

Reflections on the Mass

Reflection 1: Preparation for Mass

There is an old saying that goes: “We receive what we give.” To receive something good, we have to give, whether it is acquiring an education, doing well in a job, or even learning to play golf. This applies with equal force when it comes to the Mass - we receive what we give.

Sometimes we may hear people complain, “I don’t get anything out of Mass.” Such a statement begs the question: “How much did you give?” And I don’t mean the collection plate. Rather: how much did you give in preparing for Mass? Did we hurry in at the last minute, just as the processional was starting, with our hearts and minds still caught up in the worries and concerns we woke up with? Or did we take time to prepare for Mass? How much did we give in order to receive?

Most of us can recall a time in our lives when we might have spent hours preparing for a big date. Why? Because we knew that to receive the attention, the love, and affection of another person, we had to give of ourselves; and that by doing so, we would receive. At Mass we meet someone in sacramental form whose attractiveness goes beyond all other experience: this is Christ the Lord. But to receive such a blessing, we must give of ourselves in order to receive. Just like the big date, we must prepare.

Our preparation should begin long before the start of Mass: ideally, during the days leading up to Sunday Mass. We might begin by reading the scriptures for that Sunday, followed by a rosary. Fasting for at least one hour before attending Mass is also a helpful preparation. Above all, we should strive to be at peace with one another, for as Jesus said, “If you bring your gift to the altar and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift at the altar, go first to be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23)

We can prepare for Mass by forgiving and being reconciled with others. The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation can work wonders in bringing peace to an otherwise troubled conscience.

Sometimes our preparation for Mass can be jeopardized by arriving late, hurrying to find a place to park, and then searching for an inconspicuous place to sit ... certainly never the front pew! Church tradition can help us to slow down and to enter with a worshiping attitude. Pause at the entrance of the church and dip your fingers in the holy water, reflecting for a brief moment on the significance of what you are doing. Perhaps before Mass begins stop to light a votive candle and offer a short prayer. Enter the church slowly and reverently, pausing to genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament or to make a profound bow before the altar. If possible, kneel for a few minutes to offer prayers or to reflect on a special intention for that Mass.

The sacrifice of the Mass is the most important event that happens every Sunday. But to receive it well, we must be willing to give. And the more we give, the more we will receive.