



EIGHT REASONS & RESPONSES TO WHY CATHOLICS STOP COMING TO CHURCH ON A REGULAR BASIS.

Millions of Catholics in our nation do not come to Mass on a regular basis for many reasons. In this column, I will name *eight* of the reasons and give a brief response to each reason. If you are a non-church goer you may have reasons other than the ones mentioned here for not coming to Mass. If so, I would love to hear from you. If anyone reading this column have thoughts and feelings on this topic, I would love to hear from you. My email address can be found at the end of my column. The reasons I name are not intended to be in any particular order.

Reason #1. Because of hectic, crazy schedules, lots of well-intentioned families do not make it to church.

Response: It seems the 40 hour work week is long gone for most workers today. Many are working 60+ hours. Many work six days a week and some people on the weekend. Many families are busy with sports activities on the weekend. As a result, church gets squeezed out of many people's schedules. Having said that, the fact is that weekend after weekend millions of very busy people in our nation do make it to church. How come? Because God and church are *high priority* for these families. When I use to play tennis and racket ball a lot I always made sure they were in my schedule. It was that plain and simple. ***We ALWAYS make time for what is IMPORTANT to us.*** If we miss Mass on a regular basis, we can usually assume that it is because it has lost its *importance* and *value* in our lives. It is no longer a priority.

Reason #2. Lack of support from spouse and/or extended family. The hassle of keeping young kids quiet in church.

Response: Blessed are the families in which *both* spouses want to attend church on Sunday and twice blessed are the young families who have extended families in the area who also attend church regularly and perhaps make attending Mass a time to be together and go to breakfast or lunch afterwards. When the opposite is true, it is very difficult: one spouse has little or no interest in church, even parents who live in the area have lost faith in the Eucharist and in church. This is a situation when a person has to be very strong especially

if small children and teenagers are involved. When one parent makes a big effort to come to Mass with his/her kids even though they have little or no support from a spouse or one's extended family, I believe God has to be particularly pleased with such a person. As for the hassle of keeping young children quiet in church, I offer the following suggestions:

- Bring the child/children up front so that they can see what is going on. Reward them for good behavior. I once asked a father who had three very little children up front what was his secret of keeping them quiet? He said his secret weapon was the donut after Mass. The well behaved kids got to have a donut after church. The poorly behaved ones got to watch the well behaved children eat their donut.
- Take a 5 or 10 minute break during Mass and come back in. If the hassle is too much and you feel that you are getting nothing out of Mass, opt to use our *free* childcare located in the *Ministry Center*. This is available on Sunday's during the 9:30 & 11:30 AM Masses.
- A less good option, but way better than not coming at all, is to alternate. One spouse comes to Mass one Sunday while the other one stays home with the kids and vice versa...

Reason #3: Loss of faith in the Eucharist - in Jesus' Presence in the Bread and Wine.

Response: Catholics believe that Jesus is truly present in the bread and wine at Mass. This belief is firmly stated in scripture (John 6:53-71, 1 Cor. 11:28-34). Catholics believe that when we receive the bread and wine at Mass, we are actually receiving the Body and Blood of Christ. A Baptist minister once said: "If I believed what you Catholics believed about the Eucharist, I would come crawling on my hands and knees to receive my Savior." Unfortunately, millions of Catholics raised to believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist loose that faith or it becomes unimportant to them. This is true not only for non-church goers, but also for Catholics who attend other Christian churches who do not serve the Eucharist or who only serve it infrequently and do not believe that they are partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ. If a Catholic really believed in his/her heart that the Jesus who lived in Palestine 2,000 years ago was now truly present body, soul and divinity in the bread and wine at

every Mass, how could he/she not come to partake of the Eucharist?

Interestingly enough, many Protestants who convert to Catholicism and Catholics who joined other Christian churches and return to the Catholic church often convert or return because of their new found faith and understanding of what the Eucharist is all about. People interested in these stories are encouraged to purchase a copy of the *Surprised by the Truth* books. There are now three different books, each one has a dozen or more stories of converts or reverts (returning Catholics) who after much study, converted or reverted to the Catholic Church. Copies of the *Surprised by the Truth* books are available at our parish office 254-1595 ext. 3050 email fdowney@ascensioncatholicsch.net or from amazon.com or 1-800-8889344 from of the publisher.

Reason #4: Many Catholics see the Mass as boring. As a result they do not go or they go to a church that is more 'upbeat' and 'uplifting'.

