

17TH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME, Cycle B, 1st of 5 talks on the Mass
2 Kings 4: 42-44 + Psalm 145: 10-11, 15-18 + Ephesians 4: 1-6 + John 6: 1-15
Holy Spirit Catholic Church: July 26, 2015

During the next 5 Sundays we take a break from Mark's Gospel and plunge into the riches of the 6th Chapter of John's Gospel. In the 6th Chapter of John, Jesus gives his "Bread of Life" discourse, which is packed with Eucharistic themes.

The Mass, a term which Catholics use for the celebration of the Eucharist, is the "source and summit" of our life of faith.

The graces received at Mass nourish our journey of faith.

From this summit, we can look back over the past week to see where God was present and look ahead into a future full of hope because God has been with us.

At the mountaintop of the Mass, we encounter the Risen Jesus in a powerful way. He takes the gift of our lives and blesses our lives by filling them with his Risen Life; He breaks open our lives by drawing us into the saving mystery of his dying & rising, and then he gives us our lives back transformed by His Spirit.

United to the Risen Jesus through the celebration of the Mass, we discover we have more than enough to sustain our life.

As we explore the rich Eucharistic imagery in the 6th Chapter of John, I will review some essential fundamentals of worship. While reviewing these essential fundamentals, I also will be addressing some practical matters of proper behavior at Mass.

It will be impossible for me to cover in 5 talks over these 5 Sundays everything that is involved in the celebration of the Eucharist.

I could give a talk every Sunday for the rest of this year and still not plumb the depths of this wondrous mystery we call the Mass.

For these 5 Sundays I simply want to review the essentials of the Mass and give direction and advice on practical matters.

"Why do I have to go to Mass?" "Why can't I pray to God in the privacy of my room?"
Has your teenager ever asked you these questions?
Or maybe when you were a teen, you asked these questions of your parents in an attempt to justify your sleeping in on Sunday morning.

The simple answer to the question why we need to go to Mass is this:

God made us to worship God with others.

Essential to our make-up, essential to our being human, is this basic need to worship God with others.

Private prayer helps us grow in relationship with the Lord Jesus, but public, communal worship is even more important.

One 12th century sage put it this way:

“Public worship is seventeen times better than private worship.”

Throughout the history of humankind, the preoccupation with self has turned men and women away from God.

Selfishness drives us to make ourselves the center of everything, when the only way to true peace and joy is when God is at the center of our lives.

The celebration of the Mass constantly confronts us with the call to sacrifice our preoccupation with self, to die to self-centeredness and to rise up with Christ to an abundant life with Him and in service to others.

The communal worship which is the heartbeat of the Mass is threatened like never before in an age where “*selfies*” and overt attention seeking are the practice of the day.

Communal worship counters the self-serving cultural mantra of “*me, my, and mine*” with “**thee, thy, and thine**”—directing our focus outward to God.

The living Christ who we encounter in a very definite and real way in the Mass draws us out of the death of our self-centeredness to new life, from “*give me, give me, give me*” to total self-giving with him and through him.

Because our worship at Mass is by its very nature corporate, it resists any narrowing of the spiritual life to a private relationship between the solitary soul and God.

The Mass places God in the center and us in community.

Entering fully into the celebration of the Eucharist reminds us life is about much more than “me”---it’s about “we” who are one in Christ,

who together direct our lives toward the Source of Life, God Himself.

Here, in the work of communal worship, we redirect our focus, away from deadly self-absorption toward the living Christ present sacramentally & in others.

The boy in today’s Gospel reveals the attitude of generosity which is vitally necessary for our communal worship at Mass.

He is not self-centered, thinking only of himself,

but focused on how he can be of help to the larger group, thus he brings food to Jesus.

The boy could have hoarded his lunch, feasted on some fish sandwiches.

Instead, he brings what he has to Jesus, placing the gift of himself in Jesus' hands. The miracle of life-giving worship happens when we all have this kind of attitude.

