



The Most Holy Body & Blood of Christ

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“DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME”

“Do this in memory of me.” Reflecting on these words of Jesus, Dom Gregory Dix in his book *The Shape of the Liturgy* writes:

Was ever another command so obeyed? For century after century, spreading slowly to every continent and country and among every race on earth, this action has been done in every conceivable human circumstance for every conceivable human need, from infancy and before it, to extreme old age and after it, from the pinnacle of earthly greatness to the refuge of fugitives in the caves and dens of the earth. Men have found no better thing than this to do for kings at their crowning and for criminals going to the scaffold; for armies in triumph or for a bride and bridegroom in a country church...for the famine of a whole province or for the soul of a dear lover...and best of all, week by week, and month by month, on a hundred thousand Sundays, faithfully, unflinching, across all the parishes of Christendom, priest and people continue to work together in order to carry out this command, “Do this in memory of me.”

From this beautiful reflection on the Lord’s command, one can readily see how important and central the Mass has been to Catholic life down through the ages. In the words: “Do this in memory of me,” Jesus commanded the Apostles and their successors to repeat his Eucharistic actions and words,” until he comes again” (1Cor 11:26).

Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

At Mass, Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is present in the proclamation of the Word, in the gathered assembly, in the presider, but above all and in a wholly unique manner, in the Eucharist. The presence of Christ in the bread and wine is called ‘real,’ not to exclude other types of presence which are also ‘real,’ but to emphasize that the presence of Christ in the bread and wine is a presence in the fullest sense; it is a *substantial* presence (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1373-1374).

In the sacred species of bread and wine, Christ comes to us in the fullest possible expression and communication of his love. “Since the Middle Ages, the changing of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ has been called ‘transubstantiation.’ This means that the substance

of the bread and wine is changed into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ. The appearances of bread and wine remain (color, shape, weight, chemical composition), but the underlying reality—that is, the substance—is now the Body and Blood of Christ” (United States Catholic Catechism p.223). What looks and tastes like bread and wine is now filled or taken over with the presence of our Divine Savior. An early Father of the Church, St. John Damascene, writes: “*If anyone wishes to know how the bread is changed into the body of Christ at Mass, I will tell him. The Holy Spirit overshadows the priest and acts on him as he acted on the Blessed Virgin Mary, when the angel Gabriel visited her.*” During the Eucharist Prayer of the Mass, the priest prays: “*Let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy so that they may become the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

In the Constitution on the Liturgy (a Vatican II document), the Council Fathers prescribe the “*...full and active participation by all the people [as] the aim to be considered before all else.*” (14)

Concretely, what does full and active participation in the Mass involve? The following are six behaviors that help us to be full and active participants at Mass. As you read them, you can ask yourself to what extent you embody these behaviors.

Reflection question: Are you an active participant at Mass or a silent spectator?

Behavior #1: Punctuality. Getting to church at least ten minutes before Mass begins gives us some time to prepare ourselves spiritually for the wonderful and sacred event that is about to happen. Ideally, we should not be chatting before Mass. We can do that after Mass.

Behavior #2: Spirit of hospitality. Everyone enjoys coming to a place where there is a spirit of warmth and hospitality. This includes the place we call church. It has been said that *warm prayerful congregations attract people. Cold, un-prayerful and distracted congregations drive people away.* A spirit of hospitality does not mean a lot of chatter before Mass. Rather, it means an attitude that says to those around us: “I am glad to see you.” A simple good morning or a smile communicates a spirit of hospitality.

Reflection question: Do you normally get to church a few minutes before Mass begins? If so, to what extent do you use the time to prepare your mind and heart for worship?

The Church speaks of *four presences of Christ in the Eucharist*: in the congregation, in the *presider*, in the proclamation of the Word and, most of all, in the Eucharist. We can say that we help the presence of Christ in the congregation to *come alive* when we are hospitable to those around us and when we are prayerfully engaged in the Mass. We hinder the presence of Christ from coming alive in the congregation when we are unfriendly, distracted, and not engaged in the Mass.

Reflection question: To what extent are you a hospitable and prayerful presence at Mass?

Behavior #3: Active participation in the song and prayer of the Mass. Prior to his conversion to Christianity, St. Augustine used to come and sit in the back of the church while the Mass was going on. Concerning the singing, Augustine wrote:

*How I wept, deeply moved by your hymns, songs,
and the voices that echoed through your Church!
What emotion I experienced in them!
Those sounds flowed into my ears,
distilling the truth in my heart.
A feeling of devotion surged within me,
and tears streamed down my face—
tears that did me good.*

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1157)

Augustine's words speak to the power of music and song to touch hearts. When it comes to church music, all of us have different tastes (and some of us were absent when God was passing out the singing voice!). Having said that, all of us should do the best we can to enter into the song and prayer of the Mass.

