

Teaching Mass

Welcome to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist! As we begin this new liturgical year, I invite each of us to be open to a year of traditions. Throughout the year, many of our Church's traditions of processions and celebrations will be renewed. Today, we begin with the essence of all with the celebration of Mass.

Each Sunday we go to Church to celebrate Mass because Jesus told us to. Jesus started this Tradition at the Last Supper before He was crucified. At the Mass, we come together as disciples of Jesus to celebrate our Faith, to pray for all our needs and to receive strength to live holy lives so we can join God in heaven.

Each Mass has a specific intention. Today we are offering this Mass for _____. We may request a Mass to be offered for ourselves or other living people, to pray for certain needs. We, also, pray for the dead because our prayers help those who are in purgatory. We believe great benefits are given to those we offer Mass for.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the central mystery of our Catholic Faith. It is so important that we are not to miss one Sunday Mass – it is a mortal sin to intentionally skip Mass. God is very sad when Catholics don't attend Mass. Just as Jesus asked His disciples before He was to be arrested, at the garden of Gethsemane, "Can you not stay awake for just one hour?" so too, He asks us "am I not worthy of your time?" When Catholics don't attend Sunday Mass, it tells God that He isn't important enough to them to spend an hour a week with Him. Through our Baptism, we are part of the Body of Christ and when we are absent from the liturgy, it is as if part of the Body of Christ is absent.

The Trinity, which is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, loves us more than anyone. God wants to give us good things. One of the ways God gives us these good things is through His grace. Sanctifying Grace is a special gift that is given to us at Mass and in all the sacraments; grace is God's life and love in our hearts.

One of the ways we give *our* love back to God is to fully participate in the Mass. We sing, kneel, stand, bow, sit, listen, reply, join aloud in prayer, and receive the Eucharist. If God is Lord of our life, then we will show it by actively responding to what is occurring at Mass. We should remember that we are not alone at Mass. Heavenly angels join us to worship the Lord and give Him glory and honor and praise.

Many of us are unsure of what's going on at Mass or have forgotten why we do specific things or actions. This makes it difficult to know how to respond appropriately. We can look around at others for help in doing the right thing at the right time, but to fully participate requires us to also put our *hearts* into the actions. We're now going to have a teaching Mass to help us better understand what's going on in Mass.

Before coming to Mass, it is proper to dress appropriately. Church clothes need to be clean and modest. Mass is *special* and we should dress like it is and wear something nice. Sports attire should not be our "normal". As we are called to dress appropriately, so too is the priest called to vest with the correct liturgical vestments:

Alb – Cincture – Stole – Chasuble

We also must remember to keep the 1-hour Eucharistic fast; this means we do not eat or drink anything besides water an hour before *receiving* the Eucharist. This includes candy and pop. Also, chewing gum is never allowed at Mass. We should be hungry spiritually *and* physically for Jesus. We are human, made up of a body and soul. The Mass is designed to use our bodies to reflect our souls. In other words, what we believe in our heart and soul is displayed in our physical actions; everything in the Mass has meaning.

When we enter God's house, the Church, we take holy water, genuflect and make the sign of the cross facing the tabernacle. The holy water is there to remind us of our Baptism when we became God's children and members of His Holy Church. We genuflect, or go down on one knee, as a sign of reverence/adoration towards Jesus who is truly present in the tabernacle (*point to tabernacle*). We offer adoration only to God. We make the Sign of the Cross to remind ourselves that we have been set apart by Christ and we renew our commitment to live in union with Him.

It is important to arrive a little early for Mass to quiet our minds and hearts. In the time before Mass starts, give to God all your burdens, concerns and sadness. Close your eyes to help take away distractions. Tell God what is on your mind. Ask Him to help you and think of what you have to thank God for. Tell Him what you are grateful for this past week. Ask God to help you focus during Mass and help you be open to receiving His graces and blessings. Please turn to page 896 in the misselette to find the prayer Preparation for Mass. Praying this would be a great way to prepare ourselves for Mass.

The Mass begins with the entrance song or antiphon. Not everyone can sing well, but that *is not* important. God gave you your voice and He wants you to use it to sing to Him. The *words* of the songs are important. They help lead our thoughts to God and are chosen to fit with the readings. The songs also match the liturgical seasons.

Have you ever noticed the Priest during the entrance procession? He kisses the altar. This kiss is a sign of veneration or holy respect for the altar. The sacrifice of Christ Jesus is made present to us right there on that altar.

The Priest represents Jesus to us and he begins the celebration with the Sign of the Cross. Father greets us when he says “the Lord be with you”. Our response is “and with your spirit” (ref. 2 Tim 4:22). Through the Priest, Jesus begins to talk with us. This pattern of the Priest speaking and the people answering happens all through Mass. God is always first; everything we do is a response to God who made us, knows us, loves us and has a plan for our lives. God initiates and we respond. The majority of the words we use in Mass come from Scripture.