Response: Our Catholic Mass is a reenactment of the Last Supper, which took place the evening before Jesus died a cruel death on the cross. I doubt that the Last Supper was entertaining or even uplifting. It was a *solemn celebration* of Jesus' willingness to lay down his life for us and his way of continuing to be with us and nourish us in our journey of faith. (See 1 Cor. 11:28-34)

All too many Christians bring a 'consumer mentality' into their church life. They come looking to 'get' and see 'what is in it for me'. Sure, all of us want to feel blessed when we come to church. But ideally, we should go to church wanting to *give* of ourselves. *Eucharist* means 'thanksgiving'. We go to Mass to *give thanks* to God for Jesus and the salvation he offers to us. If we come to Mass with a *giving attitude*, most likely we will receive. Of course, we do receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Having said this, it should also be said that every parish should make a concerted effort to have liturgies (especially music and homilies) that touch people's lives.

Reason #5: Some Catholics do no come to church because they cannot see beyond the imperfections of the church.

Response: It would be nice if every parish and diocese were made up of perfect or almost perfect priests, bishops and laity. But, reality is very different and has been different ever since Jesus founded the church. His twelve Apostles were a rather imperfect bunch. If we read Paul's letters, we quickly see that he was dealing with imperfect congregations.

The church always was and always will be imperfect and sinful because it is made up of imperfect and sinful people like you and me. The recent scandals are a

glaring example of the church's sinfulness and imperfections but also, an example of her ability to reform herself. The recent scandals are also a good example of how the vast majority of *church going* Catholics are able to *see beyond* the sin of the church to the good things that she has to offer. Despite her sinfulness and imperfection, the Catholic Church continues to form a multitude of very holy and inspiring men and women. When we cut ourselves off from church, we cut ourselves off from the Body of Christ and this can only spiritually impact us in a negative way.

Reason #6: Problems with some of the church's teachings.

Response: Many Catholics who come to church regularly and receive Holy Communion, have difficulties with one or more of the church's teachings. The truth is that none of them respond perfectly to Jesus' teachings. Our response is always imperfect. Communion is not so much a reward for being good, but a supernatural aid to help us to live a good Christian life. Having said that all of us should try hard through study and prayer to be in full communion with our church in all of her teachings.

Reason #7: Sometimes when bad things happen to good people they pull away from God and church.

Response: Bad things happening to good people is a 'faith buster' for some Catholics and a big 'faith tester' for others. I am sure all of us have great sympathy for good people who have bad things happen to them. This has been an issue for people of faith ever since the book of Job was written 3,000 years ago. All of us know that there is no good explanation for the mystery of why a good and loving God allows bad things to happen to good people. The bottom line here is a faith issue - having sufficient faith to place our trust in God even when his ways make absolutely no sense to us. People who do persevere with God in and through the bad times, often report that such perseverance led them to a place of spiritual growth that they would never have reached if bad times had never come their way.

Reason #8: "I believe in God, but I don't want to be involved with institutional religion."

Response: The holy and sinful side of the church has been there ever since Jesus choose the twelve Apostles. In his hour of greatest need, one denied him (Peter, the first Pope), another betrayed him with a kiss and all of them abandoned him when he needed them most (Mk 14:50). When one reads some of Paul's letters in Acts, we also discover rather quickly, that the fledgling Christians had to deal with attacks from within and from without. Living within a church that can be very

dysfunctional can test our faith a great deal. Frequently, we may be asked to *see beyond* the human element so that we can be blessed by its *divine* element (its sacraments and teachings). The church always was, is and will be a fragile vessel of clay carrying within her a divine treasure. (2 Cor 4:7).

Within a family we sometimes fail and hurt each other. I know I have failed and hurt church members here and elsewhere and people have failed and hurt me. Jesus calls us to forgive, reconcile and move on. If you have been hurt by the church and have not come to terms with the hurt, please consider coming to talk to me or someone else in our church family.

Why Go To Mass?

The main and primary answer is of course, that the Lord commands us to do so in the *Third Commandment*: “Keep holy the Sabbath Day.” For 2,000 years Catholic Tradition has taught and believed that the central and most important way we keep holy the Sabbath Day is by going to Mass. If Jesus was not serious about us coming to the Eucharist on Sunday, why would he have spoken his discourse on the Eucharist in John 6—especially see his words in verses 53-62 about the importance of “eating his body” and “drinking his blood”. When asked: ***Why they go to Mass on Sunday*** this is how some Catholics answered the question.