What we do at Mass, we do together.

We pray together, not some of us faster or some of us slower, but together.

Even the personal prayers we offer in silence after everyone has received Holy Communion, we offer together, in silence with others.

We open up our hymnals and sing together.

Together we stand, together we sit, together we kneel.

For those who are physically capable, all these bodily movements are done together.

We don't come here and do whatever we want, standing while everyone else is kneeling or kneeling while everyone else is standing.

When we worship with others at the Mass, we die with Christ to a preoccupation with self, and rise with him to new life as a member of His body, the Church.

United by the Spirit of Christ, we are able to give God the Father fitting praise and thanksgiving.

Together we experience the wonders of God's providential love, together we experience how the hand of the Lord feeds us and provides for all our needs.

The introductory rites of the Mass, also called the gathering rites, help us to turn away from our preoccupation with self and to turn toward God and others. We sacrifice our individualism for a short while in order to be part of something much bigger than our own small self.

The first of the four parts of the Mass, the Introductory Rites are sometimes referred to as the gathering rites, and there are two types of gathering taking place:

The gathering of individuals into a community

And the gathering within ourselves, which helps us focus on God and others.

This 2nd kind of gathering—the preparing of our heart and mind and soul for worship--requires both remote preparation and proximate preparation.

The remote preparation happens before we enter the church doors.

The church requires us to fast from food and drink for one hour before receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord in Holy Communion.

This "fast" prepares our body to enter more fully into worship, this kind of sacrifice helps us die a little bit to self.

So, we do not bring candy or food into the church, nor chew gum before or during Mass.

Arriving early helps prepare our mind and heart.

When we are rushing into church at the very last minute, or when we are late, our thoughts are jumbled and our heart is racing— it's hard to be focused on the important work of worship we are about to do.

Another good practice for remote preparation for worship is to leave our cell phones in our cars.

If we cannot “disconnect” for one hour from our electronic gadgets, then we have a serious addiction which needs healing.

In order to give our total focus to worshipping God with our sisters and brothers in Christ, we can't have our cell phone in our pocket or purse, buzzing or ringing throughout the Mass.

To be present to Christ who comes to us at Mass, to connect with Him who is the Source of Everlasting Life, we have to disconnect from our phones.

An exception would be a doctor on call who needs to wear a pager or phone in order to be summoned away in case of an emergency.

Upon entering the church we do several things that help us prepare for worship.

1. Bless ourselves with Holy Water
2. Genuflect to the presence of Christ in the tabernacle
3. Silent prayer in the pew
4. Read over the readings in the missalette
5. Locate the opening song in the hymnal
6. Be hospitable by saying a few words of welcome to someone who comes and sits by you. But ongoing conversations need to take place outside the church proper.
7. If someone needs to be seated in your pew, be hospitable and move to toward the center. Liturgical ministers may need to stay seated at the end of the pew in order to exit promptly to proclaim the Scriptures or help with Communion, but others need to be considerate when people come to sit in the pew with you.

The following occur during the Introductory Rites (Gathering Rites)

Opening Song—singing draws us out of ourselves and unites us to others.

Sign of the Cross & Greeting--- life in the Trinity, marked by saving cross.

Penitential Act---We have an ongoing need to seek forgiveness for our sins,
for we are sinners in need of God's mercy.

Gloria---we rejoice in God's saving mercy. The refrain of the Gloria is the song of the angels at Jesus' birth—God has been born among us, like us in all things but sin, to save us from sin. How can we not sing “Glory to God!”

Opening Prayer (Collect)

The gathering rites transform us from disparate individuals into a community of faith joined in worship. They prepare us to hear the word of God which will be proclaimed and to worthily celebrate the Eucharist.

The introductory rites, as the first part of the Mass, move us away from self-centeredness toward others and unite us as one body in Christ. These rites pull us out of self-absorption toward the Other, the Living Christ who is the Bread of Life.

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