

I Showed Up for Mass, Now What?

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Why did you attend Mass today? What does Sunday Mass mean to you? The Mass is most meaningful to those who strive to understand it more fully and participate in it more actively. The Mass is meaningless ritual for those who are present mostly as spectators. Mass is not intended for onlookers, by nature it is an encounter with God and with one another. We don't come to Mass solely to "get" something (although God is more than happy to give); **the first and most important reason we come to Mass is to WORSHIP, and to do so as a whole People of God, not merely a gathering of individuals.** This gathering is one in which we celebrate who we are and what God has done for us in Christ.

To worship God means to give him the honor and respect that is due to him simply because he is God. This action fulfills the First Commandment: "I am the Lord your God, you shall not have other gods besides me" (*Exodus 20:3*) and is essentially what we pray when, in the "Our Father" we pray, "... hallowed be Thy Name." The Mass, also referred to as the liturgy, is the way in which we "proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes" (*I Corinthians 11:26*). According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "The word 'liturgy' originally meant a **"public work"** or a 'service in the name of/on behalf of the people.' In Christian tradition it means the participation of the People of God in "the work of God." (CCC no. 1069). The liturgy has the power to transform us and in turn enables us to transform our world, enabling us to become more than we ever thought we could be. Pope John Paul II said *"It is in the sacraments especially in the Eucharist that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of men"* (*Catechesis in our Time*, no. 23). This transformation starts with God the Father's initiative in inviting us to be a part of his family; thus, **participating in Mass is both our right and our duty as baptized Catholics.**

Sometimes people will say things like, "I don't feel like going to Mass" or "I don't get anything out of it." These are legitimate comments based upon people's real feelings. It's okay to feel this way, but remember, this is not primarily about *feeling* at all. God has commanded us to worship him in the assembly of his people. We can either obey God's command or not-it's that simple. There are times when I don't "feel" like going to Mass (and I'm married to a deacon!). We do the right thing because it is the right thing to do. People have a point when they say, "I don't get anything out of it." It is responsibility of the Church to plan good liturgy, with music and atmosphere that helps people pray. It is the responsibility of the presiding priest to lead God's people reverently in prayer. It is also the responsibility of every Catholic to come prepared to fully participate. **What are some ways we can better prepare for Mass to transform us?**

1. **Anticipate Mass all week.** Treat it as a special occasion. Talk with family members about which Mass you plan to attend. Lay out appropriate clothing in advance (pick out something a little nicer than you would wear to the grocery store.) Leave your home early enough to drive at a relaxed pace. Greet people as you walk in. Smile!
2. **Arrive early (yes, early!)** This seems almost unthinkable given how many people stream into Mass late on a regular basis. Ten minutes before Mass begins our church should be full of prayerful people, waiting with loving, longing anticipation for what is about to happen. If we all changed this one bad habit of being late for Mass and leaving early, we would quickly experience more of the power and blessing of Mass.
3. **Read the Scripture readings of the Sunday Mass in advance**, perhaps early in the week. Allow the Word of God to speak to you. Go to www.usccb.org and click on the calendar for the day's readings. You can also listen to them read aloud or watch a video commentary!
4. **Participate. Open your mouth.** Speak the people's responses with full voice. Sing. If you can't sing, sing louder! Don't worry about what the people around you will think. They are too busy worrying about what you are thinking! Remember, this isn't a popularity contest-it's worship. Give it all you've got!
5. **If you've got children, be patient.** They won't be small and squirmy forever. **If other people have children, be patient with them.** Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them" (*Matthew 19:13*). Children are a gift from the Lord to all of us. Yes, they can be annoying and uncooperative. For the very young, consider using the services of our parish nursery. For older children, insist that they learn how to conduct themselves during Mass. This will take time. Do not give up! Sit near the front and allow each one to bring a bible picture book to Mass. Teach children about the Mass, by doing so you will learn, too.

The Mass has the power to help make us holy and beautiful in the eyes of God. As adopted children of God, we are able to take on characteristics that make us more like God. In order for this to happen, we must be open to it, we must be disposed or inclined to receive the blessings God is ready to give us. The Mass is always the Paschal Sacrifice of the Son of God to the Eternal Father-that never changes-yet we can be changed depending on whether or not we allow it to have an effect in us.