Our response, “And with your spirit,” is formal and sacral, and indeed a prayer that dates back to the earliest years of the Church. We pray that the Lord may uphold our priest, not because he is better than we are, but so that he, human though he be, may serve us in his priestly capacity as an embodiment of Jesus, wedded to His bride, the Church.

After the opening greeting, we have the penitential rite, which is when we call to mind our specific sins and ask for God’s mercy and forgiveness. There is a small time of silence. During this

silence, we acknowledge our sins, not merely our failures, because a sin is more than a failure, it is a turning away from God. We admit our sins that we may be prepared to celebrate the mysteries of forgiveness. Secondly, we are called to strike our breast at this point. We profess “through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault”, an expression of our sorrow. Then something amazing happens – the lesser of our sins, which we silently confess to God, are totally forgiven through the words of the priest “may almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life.” However, all mortal sins are to be brought to the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to the reception of the Holy Eucharist.

We use the word “Amen” many times during Mass. It literally means “it is true” or “so be it.” When we say “Amen”, in our hearts we are saying yes, I believe what has just been said. Listen closely to each prayer so that you may be able to sincerely respond with a firm “Amen”.

Let us now begin our celebration of Mass. Our entrance hymn is #_____. *(move to chair)*

Before the 1st reading, after everyone is seated, continue with:

We are about to begin what is called the Liturgy of the Word; the part of Mass where we celebrate the Word. We listen to the scriptures and respond in faith to what it says. Even our body language expresses our relationship with God. As we hear the first and second readings proclaimed, we sit, a posture of learning. We stand for the proclamation of the Gospel, a posture of reverence. In the scripture readings from the Bible, God is speaking to us. The first reading is usually from the Old Testament; the time when God was preparing His chosen people for Jesus. The first reading ties to the Gospel.

After the first reading is the Psalm Response, which is either spoken or sung. It is normally taken from the book of Psalms and has a refrain we repeat together after each verse. Usually the words encourage us and give us hope.

On Sundays and major feast days, there is a second reading from the New Testament Epistles or Revelation.

The last reading is always a Gospel reading taken from Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. Everyone stands up for the Gospel because it is so important; it is the time when Jesus is directly speaking to us. At Mass, within the first sentence of the Gospel reading each Sunday, Jesus is normally mentioned. You'll notice that before we hear the Gospel proclaimed, we trace a small cross on our forehead, lips and heart. Do you know why? It is an outward symbol of our desire for Jesus to be in one's mind (*trace forehead*) and on one's lips (*trace lips*) and in one's heart (*trace heart*). Another symbol of love for Jesus is the kiss; the Gospel book is kissed respectfully after being proclaimed aloud at Mass as the priest silently proclaims "Through the words of the Gospel may our sins be wiped away."

The homily follows the Gospel. We sit for the homily because we are going to receive *instruction*. During the homily, the Priest or Deacon shares with us a *reflection* on the Scripture readings. It is the job of the Priest or Deacon to tie the Scripture readings together and explain them to us. Following the homily today, we will have the blessing of the Advent wreath. (*be seated*)

After the homily, Father will sit and then continue with:

At this part of Mass on Sundays and all Holy Days we stand and recite the Nicene Creed that begins "I believe in one God, the Father, Almighty". Why is the creed part of Sunday Mass? The creed is a summary of our Faith, of what we believe, and defines who we are. It is similar to the pledge of allegiance we all say as American citizens. As Catholics, we stand united and profess our Faith aloud – a call to renew or reconnect ourselves to these beliefs. All bow from the waist while saying: "and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man." Together, we are recognizing that Jesus became human. On the Solemnities of the Annunciation and of the Nativity of the Lord, all genuflect.

Once we've declared our beliefs, we turn to God with our needs. We lift up prayers of intercession for all of humankind; for the Church, civic leaders, those with various needs, for all peoples, and for the salvation of the world. Our response is usually "Lord, hear our prayer." God tells us in the Bible to "ask and you shall receive", so we pray with confidence that God will hear and answer our prayers according to His perfect will.

Please stand and join in professing the Nicene Creed.

(wait for general intercessions & blessing of Advent wreath, then....)

Please join in our preparation of gifts song, #_____.

After Father has received the gifts and the choir has stopped singing, continue with:

We are about to begin the section of the Mass where our gifts of bread and wine are prepared on the altar and changed into the Body and Blood of Christ through the prayers of the Priest. First, we need to have God purify our hearts in order to be worthy to receive Him. Notice the Priest washes his hands after he pours the wine into the chalice. He prays “Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin” (Ps 51:4). As his hands are being cleaned, he asks God to clean his *soul* to prepare him for what is about to come.

Prior to the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest enters into a dialogue with the congregation. Why? We are called to a spiritual wake up call. Today, and throughout Advent, Father will pray Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I found on page 23.

