

PRAYING THE MASS

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LIFE is dominated by a trinity of disciplines—physical, mental and spiritual.

If we are to experience the joy of being fully aware of our share in the priesthood of Christ, and of our membership in His Mystical Body through the Sacrament of Baptism, we must offer ourselves in the Holy Mass on all three planes, physical, mental, and spiritual. Therefore let us pray the Mass with our bodies, with our minds, and with our souls.

PRAY THE MASS—WITH OUR BODIES

The first discipline in praying the Mass is a physical one, and it can be exercised in the following points, little practices that cost something but are very rewarding.

Be Punctual

Get up a few minutes earlier as an act of discipline to pay for the grace of offering Mass.

If one is late, on entering the church apologize to Our Lord in the Tabernacle. Coming late is bad manners.

Rushing out of church before the final prayers is also an act of bad manners and needs an apology.

Come to Mass in Silence

A silent tongue will give mind and heart a better chance to think over what is going to happen at Mass.

Go Straight Into Church

These precious moments really matter and help us to pray the Mass better. It is a pity to squander them in small talk outside the church.

Act Reverently on Entering the Church

Use the blessed water and make a reverent sign of the Cross. Then genuflect as an act of faith in the Real Presence.

Up Near the Altar

This will take some doing. The nearer the altar the better we see and hear the celebrant. Walk quietly and slowly as an act of reverence. If late, do not disturb those in the back seats. We might impose on ourselves a fine of going up near the altar-rails for the discourtesy of coming late.

Hilaire Belloc sings:

“Of courtesy, it is much less

Than courage of heart or holiness

Yet, in my walks it seems to me

That the grace of God is in courtesy.”

The rubrics are acts of courtesy during the Sacred Action which inspire reverence in the celebrant and aid his concentration.

The Courtesy of Our Hands

Let us make use of whatever helps to keep our interest lively during the Action-prayer of the Mass. For example, the priest turns round to invite us to pray with him as he opens his hands to say:

“Dominus vobiscum.” Let us open our hands as he does, reply to his greeting, and so check any day-dreaming at once.

At the Gospel let us make the sign of the Cross on our Missals and sign ourselves as the priest does.

At the “Mementos” for the living and the dead, we shall put our Missals down and imitate what the priest is doing with his hands. With his head bowed, and his hands joined near his face, the priest pauses to recall by name those for whom he is giving a place in his “memento.” This practice will remind us to bring all we wish to pray for into our Masses, our beloved dead and the friends we cherish.

Ten times during Mass the priest strikes his breast. This rubric is a cleansing act of sorrow, and that is the best approach to co-offering the Mass. Therefore let us strike our breasts—At each “*mea culpa*” of the Confiteor. At each “*Agnus Dei*.” At each “*Domine, non sum dignus*.” At the words, “*Nobis quoque peccatoribus*.”

The Courtesy of Our Heads

The courtesy of bowing the head calls for a closer observation of the priest; we need to lift our eyes from the Missal to the Altar. The priest bows his head to the crucifix at the mention of the Holy Name, at the “*Oremus*,” and at the conclusion of the prayers. Obeying this rubric increases devotion.

The priest bows his head to the Missal at the name of Mary, at the name of the saint whose Mass is said, at the name of the martyr in the two lists of saints in the Canon, and at the mention of the name of the reigning Pope. This small courtesy adds joy to the celebration of the saint’s feast day in heaven and the saint thus honoured is grateful and will reward us.

The Courtesy of Our Eyes

At certain parts of the Mass the rubrics direct the priest to raise his eyes to the Crucifix that he may more expressly send his prayer direct to God. Let us follow his example and improve our praying of the Mass. Frequently during Mass let us take our eyes off the Missal to observe what the priest is doing. If we are not quite up to where he is, it is better to skip some Missal prayers rather than rush to catch up with him. The Latin prayers take less time to recite than the longer English translations.

At the beginning of Mass observe the colour of the Vestments. If there is no altar boy, why not volunteer to serve the Mass?

The rubrics prescribe custody of the eyes that the priest may be more recollected, and may edify the congregation. Custody of the eyes in church is an acceptable gift to offer to God during Mass. Our eyes are usually under control when we walk to the altar rails to receive Holy Communion, and on returning. At other times there is an urge to look around at those present, especially when we sit up.

