

2007: PREPARING TO EXPERIENCE CHRIST THROUGH THE MASS

Over the past two thousand years, the Mass has been the most powerful means of drawing upon the power of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for the needs of people's lives. The greatest means he left us to do so is the Eucharist. But to draw on this power, believers need to prepare themselves for the basic experiences Jesus offers through the Eucharist, which he instituted at the Last Supper.

The Opening Prayer: 'What needs am I praying for in this Mass?'

The Mass is the prayer of Jesus to God the Father. Being the Son of God, the power of his prayer is all powerful and always granted. To the extent that believers pray for personal needs or the needs of others in a Mass, Jesus makes their prayers his own.

We recall these needs when the celebrant invites: 'Let us pray'. The personal *needs* we pray for in a Mass, and our prayers for others, are always answered in ways *God sees to be good* for us (which may be different from the answers we think best). This is the first experience of Christ in the Eucharist.

Preparing my prayers for this Mass

What needs will I pray for in this Mass? Personal needs? Needs of others? Humanity?

The Liturgy of the Word: 'Where am I seeking Christ's guidance for my life in this Mass?'

There are many Gospel examples of the young, parents, leaders and others seeking Jesus' guidance for their lives. They had personal questions, confusions and problems resulting from their own mistakes.

Jesus guides people today through the Liturgy of the Word. He does so for anyone who listens to his teachings in the scriptures, and tries to apply them to their lives. Their wills are strengthened, as is their love for God.

Whether guidance is experienced sooner or later depends upon the extent to which they pray daily. It will depend also on whether the question or problem is symptomatic of deeper issues. If so, they find themselves guided to the deeper issues.

Usually a priest or deacon gives a 'homily' after the scripture readings. His task is to help hearers reflect upon ways the scripture ideas can relate to their lives. Only by doing this can hearers open themselves to the guidance Jesus is seeking to give them.

What questions from my life am I bringing to this Mass? What confusions? Problems as a result of earlier choices?

Preparing myself to hear in this Mass

We open ourselves to hearing Christ's guidance by listening to the scriptures in the Liturgy of the Word, and trying to apply at least one idea to our lives. *'How does one or more ideas in this Mass relate to my daily life?'*

'The Eucharistic Sacrifice: 'Where am I seeking the power of Christ's Resurrection for my life?'

The Eucharistic sacrifice is the heart of the Mass. Once the bread and wine have been prepared, the celebrant begins the Eucharistic Prayer, with its preface. The centre of the Eucharistic Prayer is the narrative of the Last Supper, when Catholics believe that Jesus, with the Holy Spirit, changes the bread and wine into his Body and Blood.

The Eucharistic Prayer is the prayer of sacrifice. During this prayer, Jesus offers his divine power for participants lives. He can heal, free from inner controlling influences, console, replace guilt with peace. His Resurrection showed that no human weakness is beyond his power which can conquer even death.

What personal weaknesses am I struggling with? Temptations to do wrong? Hurts in my marriage? Weaknesses undermining commitments? Strong emotions hampering efforts to live ideals? To change? Selfishness strangling love? Resentment preventing forgiveness?

Preparing myself for Christ' power through this Mass

Catholics believe that Jesus becomes present during the Eucharistic Prayer under the appearances of bread and wine as the celebrant repeats the words of Jesus in the Last Supper. Jesus offers himself in sacrifice to God the Father.

Worshippers can draw on the power he offers to the extent that they offer thanks for the good in their lives, and their efforts and struggles. This is not as easy to do as it might seem, particularly if we do not do it very often. The following questions may help.

What am I offering in this Mass from my work? My daily prayer? My married and family life? My relationship? My daily routines outside work? Any Personal sufferings, spiritual, psychological or physical? Hurts from relationships etc?

Holy Communion

Catholics receive Jesus in Holy Communion. This action publicly expresses three things. These are their conviction that Jesus Christ is really present, divine and human, body, blood and soul, under the appearances of bread and wine; that there is no grave sin disrupting their personal relationship with Jesus; and that they believe to the beliefs of the Catholic faith community.

Catholics receive Holy Communion for many reasons. The most important is to deepen their personal relationships Jesus himself. The closer people draw to him the more his influence and blessings grow in their lives.

During Holy Communion, people of other faiths and Christian traditions are always invited to approach the Celebrant for a special Blessing.

However, there is *never any expectation* that anyone feel obliged to leave their seat during the Communion Rite - be they Catholic but not wishing to go to Holy Communion for some reason, or not Catholic and not wishing to receive a blessing. Here we are in an area of freedom of conscience, which always has to be respected.

Conclusion

How do I prepare normally for Mass? If I do not do so, the chances are that I will not be open to the experiences Christ is seeking to give me. I am likely to feel that 'I get little out of it'