An important part of active participation in the Mass is joining in the sung prayer of the congregation. Notice the term "*sung prayer*." Ideally, at Mass we don't just sing the songs, but we *pray* the songs. We do this by paying attention to the lyrics of the song and making an effort to lift our minds and hearts to God during our singing.

Reflection questions: Do you actively participate in the sung prayer of the congregation at Mass? Even when you don't like the song or don't know it, do you still try to sing it? To what extent are you aware that your participation or lack of participation in the singing impacts the quality of the worship that we give to God?

Behavior #4: Attentive listening. At times during Mass, we are called to be active listeners. This is especially so during the proclamation of the scriptures and the homily

which follows. *Attentive listening* during Mass is not easy. It demands a real effort on our part, particularly when the readings are difficult to understand and the homily does not engage us. Nevertheless, we are called to do our best to tune out other voices seeking our attention and to tune into the Word of God. A helpful preparation to hearing God's Word during Mass might be going over my weekly commentary on the readings which may be found on our parish website (see homepage). You might even consider downloading the commentary and bringing it to Mass to read over before our celebration of the Eucharist begins. The *purpose of the homily* is to connect the readings, at least one of them, to our daily lives. I often pray for the deacons and priests who will be preaching in our churches throughout the world this coming weekend. I invite you to do the same. During the Liturgy of the Word, our prayer should be "*Lord help me to hear the word you want me to hear today.*" That simple prayer expresses our desire to hear God's Word.

Reflection question: Do you normally make a real effort to tune into the readings and message proclaimed at Mass?

Behavior #5: Spirit of generosity. The following are four ways that we can allow a spirit of generosity to impact the way we participate in the Eucharist.

- Getting to church on time and remaining until the end of the final song
- Giving of ourselves to the songs and prayers of the Mass
- Giving of our financial resources to the church during the collection
- Bringing food for the poor on the first Sunday of the month. (Please bring your food offering with you to church so you can take it forward during the offertory procession. We ask that you not leave your food offering at the truck outside as the food will not be blessed. Neither should your offering be brought to the sanctuary *before* Mass begins.)

Behavior #6: Spirit of thanksgiving. At each Mass we participate in, we come primarily to *give* of ourselves and not to receive. Though of course in our giving, we will receive. When we come to Mass with a "what's in it for me" attitude, we are bringing a consumerist mentality into the house of God.

Our behavior at Mass is contagious. It is important to remember that our behavior at Mass is contagious. When we are *hospitable* to those around us, *sing* enthusiastically, *pray* devoutly, *listen* attentively to the readings and homily, place our *money offering* in the basket, receive the Body and Blood of Christ with *love* and *faith*, move with a sense of *reverence* that reflects

awareness that we are on holy ground—we demonstrate that we are participating in something very important, and our good example may impact those around us more than we can ever imagine. On the contrary, when we miss Mass for no good reason, we give a poor example to our family and others. When we come rushing into Mass, show no hospitality to those around us, behave in a distracted and uninvolved manner, or leave early, we diminish the whole worship atmosphere. We communicate to others that “the Mass is not important; I’m bored and not mentally here.”

Why Non-Catholics Are Not Invited to Receive the Eucharist

This is a painful issue not only for non-Catholics who come to Mass with their Catholic spouse, but also for many Catholics who wonder why not all who believe in Jesus, and perhaps even in his presence in the bread and wine, are invited to come to the Lord’s table. A key reason for this is the lack of unity in matters of belief. For Catholics, reception of the Eucharist signifies oneness in our belief in Jesus, but also in Mary and the saints, as well as our unity with the Pope as the successor of St. Peter. In light of the fact that these fundamental beliefs are not shared by our non-Catholic brothers and sisters, it pains us to exclude them from partaking of the Precious Body and Blood.

When non-Catholic Christians convert to Catholicism, they enter into *full communion* with our church, i.e. full communion in all matters of faith and belief.

Connecting Liturgy and Life

“One cannot be truly engaged in the liturgy if they are not engaged in life. One supports the other.”

(Clara Dina Hinojosa)

It would seem that many people who attend Mass on Sunday see little connection between what happens in church and what happens in their homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces. For many people, their “Thanks be to God” at the end of Mass may literally mean, “Thank God, our Sunday obligation is taken care of; now let’s get back to business as usual.” Too few people are aware that the time spent in the world can be a means of personal sanctification just like the time spent in personal and communal prayer. Such separation of worship and life, of the sacred and the secular, is a perennial danger in Christian spirituality. It is too easy for us to lose sight of the beautiful fact that the Jesus who leads us in worship on Sunday morning is also at work in the kitchens and offices of life, seeking to build there “a kingdom of truth, justice, love and peace.” (Preface, Feast of Christ the King).