To use the eye-lids God gave us to control this curiosity is a discipline very acceptable to Him.

The Courtesy of Our Lips

The rubrics prescribe action, we must do things, not just sit, or lounge between the kneeler and seat. Obey the rubrics and we lessen distraction and banish boredom.

As an act of respect the priest kisses the altar many times during Mass. He also kisses the Missal at the end of the Gospel, saying: “By the words of the Gospel may our sins be blotted out.” Let us do likewise.

Let us *recite*, not merely silently read, the Missal prayers. The priest is bound to form the words with lips and tongue. Reciting the Missal prayers pays God the courtesy of our lips and must increase our earnestness in prayer. Reciting the words will slow down our praying of the Missal. A whistling noise, or a loud, sibilant whisper, is to be avoided, for it annoys others.

As the priest salutes us at the “*Dominus Vobiscum*” let us form with lips and tongue the appropriate response in silence. Similarly at the Gospel, at the “*Orate Fratres*,” and at the Preface dialogue.

The Courtesy of Our Bodies

When we kneel let us kneel upright, not stretching ourselves between seat and kneeler. When we stand let us show dignity, attention, and the readiness of a soldier on parade before the altar of sacrifice. Even while we sit we are still praying the Mass with the priest. At collection time there is a danger of distraction when men fumble through their pockets and women fuss over their bags. Have your offering ready, pay it, and return quickly to the Missal.

There are two occasions at Mass when we should get down on our knees earlier than is customary. The first is at the Preface: let us get on our knees at the beginning so that when the Sanctus bell rings we are ready to say it. The

present custom of waiting for the bell is very distracting. The second occasion is to be on our knees at the Post-Communion prayer so that we are eagerly awaiting the Blessing. This is more becoming, more an attitude of expectancy and gratitude for the official blessing of the priest, than the scramble to our knees as the priest is about to turn to bless us.

The priest bends his body low at the Confiteor, before the Gospel, at the beginning of the Canon, and at the prayer, “Supplices te rogamus,” as an expression of self-abasement and humility. We could with profit to our praying of the Mass copy the priest and bend our bodies low at those moments.

The priest is admonished to move about the altar “with eyes cast down, with dignified carriage, erect.” We should also obey that instruction. Our few steps to the altar-rails may express love, gratitude, and reverence, or an atrocious carelessness.

PRAY THE MASS—WITH OUR MINDS

Let us accept the Missal as a spiritual life-companion, the one book that is to accompany us from school to the grave. The Holy Spirit is the Author of the Missal and He puts it into our hands to make us holy. The Missal path to holiness is open to all of us.

Using a Missal we pray *the* prayer of the Church and the prayer of the Church is the prayer of Christ. The use of the Missal will lead us to pray with the Church corporately, awakening in us the consciousness of our membership in the Mystical Body of Christ. Its use will lift our prayers above the level of mere private devotions to the dignity of a people praying the prayer of Christ.

When we open the Missal, we must try to realize that we are entering into a choir, into a congregation, into a society, into a family made up of souls of every condition on earth together with souls in heaven and souls in purgatory. The Missal will never have anything like its true meaning for us until we pray it in this way, that is, until we pray it as Members of the Mystical Body of Christ, not as private individuals.

The Missal is such a glorious gift and source of holiness that we should thank the Holy Spirit Who inspired it by using it with love and appreciation. Here are four practical suggestions to increase our love of the Missal.

1. Consult a Text-Book and a Guide

Take up again the text-book, *Pray the Mass*, which we used at school and learn more of the wonderful structure of the Missal. The Latin of the Missal is the concise, legal language of the Romans. We really need a guide to interpret the words of the Missal, to make them come alive, and thus to relish their power to make us holy. Father Martindale, S.J., helps us to dig for the treasures lying under the words and technical phrases of the Missal. His Books, *The Mind of the Missal* and the *Words of the Missal*, are very helpful.

