

3rd Homily on the Mass - immediate Preparation

Begin with a prayer: “Lord Jesus, the gentle, red flame by the tabernacle reminds us that you are with us, that you are present to us in the Blessed Sacrament. Deepen our Faith and increase our Love, so that everything we do to prepare for Mass and what we do during Mass is inspired entirely by love for You. We ask this through your Holy and powerful Name.” Amen

One way to prepare well for Mass is to ask God to help us with our intention. There is a prayer in the bulletin this week that can be used to help cultivate a motive for going to Mass that springs entirely from love. We want to get away from other motives like obligation, duty, guilt and fear, and to come to Mass purely out of love for God and to receive the tremendous love that He lavishes upon us at every Mass.

Another way to prepare well for Mass, and perhaps one of the most important, is by asking ourselves if there is anything that we may need to confess before receiving communion: Have we done anything to seriously wound or break our communion with the Lord? Why is this important? I will use an analogy from marriage to explain:

- A husband and wife have planned an evening together to celebrate 20 years of marriage and to renew their love. On the evening of their date, he gives into an invitation to have a couple of drinks after work with some friends and comes home 3 hours after the agreed upon time with his wife. She knows what happened. She is crying; she is deeply hurt and very upset. As if nothing happened he sits down beside her and tries to get intimate with her. And naturally she is further offended and pulls back, repulsed by his insensitivity and lack of respect for her. She knows that any attempt at intimacy at that moment would be a lie until there is some kind of reconciliation, an acknowledgement and apology for what he had done. If this is true between a husband and wife, how much more in our relationship with God?

Let us take one of the Commandments, the 3rd for example: “Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.” The first 3 Commandments deal directly with the love of God. This means that whenever I come to Mass I am loving God. Mass, in fact, is a celebration and renewal of God’s covenant love with us--and God wants to renew this love with us at least once a week. When a person fails to come to Mass without a good reason, it is a serious failure to love God. For one to do this and then come the next week and walk right up to communion as if nothing happened--would this not be terribly wrong? To act in this way without any sorrow and confession of sin would be to commit an even greater sin, what St. Paul calls the “sin against the body and blood of the Lord”--taking something so holy and sacred, so beautiful and good as the Eucharist and disrespect it, treat it with indifference, receive it unworthily as if it were no big deal.

- I remembering being at Mass once when I was convicted by something in the homily--a serious sin that I had committed in the past. I knew at that moment that I could not receive the Eucharist. So I accepted the humiliation, and stayed back. But after Mass I went to confession so I could receive the Eucharist the following Sunday.

There is a certain 'casualness' that has crept into the Church over the last several years, which has done much to weaken faith about the Mass and the Eucharist. The US bishops have put together a document which we will post on our web-site that is on the worthy reception of Holy Communion, and they give several examples of those sins that should be confessed before receiving the Eucharist. One way to grow in our honor for the Lord and deepen our respect for the Gift of the Eucharist is to read this document and reeducate ourselves on this important topic.

This also applies to our relationships with each other. If I have seriously hurt anyone, the Lord asks me to reconcile with them before I bring my gift to the altar.

We also prepare for Mass by the practice of fasting one hour before receiving Holy Communion. This does not apply to little children, or to elderly who are frail, or to the sick who need food to keep up their strength. But for the rest of us, why does the Church encourage us to fast one hour before communion (this would include gum and candy and any snacks)? Is this just another bothersome rule to make our life miserable? Not if we understand the reason for it. In the spirit of love, we want to leave home hungry in order to come to Mass hungry: hungry for God, hungry for the Word of God, hungry for Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life. Seen in the light of love, our fasting says to God: "I am going to Mass to listen to Your Word and receive you in Holy Communion, and so I want to keep all the space in my body and soul just for You--I want nothing else to fill this space--it is all for You Lord."

Have you ever noticed how you feel differently when you're all dressed up for a special occasion, like a wedding? Our dressing up says that the occasion is special to us, and helps us to take it more seriously. Since the Mass is certainly the most important, special celebration of our life, what we wear can help us to see it as special and take it more seriously. We also know how our clothing can be a way of showing honor and reverence for God and His House, and a way of loving each other by avoiding anything that could distract or detract another during the great prayer of the Mass. God may not mind what we wear, but our clothing helps us by the way it influences our attitude.

Also important for preparing well for Mass is trying to come early, so that we have time to prayerfully recollect ourselves before the Mass begins. I know this can be challenging. There are those who are chronically late to everything--if you are among them, God bless you, do the best you can. It is also very challenging for families with young children--God understands--and there too we must do the best we can. It's when the Mass is the only thing in our life for which we are late, then it's a problem--an indication that one may need to re-evaluate the priorities of their life. And I am not one to stand up here and give a guilt homily to those who come late and leave early--that would only last a couple of weeks anyway. It is better when our choices come from within our own hearts and springs from our own love for the Lord. God is always inviting us to a conversion of heart.

The last preparation is the moment of prayer while we are kneeling or sitting in the pew. Realizing that we are soon to begin the great prayer of the Mass, preparing to Worship the Most Holy Trinity, preparing to re-immense ourselves in Paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, the best way to spend this time is prayerfully. And to help with this we have put together some prayer card that are now in the pews. You may have prayers of your own that you like to say, but sometimes people prefer something that's already written. So feel free to use these prayers if you find them helpful.

As we apply all that we are learning about the Mass and the Eucharist, this will not only help us grow in our own appreciation for this wonderful gift of our Catholic faith, but it will also help us to open our lives to the powerful love and grace that is present in every Mass.

God love you,
Fr. Steven