

The Mass: Source of Strength for Daily Life

By María de Lourdes Ruiz Scaperlanda

Catholics believe that in the celebration of the Mass, they join the sacrifice of everyday life to the sacrifice of Christ, says Msgr. Joseph DeGrocco, Professor of Liturgy at Immaculate Conception Seminary in Huntington, New York. “The offering and self-emptying we do at Mass, in union with Christ, is the offering and self-emptying we are supposed to be living every moment of every day—that is what the Christian life is!”

The relationship between the Mass and everyday life is a reciprocal relationship, an active experience. At every Mass Catholics bring the offering of what’s going on in their lives—and offer that in union with Jesus. It is that union, culminating in the Holy Communion, that strengthens them for everyday life, explains Msgr. DeGrocco. “We do liturgy in order to try to do Christian life right. What we do at Mass is a summation or a ‘microcosm,’ if you will, of the way we are supposed to be living Christian life.”

According to Msgr. DeGrocco, this awareness of what takes place at every Mass is precisely why Catholics should invest themselves into appreciating the Mass. “We cannot be Catholic without it,” he says. “We cannot be fully united to Jesus without sacramental communion with Him in the Eucharist.”

Not only is daily life about the Mass, says Liturgy Professor Sister Janet Baxendale, SC of New York City’s St. Joseph’s Seminary, but the Mass also “offers extraordinary help in my efforts to live my life well” through Scripture, the Word of God, the Prayers of the Faithful, and most powerfully, by receiving the Eucharist.

In Holy Communion, “Christ comes to us to nourish us; to be food for our souls as we struggle to fulfill our Baptismal call to be like Christ, to be His presence in our world,” notes Sister Baxendale.

Distractions can make participation and appreciation of the Mass discouraging, notes Sister Baxendale. “Our thoughts stray; we find ourselves trying to solve problems of home, of office, of life in general. The people around us distract us: a crying child; someone with an annoying habit sharing ‘my’ pew; the choir is off-key; the readings can’t be heard—and on and on.”

Sister Baxendale says there are strategies to reduce the impact of these distractions:

1. Prepare for Mass. Read over that day’s Scriptures. “In this way you will have done the ‘ground work,’ tilling the soil so that the seed of God’s Word may find ready soil in you.”
2. Participate in Mass. Sing the hymns, pray the responses, listen to the readings and to the prayers said by the priest on our

behalf: the opening prayer, the prayer over the gifts, the prayer after Communion, the Eucharistic prayer. “Work at doing this well, and there will be less time for distractions.”

3. Learn about the Mass. Check online sources provided by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and printed materials in your own parish for resources to “enhance your understanding and appreciation of the great gift God has given to His people in the Mass.”

4. Take daily time to be silent and to listen. The self-discipline of a regular period of quiet reflection teaches us to “empty our minds of the cares, ideas, and distracting thoughts that press on us—and to concentrate on God, on His incredible love for me [personally], and His presence to me. Our perseverance can bear fruit in the ability to concentrate more fully when we are at Mass.”

5. Don’t get discouraged. “It is the effort that counts. The results are in the hands of God.”

Christ is present at Mass in many ways, explains Msgr. DeGrocco, “in the gathered assembly, in the Word, in the priest, and most especially in the Real Presence of the Eucharist... The person in the pew who does nothing ‘more’ than being internally attentive and bringing the sacrifice of his/her life, and who does all the external participation (sitting, standing, kneeling, responding, singing) is nonetheless participating fully.”

He notes, “The best way to improve one’s appreciation of the Mass is to improve one’s living of the sacrifice of one’s life.”