2. Memorize Some Prayers of the Ordinary

Let us memorize *some* of the Missal prayers as an “act” of gratitude to the Holy Spirit Who *gave them to us*. This “act,” open to all, the clever and the slow, the old and the *young*, can be put on the Paten as a petition that what we have taken the trouble *to* memorize may be better prayed during the Mass and more frequently said outside *Mass*. There are prayers in the Ordinary which the priest says by heart as he watches the crucifix or bends low over the altar. To lift our eyes up to the crucifix, or to bow our heads as we softly say these *prayers with* the priest, will certainly increase our sense of participation and make us *more* devout and attentive.

Here is a short list of Missal Prayers to be memorized in the Mass of the Catechumens:

1. The prayer ascending the altar is an act of sorrow that is a pleasing change from the usual one.
2. The prayer on kissing the altar-stone might be said when we are called upon to do something that is difficult *and* unpleasant for us. We pray that the strength of the martyrs would steel us.
3. The *Kyrie Eleison*, like the urgent cry of the ten lepers, says: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

4. The *Gloria in excelsis* is a glorious lifting up of the heart to adore God with the joy of the Angels at Bethlehem.

5. The prayer on changing the Missal (Munda Cor) is a cleansing prayer that our tongues which speak the Gospel should be kept pure and clean and kind and generous—this surely is a grace that all of us need badly. Here is an admirable way of asking for it.

6. The prayer at the end of the Gospel is an ejaculation that should be ours very often: “By virtue of the words of the Gospel may our sins be blotted out.”

7. The *Nicene Creed* calls upon the mighty host of martyrs and confessors to strengthen our faith and increase our devotion to the Mass.

The Mass of the Faithful contains the essential prayers of Sacrifice, many we cannot understand. To memorize some of these prayers is an acceptable act of faith that will win such for us.

1. The Offertory prayers learned by heart enable us to look up at the crucifix and thus say them with a truer significance and a deeper desire of self-offering.

2. The *Orate, Fratres* is the priest’s appeal “that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father Almighty.” Let our reply be learned by heart and said from the heart.

3. The *Sanctus* known by heart allows us to bow our heads as we say it.

4. The *Peter Noster* is an easy one to learn in Latin. Let us say it with the priest. The Lord’s Prayer and its sequence (*Libera Nos*) is an appropriate prayer to say during a visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

5. The *Agnus Dei* is a prayer we should frequently say, with a special plea that He may give us peace of soul.

6. The three prayers before Holy Communion are the Missal’s preparation for Holy Communion, and we cannot improve on them. They are worth learning so that we can say them slowly and thoughtfully.

7. The *Domine, non sum dignus* is easy to learn in Latin. The sound of the priest’s voice reciting a Latin prayer that we have memorized will be as music to our ears.

8. All the prayers around the Communion of the celebrant are admirable ejaculations which will be prayed better if known by heart. Let us say these Missal words of love for the Blessed Sacrament that “we may grow into what we receive” (Pope Pius IX).

9. The prayers after Communion (*Quod ore* and *Corpus tuum*) are suitable petitions to be made outside Mass.

10. The prayer before the Last Blessing (*Placeat*) begs the Holy Trinity to accept the sacrifice offered. We say it best when bowed low like the priest.

Let us cultivate the practice of saying these memorized prayers during a visit to the church, or at any other time, to make amends for the lack of attention we gave them at Mass. Prayers thus said, and said lovingly, outside Mass, will have a great attraction for us when we come to them during Mass.

We shall make the Missal prayers our own by using them for our private devotion. Spiritual guides recommend us

to turn the mind and heart towards God at intervals throughout the *day*, to throw, as it were, a network of prayers over all we plan and do. In cultivating that admirable reminder of the presence of God let us use the Missal Prayers.

3. *Meditation on the Missal Prayers*

In an address to Catholic Youth, Pope Pius XII counselled them “to form themselves to piety so that the knowledge of God and religion would not be in the intelligence alone, but above all, in the heart.” Let that be our ideal with the Missal. We have memorized many of the Missal prayers, and let us now put them into our hearts through meditation.

Some think that mental prayer is only for priests and religious, and consequently do not attempt it. Others tire quickly of the formal method of meditation. The Missal prayers are the solution of these difficulties. Through meditation on its prayers the Missal becomes a most helpful spiritual book. A word, a phrase, a thought in the Missal may inspire our whole spiritual life, changing us into holier persons.

