

## Preparing for Mass

As the face-to-face sessions were being held for those involved in liturgical ministries, several people made suggestions to how the faithful can prepare themselves for Mass. These practical tips are offered here for your consideration. By working together, we can create powerful liturgical experiences that engage our head, hearts, hands, and voices.

- **Prepare at home.** Develop a habit of daily prayer. Include some of the words of the Mass in your repertoire of prayer at home. These will help prepare you for Sunday worship with the community. Pay attention to the times that you sacrifice for others, and the times you rejoice with others as well.
- **Prepare the children.** As a parent, you are the first teachers in the ways of faith. If you have young children, talk about the readings for Sunday Mass ahead of time so they are familiar with what they will hear during the Liturgy of the Word. Encourage them to sing and to follow along. Sit where they can see what is happening at Mass.
- **Arrive on time.** Come to Mass on time, if not a little early. You can meet other people, catch up on their week, learn about their joys and struggles, and prepare yourself to worship as the Body of Christ. If you arrive late, you have not joined with others in the opening hymn. If you take your seat while the readings are being proclaimed, you will distract others from listening to the voice of God speaking to them. Arriving on time shows respect for others in the community, and to God who calls you together.
- **Greet the priest.** If your priest is standing by the door, say hello—before or after the Mass. But, if you have something important to tell him or discuss with him, be sure to contact him some other time instead. Standing at the door of the church and away from his office, vested for Mass, he is probably not able to make an appointment with you or even to remember an intention that's important to you. He really does care, but the number of people walking by is so large that he cannot remember everything people say to him before and after Mass. If you need to go to confession before Mass, try to go during the times your priest has already set aside. He may not be able to help you without prior notice in the precious minutes before Mass begins.
- **Sit in front.** You probably have a favorite place to sit. But if there are empty seats in front of you, move up. Participating at Mass demands your full attention. Nothing else should distract you. The closer you are to the action, the more easily and fully you will be able to participate.
- **Shut off electronic devices.** You may have a phone, a watch, or some other device that may create a sound or distract you with messages. You show respect for others in the assembly if you shut off these devices so as not to disturb their prayer. You will also concentrate better on the work you are now called to do.
- **Be welcoming.** Move to the center when you know that more room is needed. Learn the names of those who sit around you. When you see parents with young children, remember that a smile goes a long way in making others feel at ease.

- **Sing.** When you are invited to sing, do it. You will experience a deeper sense of prayer and a richer participation in the service. Your voice will blend with the voices of others, raising a chorus of praise to God. It will be beautiful for God to hear— but only if you sing.
- **Acknowledge your sins.** We all sin, and God loves us when we are honest about it. Your sins do not keep you from coming to Mass. Your humility helps you participate even better.
- **Pray.** When the priest says, "Let us pray," he means it. In the silence that follows those words, think hard about the reasons you are at Mass today, the intentions you hold in your heart. As you listen to the priest pray the Collect, find a place in it for the intentions you bring to Mass this day.
- **Listen to the readings.** When the readings are being proclaimed, listen intently. Put down the participation aids and anything else that may distract you. You are in God's house. God is speaking to you. Surely you want to listen. In the silence that follows each reading, think over the words that struck you and open your heart to them.
- **Pray for others.** In the universal prayer (the prayer of the faithful), you exercise your baptismal priesthood by praying for others. Think consciously of all those who need prayer around the world today.
- **Contribute to the collection.** Make an offering that will be included in the procession of the gifts. Your financial sacrifice signifies the offering you make of yourself. If you contribute nothing at all, you have to find other ways to join in the sacrifice of the Mass. Sadly, some people do not contribute money out of anger or frustration with something pertaining to the Church. Your offering does support the needs of your parish, but more importantly it is a sign of your sacrifice to God. If you withhold help from your parish at the collection, your sacrifice may appear stingy in the eyes of God. Give joyfully and generously, as Christ gave himself to you.
- **Thank God.** When the Eucharistic Prayer begins, the priest will recount many reasons for which we give God thanks. As he says, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God," think concretely about your reasons for giving God thanks today. Include these reasons in the Amen you sing at the end of the eucharistic prayer.
- **Adore Christ.** When the priest raises the host and the chalice during the eucharistic prayer, look up. Adore Christ who makes himself present to you.
- **Share peace.** Whenever you are invited to offer a sign of peace, share it with those nearby. Keep it focused on expressing the peace that is in your heart. This peace should help you prepare to receive Communion with others in the church.
- **Receive Holy Communion.** Those invited to the supper of the Lamb are blessed, and that includes you. If for some reason you are ineligible for Holy Communion, try to reconcile the situation so that you may participate fully in the Mass.
- **Receive Reverently.** The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* asks each country's Conference of Bishops to determine the posture to be used for the reception of Communion and the act of reverence to be made by each person as he or she receives Communion. In the United States, the body of Bishops determined that Communion should be received standing, and that a bow is the act of reverence made by those receiving. Be prepared to Receive Holy Communion either in the hand or on the tongue. If you wish to receive Holy Communion in the hand, make sure your hands are clean, free of bandages and/or gloves.

Make a throne with your hands. When the person distributing Communion says, "The Body of Christ," to you, reply with a strong, "Amen," which means, "it is so."

- **Receive Communion from the cup.** When Communion from the cup is offered, you can experience a deeper participation in the eucharistic covenant that God made with us. At the Last Supper, Jesus invited the disciples to eat and drink. The same command applies to each of us. Eat his Body. Drink his Blood. This meal is the foretaste of the heavenly banquet. Experience the fullness of the presence of the Risen Christ under the form of wine.
- **Give thanks.** After receiving Communion, use the silence to thank God for the gift of the Eucharist. Be grateful that the Holy Spirit will help you this week through the grace of this sacrament.
- **Go.** Stay for the end of Mass, and then go with other members of the community into the world to bring the Good News there. Don't leave early! If you leave after Communion, you avoid giving thanks to God for the Eucharist, hearing the announcements for activities during the week, receiving the blessing from the priest, and hearing the deacon's command to go as a body with him into the world. Christians have work to do. We love being at church. We love the Mass. We love being present with other members of the Body of Christ. But Christ expects more. He expects us to go. We never leave the Gospel behind. We take it with us. We never leave the community behind. We leave with them. We also take the fruits of this Eucharist, which we have faithfully celebrated in memory of Jesus.

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