



Most Holy Body & Blood of Christ June 26, 2011 A

THIRTEEN CATHOLICS SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS ON WHY THEY GO TO SUNDAY MASS

This weekend our Church celebrates the feast of *Corpus Christi*, the gift of the Eucharist. A few years ago, *U.S. Catholic Magazine* asked its readers to share with them the reasons they attended Mass on Sunday. Some of the responses spoke to the question of whether attending Mass should be an obligation. The following are thirteen of the responses. I would love it if you would share them with a family member who no longer attends Mass or only attends periodically. Don't miss response no. 9 from a teenager.

1. *Some of my best memories from my childhood happened on Sundays. Sunday Mass always seemed like a special beginning to a special day. Our whole family attended Mass together each week. Sometimes it was the only time we were together. I feel that attendance at Sunday Mass is a good way of having a close family relationship and of keeping the whole family close to God. I am happy and proud to attend Sunday Mass. I hope that my children and the generations of my family to come will keep up this lovely celebration and tradition.*

2. *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.*

3. *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.

4. *Why do I attend Sunday Mass? For the love of God! It seems such a little thing to do for all the blessings I have received.*

5. *There are times in one's life when Sunday Mass on a voluntary basis would have an advantage. But I'm not sure that the Church's law about mandatory Sunday Mass attendance should be dropped. We have laws in our lives that tell us to buckle up for safety as we drive; so why not a law to help save our souls?*

6. *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!*

7. *I have very mixed feelings about forced Mass attendance. On the plus side, those who feel an obligation to attend—and attend only for that reason—may pick up something during the Mass that may change their attitude and bring them closer to God. (There have been some readings and homilies that, at times, seemed tailored to address an issue I was struggling with at that time.) On the negative side, some people who go out of a sense of obligation only go with closed hearts and may not be open to God's word.*

8. *To call oneself Catholic without faithful attendance at Mass is like trying to raise a bed of flowers without water, fertilizer, and light. In both cases, the essentials are missing.*

9. *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.*

Will Catholics go to hell if they repeatedly miss Mass? God did not say that; and besides, there are other ways of fulfilling your obligation.

10. As a college mathematics teacher, I am convinced of the necessity of having an attendance-and-testing policy that helps students work toward successful learning. Human nature being what it is, there is a natural tendency to take it easy and to drift along unless there is some sort of demands put upon a person. When students at least attend my classes, some knowledge is absorbed.

In the same way, I feel that our natural tendency toward laziness would work against the majority of Catholics attending Sunday Mass unless there was some sort of obligation present.

11. Making Mass voluntary would be a mistake. Oh, I agree that no one should be brought up to believe that to miss Mass—even for a good reason—would send someone to hell. But I feel there are many Catholics who, even though they come out of a sense of guilt, find in Mass their only contact with the Catholic Church all week. I can't help but feel that sometimes attendance at church gives God the opportunity to talk to people that they may not allow him to do during the week. It would be too easy for these people to become lost to the church were not Mass obligatory. Not all habits are bad!

12. Most Sundays I am up early and anxious to join with my family and fellow Catholics to praise and honor our God. But there have been mornings—cold, snowy, icy, tired mornings—when it was the Church's law requiring attendance at Mass that got me out of bed rather than my own good intentions. Once I sat in church, I was happy and gratified to be there as always and thankful that firm Church teachings had gotten me there at my own moments of personal weakness.

13. Sunday Mass shouldn't be an "obligation" but a responsibility. One's presence—whether convenient or inconvenient—is a responsibility one should freely choose in order to grow in his or her own faith and to help build the Body of Christ within their community.

It's disheartening to see so many complacent faces in Mass. It's a small wonder that our Sunday Eucharist is so boring or unattractive when there are so many who don't know why they're there outside of "the law."

Additional thoughts to reflect on:

- In modern day Iraq, Catholic families risk their lives to attend Mass on Sundays. In an interview with *60 Minutes*, one young adult said, "Half of my family

goes to one Mass and half to another Mass." When asked why, the young man answered, "In this way, if the church is blown up by a terrorist bomb, at least half of my family will survive."

- In many poor countries, Catholics will *walk* one or two hours each way to attend Mass. Such is their dedication to the Eucharist.

In contrast to the above commitment to the Eucharist, millions of Catholics who live in nice homes close to a church and drive nice cars, find it too much of a "sacrifice" or too much of an inconvenience to come to Mass on Sunday. All of us should often pray that the Holy Spirit would open our minds and our hearts to the tremendous gift God is offering us when we choose to actively participate in the Mass.

Pope Benedict XVI told this inspiring story during a Eucharistic Congress in May 2005.

"In 304 the emperor Diocletian forbade Christians under pain of death to meet on Sunday to celebrate Eucharist. In Abitene, a village in what is today Tunis in North Africa, 49 Christians gathered as usual on Sunday to celebrate Mass. They were arrested for defying imperial orders. When asked why they disobeyed the emperor, their leader said, 'We cannot live without meeting on Sunday to celebrate Eucharist. We would not have the strength to face the daily problems of life.' After atrocious tortures, the 49 martyrs of Abitene were killed. They confirmed their faith with the shedding of blood... We must rediscover the joy of the Christian Sunday. We must rediscover the privilege of participating in the Eucharist, the sacrament of a renewed world."

Please share with a family member, co-worker or friend who no longer goes to church on Sunday.

Have a blessed week,