Here is the simple exercise. Before Mass, or apart from Mass, say slowly one of the memorized Missal prayers, turning its words over and savouring them as long as ideas and nourishment come from them. St. Ignatius Loyola advises us. to imitate the bee which stays with the flower and continues to suck as long as food flows. If a word, a phrase, or an idea in the Missal holds our attention, then God is taking a hand. What God does to us during such a meditation is far more important than any number of prayers. The Missal is intended to make us holy, and it can make us holy if we make the thoughts beneath the words of its prayers our own through meditation. Thinking in the heart applies the ideas to ourselves. This personal digestion of the Missal prayers through meditation will make the Missal a spiritual guide and a book of devotion that will illuminate our dark minds and quicken our cold hearts.

4. *Reading the Bible Extracts*

The Missal is too valuable an aid to holiness of life just to be used at Sunday’s Mass and then put away for the rest of the week. Let us take it up often to read its many extracts from the Psalms, from the Prophets, and from the New Testament. In the Mass we read the Bible in the all-revealing light streaming from Calvary. In fact, one could with advantage to one’s soul become a person of one spiritual book, the Missal.

Let us begin by reading the Epistle and Gospel of the Mass of the day as a preparation, or later that day. This indirect approach to the Sacred Scriptures can and will enkindle a desire in our hearts to read more of the Bible, and gradually the habit of reading the Holy Scriptures is cultivated.

The evening week-day Mass can become a real religious experience. Those who intend going will have the Mass in their minds throughout the afternoon until the office, store, and factory closes and then go to Mass as a voluntary act of religion. To dip into the Missal during a spare moment, to read the Epistle and Gospel, to select a favourite prayer of the Ordinary to browse over—all this has wonderful possibilities in helping us to live our Mass.

PRAY THE MASS—WITH OUR SOULS

We might summarize the offering of our hearts to God at Mass by the following easily remembered couplet:

The Paten to pray

The Chalice to pay.

The bread on the Paten stands for us, our work, our religion, and our life. At the Offertory let us put ourselves upon the Paten with the intention to enter into the Sacred Action of the Mass, co-offering ourselves with Christ on the Cross, and with the priest at the altar, for the four great ends of the Mass, namely, adoration, thanksgiving, reparation, and petition. It will check our daydreaming and listlessness during Mass if we remember this verse:

The Four Ends

“*Adore* till the Gospel,

Give *thanks* till the bell,

Till the Communion ask *pardon*

Then all your *wants* tell.”

When the Paten is lifted up let us look at it and put upon it the love of our hearts. Thus our good resolutions, our petitions and aspirations are made holy in His sight. By putting ourselves on the Paten we pray that as the bread is to be changed we also may become more and more Christ-like. We shall really enjoy coming to Mass when we think of the Paten waiting for our intentions. To offer our daily living to God is no cheap gift. To do so we must be thoughtful, attentive, alert, and generous. The Paten thus challenges us to an act of loving surrender to His Holy Will today and every day.

The Mass without an intention does not excite us or arouse us to be spiritually active. At the Offertory we sit down, the men take up the collection, and we tend to relax. This is the time to renew our intention, to feel the need of what we ask for, and to place it on the Paten. The more of our needs and petitions we put into the Mass the more we receive from the Mass. We are to come to Mass with an appetite sharpened by some urgent need, and with an eagerness to gain our request through praying the Mass.

The Chalice to Pay

As we look at the Chalice raised up at the Offertory, we know there is wine in the cup, the fruit of the pressed grapes. Let us resolve to collect “acts” pressed out of reluctant human nature to pour into the Chalice.

The Prophet David, repentant of his great sin, and conscious of the Lord’s goodness and forgiveness, spoke these words: “What return shall I make the - Lord for all He has given me? I will take the Chalice of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.”

David knew what “the Chalice of salvation” demands and into its cup he poured tears of repentance, a heart full of gratitude, and a life of reparation and self-denial.