At Mass we celebrate the Paschal Mystery of Jesus, i.e., his dying and rising, his passage back to the Father. But it is in our homes, neighborhoods, shopping centers, workplaces, etc., that we live the Paschal Mystery. It is in these places that we literally enter into (or fail to enter into) the death and Resurrection of Jesus. We enter into and share in the dying of Jesus when we are called to die to ourselves and our desires, when we experience rejection or misunderstanding, when we are gossiped about and treated unjustly, when we struggle with pain, sickness, old age, evil and death. We enter into the dying of Jesus when we struggle with painful relationships at home, at work and at play. But we enter into the victory and Resurrection of Jesus every time we make a decision to love, to give and receive forgiveness, to do what we can to change what can be changed and accept patiently what cannot be changed. We enter into and share in the victory and Resurrection of Jesus every time we let go of bitterness, jealousies, small-mindedness, and all the things that block us from communicating and experiencing the oneness of spirit that we pray for at Mass. All of the above examples and many others give us multiple opportunities to daily die and rise with Christ.

The authenticity and integrity of our weekly celebration of the Paschal Mystery will be in direct relationship to our efforts to live the Paschal Mystery in the hustle and bustle of daily life. If our daily lives reflect little of the dying and rising of Christ, then we can be sure that our Sunday celebration of those events, however devoutly attended or beautifully celebrated, will be of little interest to our Lord. In fact, he may well say of us: “These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me” (Mark 7:6). “*Full, conscious and active participation*” does not just refer to liturgy but to all of life. *Full, conscious and active participation* refers to our relationships at home, work and recreation. It applies to our response to God who is present and active in every aspect of our lives. *Full, conscious and active participation* means that we give ourselves totally to whatever we are doing at any particular moment.

When we come to Mass on Sunday, we bring with us to the altar of God our efforts, however fragile, to live the Paschal Mystery.

During the Act of Penitence, we give the Lord our failures, and we ask for his mercy and healing.

During the Liturgy of the Word, we look at our efforts to live the dying and rising of Christ and view them in the light of God’s Word.

In the Presentation of the Gifts, we prepare the gifts of bread and wine, and we prepare our minds and hearts to enter into Eucharistic prayer and to receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

During the Eucharistic Prayer, we become mystically united in the perfect thanksgiving and self-offering of Jesus to his Father and our Father, praying that our efforts to give thanks and to surrender ourselves to him may be a little more generous.

During the Communion Rite, we receive food and drink from heaven—divine nourishment for life’s journey. By our active participation in the Communion Rite, we give expression to the fact that we are members of the Body of Christ and want to be bread for our brothers and sisters as they journey through life.

Finally, in the Concluding Rite, we are once again sent forth into the marketplace to make a fresh effort to live the Paschal Mystery of Jesus.

The time we spend in personal and communal prayer is a time to recharge. This time is a call to be immersed in Christ so that we may re-enter even more intensely the arena of human activity. This time of union with Christ strengthens us as co-workers with the Lord who is molding us as he fashions “*a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice will abide and whose blessedness will answer and surpass all the longings for peace which spring up in the human heart*” (The Church in the Modern World #39). It is not a time of escape but a time of empowerment.

Much of what I have been saying about linking liturgy and life is beautifully summarized in these words of the late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin in his Pastoral Letter on the Liturgy to the people of Chicago. He writes:

The liturgy is not an extra something nice that may give us good feelings. It is our life, our very spirit. It is the source of our identity and renewal as a Church.

When we let the liturgy shape us—from the ashes of Lent and the waters of baptism to the broken bread and poured out cup at every Sunday’s Mass—then we shall find what it is “to put on Christ.”

Yet liturgy is also a humble reality, and participation in liturgy does not exhaust our duties as Christians. We shall be judged for attending to justice and giving witness to the truth, for hungry people fed and prisoners visited. Liturgy itself does not do these things. Yet good liturgy makes us a people whose hearts are set on such deeds. Liturgy is our communion, our strength, our nourishment, our song, our peace, our reminder, our promise. This singular meeting with the Lord Jesus leads us to make all the events and circumstances of our lives occasions for meeting Him. Liturgy is for me the bedrock of all my prayer and the measure of all my deeds.

JESUS, JOY OF LOVING HEARTS

O Jesus, joy of loving hearts,
the fount of life and my true light,
we seek the peace your love imparts
and stand rejoicing in your sight.

We taste in you my living bread
and long to feast upon you still.
We drink of you my fountain head,
my thirsting soul to quench and fill.

For you my thirsting spirit years,
where’re our changing lot is cast;
glad when your presence we discern,
blest when our faith can hold you fast.

O Jesus ever with us stay;
make all our moments calm and bright.

O chase the night of sin away;
shed o’er the world your holy light.

(Attributed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux)

*(Quoted in U.S. Catholic Catechism
for Adults, pp.229-230)*

Have a blessed week,

