

## Why Go to Mass?

Not every Mass is going to be a deeply moving experience. Lifelong Catholics may have grown so used to the ritual that they aimlessly go through the motions and find their minds often wander. So, why bother going to Mass? Here are some important reasons.

If we love God, we will want to spend time with Him in the way He wants us to. And, God wants us to give ourselves to Him in communal worship. From the earliest days of Christianity, men and women have brought their deepest needs and desires to the table of the Lord, confident they will be heard. It's been said that just like we have two lungs, there are two lungs of prayer. Namely, liturgical prayer and private prayer.

St. John Vianney said of liturgical prayer, "Private prayer is like straw scattered here and there: If you set it on fire it makes a lot of little flames. But gather these straws into a bundle and light them, and you get a mighty fire, rising like a column into the sky; public prayer is like that." So, we come together at Mass to join our prayers of Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving, and Supplication (the acronym "A.C.T.S.") with other members of our faith community.

Another reason to go to Mass is so we can receive the Word of God. During the first part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word, we hear God speak to us in the readings from Scripture. We also hear Christ's voice in the homily, when the priest applies the inspired words of scripture to our lives. We know if we listen with the right frame of mind, asking Jesus to open our hearts and minds, we will receive a personal message from God.

By hearing the revealed Word of God in the scriptures and by reflecting on its meaning for our lives in the homily, we are prepared to enter into Christ's ultimate act of love for us—His sacrificial death on the cross—in the second part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Jesus established the Eucharist at the Last Supper when he said "this is my body" and "this is my blood." Only in light of these words of Jesus at the Last Supper is Calvary's meaning understood. For it was on Calvary that the meaning of these words and the link between the Last Supper and Christ's sacrifice on the cross became clear.

So, at every Mass we join in a special way with the event of the crucifixion and we offer to God the same sacrifice that Jesus offered to the Father on the cross. When we go to Mass everything we do is given eternal value. That's because at Mass our lives (struggles, good works, etc.) are offered through the sacrifice of Jesus to God the Father for our salvation and the salvation of the world.

Another important reason to go to Mass is to be filled with and become more like Jesus Christ. At the Consecration the bread and wine, through the power of the Holy Spirit, become the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is not a mere symbol, but Jesus' real flesh and real blood under the appearance of bread and wine.

The Eucharist is spiritual food for spiritual life. Jesus said this plainly in John 6:53-56: "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 remains in me and I in him."

So, when we receive Holy Communion, we become more intimately united with Christ. Holy Communion helps transform us into Christ's likeness, because it is Christ himself whom we receive. In the Eucharist, Christ changes our values, thoughts, attitudes, and actions to become more like His own. In other words, *we are what we eat*.

St. Augustine expressed this well when he said about the Eucharist:

Believe what you receive,  
Receive what you believe,  
Become what you receive.

A final reason to go to Mass is to strengthen us for our mission here on earth, which is to go forth to love and serve the Lord and one another. We are called to live as Christ lived and act as Christ would act in this world.

However, the Mass not only gives us a sense of what we ought to do, it also strengthens us for accomplishing it. Our Lord does not send us out into the world as orphans. Rather, God equips us for the journey. At Mass, Christ strengthens us in His community, forms us by preaching and teaching His Word, and nourishes us in our Holy Communion with Him. What could be more important?