When the mother of the sons of Zebedee, SS. James and John, came to Christ asking for special places for her boys, Christ issued the challenge: “Will your sons drink of the Chalice that I shall drink of?” That is the only way to win recognition in His Kingdom. In the Garden of Gethsemane Christ drank the Chalice presented to Him by His Eternal Father. At first He recoiled from its loathsome contents and prayed: “Father, if it be possible let this Chalice pass from Me, yet, not My Will but Thine be done.”

Looking at the Chalice raised up at the Offertory, and recalling all that Christ gave, let us pray with the priest: “We offer to Thee, O Lord, the Chalice of salvation, imploring Thy mercy that It may ascend in the sight of Thy Divine Majesty as a sweet perfume for our salvation and for that of the whole world.”

As a Drop of Water in the Chalice

Our acts are like the drop of water which the priest lets fall into the Chalice. The water is absorbed by the wine, losing its individual existence. The water represents us who hope to be absorbed by Christ.

St. Augustine declares that “God is a kind and not a needy exactor; for He does not grow rich on our payments, but makes them who pay Him grow rich in Him.” Therefore, whatever gifts of self we pour into the Chalice will enrich, not Him, but ourselves.

This is a most helpful thought and one that must keep us attentive and interested at the Offertory. To say to every cross that comes to us: “I’ll put you in my pocket for the Chalice.” would make our Mass a rich offering and change our whole lives.

Love that is not nourished on sacrifice becomes commonplace and trivial. The prayer that goes straight to God is the prayer of sacrifice. As the priest raises up the Chalice we must ratify what he is doing for us by pouring our “acts” into the Chalice. The Chalice of salvation is promised to us only on condition that we practise “acts” of self-denial to be offered back to God, and the best place to hand them back to God is at Mass. Unless we let fall our “acts,” as tiny drops of water to mingle with the wine, we cannot say that we pray the Mass.

Have I a Gift for the Chalice?

As the priest raises up the Chalice let us look at it and ask: “Is there any gift of mine in that Cup? Have I nothing in my pocket for the Chalice? Have I no act of self-discipline to sanctify by offering it now?”

Let us remember the words of Malachy to the Jews: “I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts; and I will

not receive a gift from your hand.” The Lord rejected the cold, official sacrifices of the Jews because the chalice of their sacrifices was empty of self-offering.

If we cannot find an “act” this time for the Chalice, well we can make a resolution that we shall collect something for the next time. An excellent preparation for Sunday’s Mass will be to pray each morning that we shall conquer ourselves in some little way as a gift for the Chalice. And the Lord will bless this resolution by making us more generous towards Him.

What an inner joy of achievement an “act” brings! And what a wonderful change this will make in our praying of the Mass! The giver comes with his gift and the gift stands for the love of the giver. To come to Mass to put something of ourselves into the cup of the Chalice is to come with a purpose that keeps us excited, alert, and deeply interested. The offering of a gift, especially a gift that costs us something to make, must be an act of the will, deliberate, thoughtful, and decisive. No one can be listless and vague who gives of himself. This Chalice idea is a certain cure for boredom and inattention during Mass.

The Mass Builds Character

The Mass is the best training ground for character. The temple of character can be built only by the inward dweller, no one else can do it for him. The fight is our own, for no one can build ourselves into holier and better persons than we ourselves.

As followers of Christ we are baptized into the death of Christ. Our “old man has been sentenced to death and Christ has been born in our souls. Our life’s work is to carry out this death-sentence on ourselves that Christ may live in us, in all our actions, and in every moment of our lives. Our prayer must be that of St. John the Baptist: “That I should diminish and He increase.”

The Mass is the arena of great personal conflicts, the battleground of self-mastery. Each day presents us with a conflict in which we must make a choice. We simply cannot satisfy every urge and desire. We must learn the strength to say “no.” The price of a good choice is sacrifice; we must forgo the one and accept the other. The rich young man in the Gospel went away sad because he had great possessions. St. Augustine of Hippo, at one time of his life, said: “Dear Lord, I want to be good, but later on, not now.” In all of us there is something of Scarlet O’Hara, who in *Gone With the Wind* silenced her conscience by saying: “I’ll think of that tomorrow. I’ll put that off till tomorrow.” We forget that postponing a decision makes the choice more difficult.

