

# Practical Ways to Prepare for Mass and stay focused at Mass (or How to get the Most out of Mass)

In the beginning of today's Gospel, Jesus instructs his disciples to make preparations for the Passover meal. Like most meals, the Passover meal required planning and preparation. Our celebration of the Sunday Eucharist also requires planning and preparation. Certainly the ministers at the Eucharist prepare for their roles: the person presiding prays and prepares the homily; the prayers of petition are written; the music ministers prayerfully select music and practice it before Mass; Eucharistic ministers, lectors and altar servers prepare carefully for their roles. As the worshipping assembly, we can also prepare for the Mass through our prayer during the week, by reading the Scripture before Mass, and by making ourselves present to the Eucharistic celebration.

Because of this Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, now is the perfect time to reflect on what you might do better, as an individual, or as a family, to prepare for our celebration of the Eucharist. Choose one or more ideas to implement for yourself or your family. Pray that God will help you and your family make your celebration of the Eucharist the highlight of your week.

## 1. Commit to Going Every Sunday

First and foremost, plan to go to Mass every week. It's not going to be very beneficial for you if you're only going when you feel like it!

Pope Francis, speaking at his weekly general audience on February 5, 2014, said:

*"...that by celebrating the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, "we participate in the mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ... "By making himself broken bread for us, the Lord Jesus pours out to us all of his mercy and his love, renewing our heart, our existence and our way of relating to him and our brothers and sisters," he said. Taking part in the Eucharist "conforms us in a unique and profound way to Christ," he said, granting Christians a foretaste of full communion with God in heaven, "where with all the saints we will have the unimaginable joy of contemplating God face to face."*

## 2. Read the Mass Readings Ahead of Time

The great thing about the readings at Mass is that you can look them up in advance. Our liturgy follows a three-year cycle that walks us through the entire Bible. But one problem is that sometimes it's difficult to hear or even understand the readings. Not to blame the lector, but sometimes you just can't hear them. Then you leave Mass feeling unfulfilled. That's why we recommend you read the readings ahead of time. You can look them up on the liturgical calendar, find them in the church bulletin, purchase a Sunday Missal, or even have the readings emailed to your inbox! Not only will you feel more prepared at Mass having made yourself familiar with the readings, but you will also get to know God through the scripture and learn how to navigate the Bible.

## 3. Reflect on the Readings

Once you have read the readings you should also reflect on their meaning. Sometimes God's voice is very clear, but other times not so much. If you are reading and reflecting with your family, then discuss and share your thoughts and insights. How is God speaking to you through these passages? If you still have trouble you can find reflections on the readings to help you grasp the meaning and relate them to your daily life. Go on-line or visit a Christian bookstore for tons of resources!

## 4. Get to Mass Early

Make it a habit to arrive 10-15 minutes early. Remember, you are coming out of a noisy world and you need to be able to leave all of that behind to be with the Lord. It takes a few minutes for most people to do this. Fix your eyes on the cross or slip into the adoration chapel and just sit in silence for a few moments. You will find it to be much easier to focus during the Mass with a little preparation.

## 5. Spend a Few Moments in Prayer

After you've cleared your mind of all distractions, talk to God. After all, that is the reason you are at Mass, right? Ask Him for His guidance, that He may speak to you during the Mass and fill you with His grace, mercy, and love. You can't be filled unless you have opened yourself to receive. Offer your open heart and mind to the Lord. Then continue to pray throughout the Mass. The Mass is a prayer after all. Ask for forgiveness from your sins, listen to God speak to you in the readings and through the priest, offer yourself to Him, and give thanks that He has so freely and humbly given Himself to you in the Eucharist.

## 6. Bring back those wandering thoughts

Don't let outside distractions disturb your internal peace. Mass is the place where heaven meets earth. Each time you are distracted, always bring your mind back to where you are, even if you have to do this 100 times from start to finish. As instructed by St. Francis de Sales:

*"If the heart wanders or is distracted, bring it back to the point quite gently and replace it tenderly in its Master's presence. And even if you did nothing during the whole of your hour but bring your heart back and place it again in Our Lord's presence, though it went away every time you brought it back, your hour would be very well employed."*

## 7. Fully Participate in the Mass

Mass is not an event for spectators. Participate! Don't expect to be entertained. You are there to offer God worship and receive grace. Say all the prayers and sing all the songs. Ask yourself: Where does this Sunday fall in the liturgical calendar? How is the Old Testament reading connected to the New Testament reading? How does the Responsorial Psalm connect both? If you are engaging in all of this, it is a rewarding occupation for the mind, and God will undoubtedly assist you to better grasp and understand His sacred truths.

*"Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy" (Sacrosanctum Concilium, §14)*

## 8. Intentionally add your intentions and sacrifices to the prayers of the Mass

Two things that you can bring with you to every Mass are the special intentions that you're praying for, and the personal sacrifices that you're uniting to Christ's one great sacrifice. Mass is a time to bring your issues, stresses, anxieties, fears, concerns, and personal baggage. Check your bags at the foot of the sanctuary! Bring a special intention with you, someone or something you want to offer up to the Lord upon his altar alongside the gifts. At the point before the Consecration when the preside says, "Pray brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice AND YOURS may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father," consciously think of what these things are for you.

Also, the last prayer in the Prayer of the Faithful in our parish is "for all the prayers of this worshipping community and for all the prayers within our Parish Book of Intercessions" with a moment of silent prayer for our personal intentions. Offer your intention at that time as well. (And write your prayer intentions in our "Parish Book of Intercessions" in the narthex.)

## 9. Go forth with purpose

*"Do you leave Mass with a mission? There are people who desperately need what you have! Before you exit that pew before your genuflection is complete, and before you deactivate the car alarm in the parish parking lot, have a goal, a purpose, and a plan. Who are you going to invite next week? Who are you going to reach out to at work or school? What do you need to work on personally, and how do you plan to unleash the powder keg of grace within your soul in the coming hours and days? The question is not whether you have been empowered at Mass but whether you comprehend the power that exists within you—and what you plan to do about it." – Mark Hart, Behold the Mystery*

By your prayerful preparation for mass, and by your fully conscious and active participation in the liturgy, there is no way you will leave Mass unaffected. But if we enter into mass thinking "what's in this for me?" we miss the point completely. When we participate in the Mass, when we fully give ourselves over to whole participation (mind, body, and soul) of Mass, we focus on God and the whole of Christianity and not ourselves. The Mass is there not to entertain us, but to provide us as a community the opportunity to give glory and honour to God for creating us and loving us, to remember the sacrifice of Christ for our salvation, to receive the real presence of Christ into our very being, and to unite ourselves in with the Body of Christ (on Earth and in Heaven). The act of doing so is pleasing to God even when we'd rather be somewhere else. Even when we're tired from a long week of work. Even when our child is fussy. Even when we feel lost or sad. It is in those times when the sacrifice might even mean the most to Him, when we give our best in the face of adversity.

***"The Mass is the most perfect form of prayer." Pope Paul VI***

***"If we really understood the Mass, we would die of joy." – Saint Jean Vianney***

***"We will never thank the Lord enough for the gift he gave us with the Eucharist."  
Pope Francis***