spiritual, emotional and practical disposition that we bring to the Mass is important. In our lifestyle, it is sometimes hard to be composed and ready to participate in the Mass to the degree we would like. Some attempt, nonetheless, needs to be made. Here is some simple guidance:

There is a weekly cycle to our spiritual life, established since ancient times. We should consider our past week, the sins, the blessings and the challenges. If you can get to the Mass just a few minutes sooner than usual, you will have time to kneel down and ask God's forgiveness. He will likely be more patient than anyone in hearing your excuses, how all the pressures of the week seem to boil over into a short temper; or how all the good intentions for time for prayer evaporated in sick kids, cars that wouldn't start or pressure from work. Tell God you are sorry. We should not put out our hands to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus, what we do not deserve, without some apology for our sins.

Even with all the troubles of life there are always reasons to give thanks. One of the helpful spiritual disciplines is to make thanksgiving lists and to offer them up to God, who is the source of all that is good. We take a lot for granted, like things of the earth upon which our life is wholly dependent. We should not forget them. Unless we develop an attitude and practice of thanksgiving, we will never be witnesses of the miracles that exist everyday, all around us.

Finally, Jesus taught us to pray for our needs, unceasingly. While this may be a great mystery to us, the command to pray for what we need is quite clear.

As Jesus ascended his throne on the cross he did so to stand before the Father, offering his life for our sake. Without this offering, we are doomed, without hope. And now we join our needs to his offering, knowing that the Father receives our prayers because of the offering of Jesus. Every Mass we attend should have our special intention offered along with those of the parish.

It is a venerable practice among Catholics to have the Mass offered for a particular need, oftentimes for the repose of the soul of someone who has died. There a variety of ways of acknowledging this intention, sometimes just before the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer (over the Bread and Wine). Liturgical norms do not require that the intention be acknowledged publicly, but it is an encouraging practice. Even if a "public" intention is not offered, we should bring our private intentions to every Mass.

As we will discuss later, the Mass changes things, makes things better. Before every Mass, we should beg God to make things better through the offering of Jesus.

A PRAYER BEFORE MASS

Good Father, I come here today to share in the offering of Jesus, your Blessed Son. I come to remember Jesus' life and death. I come to thank you for all the blessings that you bestow on me. I am sorry that I have forgotten these things and have strayed from you, especially in my sin of _____. I offer this Mass to your glory and in service to others both in my parish and throughout the world. Because you are all powerful and because you have commanded us to turn to you for all we need, I ask your help, especially with _____. I pray for my friends and my family and those who have died, especially _____. Bless the priest who will offer this Mass and all who will help him. Through this Holy Mass and the gift of the Body and Blood of your Son, more perfectly form in me your image. Make me a strong witness to your love and strengthen our parish to accomplish the work you have given us. I pray this in name of Jesus, my Lord and Savior. Amen.