- *I attend Sunday Mass because I think that if the Lord can give me a whole week—I can at least give him an hour! But, most of all, I go because he deserves to have me there, to have my love. After all, his love for me is so great that he spread his arms out wide and gave his all for me. My life is so much happier when I share it with the Lord and depend on him for all things!*
- *I attend Mass regularly on Sunday out of habit. It is part of my life, just like brushing my teeth and cooking dinner. That’s not to say I don’t enjoy going to Mass, however, or that I would stop going if it were made voluntary. It just means that Mass is a part of me.*
But I also go to set an example for my children. I want them to know God and to learn how to become Christians who serve a community. In order to do this, they must have repeated experiences of Mass attendance. And I am not the only role model they have in this regard: their friends who attend Mass and Sunday school with them also are models of what it means to be a part of the Catholic Christian community.
- *We are teenagers and come from a strong Catholic family, and we go to Sunday Mass because: 1) it’s*

expected, 2) we don’t want to let our parents down, 3) we want to be an example to our younger brother and sister, 4) attendance is the rule of the house as long as we live with our parents, and 5) sometimes it’s fun.

- *As a child I had to go to Mass with my parents or be punished. As I grew older, I was told that it was a mortal sin to miss Mass; so I went to avoid going to hell. But, by the time I was 16 I thought there must be a better reason for going to Mass; so I decided to try out the old saying, “You only get out of Mass what you put into it.” And I found that the more I looked into the prayers, songs, and readings, the more Mass was really a way to share God’s love with my fellow Catholics. If people would participate more at Mass, they would get more out of it.*

Walking with the Saints - Men and Women who changed the church.

Beginning in February, *St. Anthony Messenger* will begin their publication of 12 issue *four page* newsletter on the above named topic.

Each of the 12 issues of *Walking With the Saints* profiles three saints and a “mystery saint” whose lives exemplify a particular theme. The authors offer biographical information as well as the saints’ impact on the mission of the Church and the world. Each profile also shows how the saints inspire believers today to be dedicated disciples of Jesus.

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| <p>1. Men & Women Who Changed the Church:
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Teresa of Avila</p> <p>2. 20th-century Saints:
Katharine Drexel
Maximillian Kolbe
Faustina</p> <p>3. Women Who Knew Jesus:
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Martha of Bethany
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Benedict
Ignatius of Loyola</p> <p>9. Female Founders:
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Julie Billiart
Angela Merici</p> <p>10. Companions in Faith

Francis de Sales & Jane Francis de Chantal
Vincent de Paul & Louise de Marillac</p> |
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5. Defenders of the Faith Eastern Churches:

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Philip Neri
Vincent Ferrer

11. Saints of the

John Chrysostom
Ephrem
Sharbel Makhlouf

6. Individual Martyrs:

Thomas Becket
Isaac Jogues
Miguel A. Pro

12. Special Friends of the Poor:

Elizabeth of Hungary
Frances of Rome
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Each issue also includes

Who Am I?

This first-person account of a “mystery saint” complements the theme of the month. The mystery is solved and the name is revealed on the back page of *Walking With the Saints*.

FAQs About Saints

How are patron saints assigned? Who was the first saint canonized by the Church? What is the difference between saints and angels? Father Pat McCloskey, O.F.M., answers frequently asked questions about sainthood.

Stepping Out in Faith

This section offers ways to bring the spirit and mission of these holy people into our everyday lives—as individuals, families and communities. Included are opportunities for sharing online.

Saints are part of our “Catholic DNA,” and are one of the most popular and rich aspects of Catholic tradition. The saints are our friends, models, ancestors and family. They comfort, challenge and give us guidance and hope. They help us find God’s plan for our lives. Along the way, our own humanity is touched and strengthened by these generous and holy friends.

Most importantly, the saints who us how the gospel is lived in every time and space, in every culture, on every continent, in every century. They show us that following Christ is not an abstraction but something that is lived out every day.

The Catholic tradition teaches us that God calls every believer to be a saint.

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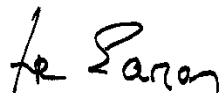
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Thank You— A big thank-you to all who were in any way responsible for our Advent and Christmas celebration of the Eucharist.

On behalf of our parish staff, I offer all of you a blessed and joyous Christmas.

Christmas Blessings,



MORNING PRAYER

*God of my life,
I welcome this new day.
It is your gift to me,
a new creation, a promise of resurrection.
I thank you for the grace of being alive this morning.
I thank you for the sleep that has refreshed me.
I thank you for this chance to make a new beginning.
This day, Lord, is full of promise and opportunity;
let me waste none of it.
This day is full of mystery and the unknown:
help me to face it without fear or anxiety.
This day is blessed with beauty and adventure;
make me fully alive to it.
During this day keep me thoughtful,
prayerful and kind.
May I be courteous and helpful to others,
and not turned in on myself.
Keep me from any word or deed
that would hurt or belittle another.
And may the thoughts of my mind be
pleasing in your sight.
When night comes again, may I look back on this day
with no grievance or bitterness in my heart.
And may nobody be unhappy because of anything
I have done, Or anything I have failed to do.
Lord, bless this day for me and everyone.
Make it a day in which we grow to have the mind of
Christ, your Son. Amen.*