

# FROM THE PASTOR'S



**Fifth Sunday of Lent**  
**March 92, 2009 B**

## **“FULL AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE MASS IS THE AIM TO BE CONSIDERED ABOVE ALL ELSE.”**

The above quote is from the Vatican II document on the liturgy. The same document states that it is the responsibility of pastors to help the faithful to enter in the prayer and action of the Mass “actively” and “fruitfully.” My hope is that this column will be a step towards that end.

### **What does active participation in the Mass entail?**

The following are six attitudes that will help us to be actively engaged in the Mass. As I outline them, you can ask yourself: to what extent do I manifest these attitudes?

**Attitude #1 - Quiet reflection prior to Mass.** The Vatican II document on the liturgy states: *“In order that the sacred liturgy may produce its full effect, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their thoughts match their words, and that they cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain”* (#11). Ideally, we should get to church ten or more minutes before Mass begins to have some time to prepare our mind and heart to enter into the prayer, song, and action of the Mass. If people around us are talking, it is, of course, going to be more difficult to get into the mood of quiet meditation. But people do do it. I see it all the time in church.

*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?

**Attitude #2 - 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. But it does mean 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. 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?

**Attitude #3 - Active participation in the songs and prayers 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 text 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?

**Attitude #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 it. *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 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 try hard to tune into the readings and message proclaimed at Mass?

**Attitude #5 - Generosity.** An attitude of generosity is reflected in several ways. *First*, by getting to church on time and staying until the end of the last song. Coming late or leaving early manifests a selfish attitude towards Sunday worship. *Second*, we show an attitude of generosity when we *give of ourselves* to the prayer and song of the Mass. The opposite is withholding of self. A *third* way we express a spirit of generosity is by faithful financial giving of our financial resources at Mass. This is the most concrete way of saying "Thank you, Lord, for the material blessings in my life." A *fourth* way to show a generous spirit at Mass is by participating in our monthly food collection. The *Catechism* states that participation in the Eucharist commits us to caring for the poor. It is a good gesture to bring your offering *into Church* rather than to drop it off at the truck in the parking lot.

*Reflection question:* To what extent do you bring a spirit of generosity to the celebration of the Eucharist?

**Attitude #6 - Thanksgiving.** People sometimes say "I get nothing out of the Mass." This is too bad when we consider that fact that at every Mass, Jesus gives us himself. Secondly, it is very important that we come to Mass primarily to *give* of ourselves to the prayer and action of the Mass. The word Eucharist means thanksgiving. At any Mass, our first duty is to give thanks. In giving, we usually receive. When we come to Mass looking for "what is in it for me?" we are bringing a worldly consumerist mentality into the house of God.

*Reflection questions:* Do you believe that in giving we receive? Why do people get bored at Mass?

### **Our behavior at Mass is contagious**

It is important for us to remember that our attitude and behavior towards Mass and during Mass is *contagious*. When we rarely or never miss Mass, others, especially our children and neighbors, know it and are probably edified by our fidelity to the Eucharist. When we are *hospitable* to those around us in church, *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 - when we do all these things at Mass, our behavior will be contagious and have a positive impact on those around us. On the other hand, 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, and leave early, we diminish the whole worship atmosphere. We communicate to them that "This is not important, I'm bored and not mentally here."

Have a blessed week,

