



The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ June 7, 2015 B

- ◆ “Do This In Memory Of Me”
- ◆ Six ways that we can be actively engaged in the Mass

“Do this in memory of me.” Reflecting on these words of Jesus, Dom Gregory Dix, OSB, 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, unflinchingly, 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

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, wrote: “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.”

Six behaviors that express full and active participation in the Mass

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.

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.

Reflection questions: 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?

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, unprayerful and distracted congregations drive people away.* A spirit of hospitality does not mean a lot of chatter before Mass but rather 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.

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. Conversely, 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 for anyone to hear God's Word during Mass might be going over my weekly commentary on the readings, which may be found on our parish website. 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.*" This simple prayer expresses our desire to be attentive to God's Word.

Reflection question: Do you normally make a real effort to tune in to 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 is an act of giving one's time to the Lord. Coming late and/or leaving early is being stingy with the Lord.
- Giving of ourselves to the songs and prayers of the Mass
- Giving of our financial resources to the church during the collection
- Bringing food to church for our Food Pantry. (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.”

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

Connecting Liturgy and Life

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

It would seem that some 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. 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 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.

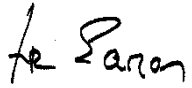
In his book, *This is Our Faith*, Michael Pennock writes:

The Mass eloquently reminds us that communal worship must never be focused on itself. When we “break bread” in the name of Jesus, we are celebrating our brotherhood and sisterhood and receiving the source of our life, the Lord Jesus. In this sacred meal, he reminds us to take him out into the world, a world that desperately needs his love. *We must be broken for others just as he was broken for us.* Christian worship that does not translate into service for others is not true worship. Jesus said:

“It is not anyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in Heaven.”
(Mt 7:21)

The Eucharist reminds us that because we have received the Body of Christ, we must become the body of Christ. We are the Lord's hands that touch and care for the sick, old and infirm; his feet that walk to meet and befriend the lonely; his understanding eyes that reveal compassion to the hurting and lost in our midst; his voice of power and righteousness to speak out for the marginalized in the cause of justice.

Have a blessed week,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Aaron". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.