This miracle of changing unleavened bread and wine into Christ’s body and Christ’s blood, with Christ’s soul, and Christ’s divinity is *the central mystery* of our Catholic faith. It is the “source and summit” of our faith. Transubstantiation is the word we use to describe what is happening. A change of *substance* occurs during consecration. We cannot understand this miracle without faith. When we receive Communion it still looks and tastes like bread and wine, but in fact it is not. Jesus tells us in John 6:51-56 “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is *my flesh* for the life of the world.” The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the *flesh* of the Son of Man and drink his *blood*, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my *flesh* and drinks my *blood* has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my *flesh* is true food and my *blood* is true drink. Whoever eats my *flesh* and drinks my *blood* remains in me and I in him.”

Remember that we are humans made up of body and soul. In the Eucharist, God uses physical stuff of bread and wine to give us His very life. We can see, touch and taste it. Physically, Jesus cannot be any closer to us than when we swallow the Eucharistic host. Jesus is inside of us and unites with our very body and soul. If our hearts are open to Christ, He will work in our lives and give us grace, his life and love. We have free will however; if we are *not* open to Christ, He will not be able to work in our lives and we will not reap the benefits He intended for us to have. This is why it is so important that we go to the sacrament of Reconciliation before Mass if we have committed any mortal sin so that we can fully reap the benefits from Jesus' graces.

We could talk for many hours about the Eucharist but we won't. Instead let's just say that the Eucharist is the best gift God has given us. When the priest raises the Eucharistic Host and the bells are ringing, we can silently pray "My Lord and My God!" The bells are meant to get our attention and help us focus on Jesus who is right in front of us. The bells signal that this part of Mass is very important. The bread and wine have been changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus. It's when the priest recites the words of consecration; the past events of the Last Supper and Calvary are mystically made present to us through the liturgy.

We need to have God purify our hearts in order to be worthy to receive Him. Notice the Priest washes his hands after he pours the wine into the chalice. He prays "Lord, wash away my sins..." As his hands are being cleaned, he asks God to cleanse his *soul* to prepare him for what is about to come.

During the Eucharistic prayer and both before and after receiving communion, we kneel. This kneeling is a sign of reverence, respect and adoration for Jesus truly present in the Eucharist. It is a posture of holiness and also a posture of repentance.

Before the Lord's Prayer

Before we receive communion, we fold our hands together in prayer as we proclaim the Our Father. Jesus gave us this prayer of petition asking God for what we need and also asking for the forgiveness of sins. Think about the meaning of this prayer. There is so much in so few words. Look at the line "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Is there

someone in your life you will not forgive? In this prayer we tell God to forgive us just like we forgive others.

Hopefully, we are at peace with everyone in our lives. We physically show a friendly gesture of this peace with people standing next to us when we turn to shake their hand. Notice again that during Mass an inward reality - peace and forgiveness - is being expressed in outwardly actions - handshake.

Mercy and peace is what we want from God, so we pray together “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us... and grant us peace.”

At the time of communion, we are to remain kneeling while waiting to go to the altar to receive communion. When we go forward to receive communion, the Church asks us to **bow** right before receiving communion as an outward sign of reverence and humility towards Christ whom we are about to receive. As we walk up the aisle, we should be singing the communion song or praying silently, staying focused on what is happening. Some people say over and over in their heads as they walk, “Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner” or “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.” Sometimes there are reasons we cannot receive communion at Mass. In these situations, we are still welcomed to come forward, cross our arms over our chest, and receive a blessing from the communion minister. Remembering that Mass is not concluded, ALL return to their pews for prayer of thanksgiving. I invite you to look at the guidelines for the reception of communion found on page 238.

During the time of preparation to receive the Holy Eucharist or after receiving the Holy Eucharist, prayers of meditation may be offered which are found on the back cover of the misselette and also on pages 238 and 239.

After Communion

As we kneel after communion, we can either join in singing the communion song or pray silently. Thank God for all His gifts. Ask Him for your needs. Surrender your entire life to Him. Let Jesus

live through you. If we are able, we should kneel as long as the Eucharist is exposed; kneeling is a sign of reverence and humility. When the Eucharist is reposed in the tabernacle, we may again sit.

Our celebration of the Mass is almost over. The Priest has one last blessing to give us before the closing song. The final blessing is meant to give us strength and wisdom so we can go out to love and serve God and one another. In the Mass we have been nourished with both the Word and the Eucharist. Now it is time to go out and share the Good News we have received with those around us. God has given us the Sanctifying Grace we need to follow Him.

After closing blessing

After Mass is over, it is recommended that you stay, kneel down and say 1 Our Father, 1 Hail Mary and 1 Glory Be for a happy death. For a private prayer of thanksgiving, please turn to page 896 to offer the prayer of Thanksgiving after Mass.

Our closing song is # _____.