The thought of the Chalice awaiting our gifts will help us to make the proper choice. Of every conflict we must ask ourselves: “Which decision can I bring back to the Chalice?” If what we propose to do is not worthy of the Chalice then the answer must be a definite “No, you cannot have that.”

Create a Spiritual Currency

Perhaps, in face of a strong temptation we make a wrong decision, then let us impose a fine, a penalty, a penance upon ourselves, and pocket this fine as a gift for the Chalice on Sunday. This self-imposed fine gives us the happy feeling of conquering ourselves in a small thing, and the desire is burn within us to do it again, to do it oftener, and to do it in a bigger way.

Life often brings something unpleasant to do. We dread to face and tackle the problem, then let us away to Mass for the grace and courage to do so. Grace will certainly be given to us, but grace is not a passive thing, it demands a surrender of something, even if it were only our pride.

Every “act” we put into the Chalice creates a spiritual credit-balance upon which we can call in a situation such as this. The Chalice with our gifts is our spiritual bank granting to us a currency which enables us to bargain with the Lord. We might look at this depositing of gifts in the Chalice as a spiritual lay-by to purchase some virtue we need.

Live the Mass

We pray the Mass that we may live the Mass. We go to Mass to offer ourselves to God as Christ the Great High Priest does. We must imitate Him in a sincere, humble, and complete abandonment to the Will of Our Father in

Heaven, not only at the moment of the Mass, but in every moment of our lives.

The late Pope Pius XI advised the Monastic Orders not to slacken the rigour of their rule, saying: “Be rigorous. A hard saying, it is true, but one full of love. Discipline keeps one on one's guard. Without it life is not completely absent, but it is intermittent, weak and slothful”

The Mass and its book of words, the Missal, is the biggest thing in our lives. As we pray the Mass so do we live. When Mass is over we go back to our daily work, to our trials, to the sadness as well as to the joys of life. These things will be the same, but, washed in His Precious Blood, we will in God's abundant grace be different. The ordinary things of life will take on a new meaning. Life will no longer be a human adventure but will become charged with the fullness of grace in Christ and strong in its purpose of sanctity.

The seeds of holiness are within the Mass and we nourish them to growth, blossom and flower through living if Mass in a daily asceticism. These daily “acts,” like the incense we shake upon the hot charcoal, create a sweet perfume in our lives which spirals upwards to God like the smoke from the thurible.

To Pray and to Pay

Prayer and penance are related like if two wings of a bird, both are needed for flight. The Paten to pray and the Chalice to pay are the two wings on which we soar to God.

“The Paten to pray
The Chalice to pay
United to Jesus
In this holy way
I'll be one with the priest
In each Mass he'll say. . .

Going to Mass with Mary

The best immediate preparation for Mass is to invite Mary to accompany us and to kneel beside us to help us to pray this Mass well. She stood by the Cross on Calvary and there learned more about the Mass than all the books that have been written. It will be her joy to enkindle in our hearts a real love and devotion to the Holy Sacrifice. As her name occurs at the CONFITEOR, at the OFFERTORY, at the COMMUNICANTES, and at the LIBERA NOS let us mention it with love and reverence as an ardent petition to pray this Mass well.

On the way to Mass let us say to her:

“Mary, Mother of God and my Mother, unite ever more closely your two children, Jesus, your Son, and me, your child.”

Mary is the only creature who always answered “Yes” to God. Never once did she oppose His will. She knows us inside out and she will help us to beat down the resistance we put in His Way. She will strengthen us with a Mother's love to accept the crosses, sufferings, and disappointments He sends.

Ask her to walk to the altar rails with us and to welcome Him, using the words of a humble Irish Mother:

“A hundred thousand welcomes to Thee,
O Jesus, Son of Mary.”

It will gladden our hearts to realize that He is within us, and that Mary who carried Him in her womb is walking beside us.

Receive at Every Mass

Holy Communion is the full participation in the Mass. We should receive at every Mass we attend. Holy Communion is a gift to be used the day we receive It. Ask the Giver that His Gift may not be idle within us, but that His whispering will indicate occasions to use the new strength gained this morning.

Mary knows that a good life cannot be lazy, cheap, and selfish. She will guide us to live the Mass this day in her company.
