

More Than Meets the Eye

"The LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

- 1 Samuel 16:7

Lord God, you remind us in these words from the Bible that things are not always as they seem to be on the surface. For just as we are more than our outward appearance, so is the Mass. Thank you for the gift of the Mass, even if we don't yet completely understand it. Please be with us during this journey. Open our eyes and ears and hearts to all that you want to reveal to us.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

“... when we enter into the Mass, we are no longer functioning on an earthly level.”

It is a “programmed” response for Catholics, offered as automatically as “God bless you” when someone sneezes. But is it meant to be more than that? How much of what we do at Mass is just a habit?

Every time you enter a church for Mass, you bless yourself with holy water. In those moments, how often do you consider the gift of your baptism? You then proceed to a pew and genuflect prior to entering. Is it humility and reverence or just habit that drives you to your knee? Why only one knee and not both? In the Liturgy of the Word, we sit for the First and Second readings but stand for the Gospel. Why? We kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer but stand for the Our Father. Is there a point to all these “ups and downs” or is the Church putting us through a low-impact cardio workout?

What about the language used by the priest? Is there anywhere else in your life that you “partake,” invite someone to “enter under your roof,”

or ponder God’s “serene and kindly countenance”? How often do you feel “imbued with heavenly mysteries”? Why doesn’t the Church just “dumb down” the language a little and “get with the times”? Why don’t the pope and the bishops speak our language? Why does the Church insist on speaking its own way?

In a nutshell, when we enter into the Mass, we are no longer functioning on an earthly level. The Church uses “heavenly” language in the Mass because it is set apart from earthly realities. The Mass really isn’t about Jesus coming to earth as much as it is God lifting us up into heaven for an hour.

It is for this reason that we need to move through the natural human distractions and really try to “lean in” to the Mass. Moving beyond what is on the surface, we will begin to respond rather than react. We will soon discover that there is so much more to the Mass than meets the eye.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Segment 1: I Was Bored, Too

What do you hope to get out of this program on the Mass?

Were you surprised to hear the author and presenter of a program on the Mass tell you how bored he was at Mass as a kid?

Most of us have been bored at Mass. Why do you think that is?

Why does God desire our sacrifice? What does sacrifice teach us?

Segment 2: I Will Follow

Did it surprise you to discover that the two men are priests? What do you think of them?

Do you tend to see priests as normal men with the same struggles as everyone else, or do you see them as different somehow?

Why was Fr. Josh surprised to hear God say, "I love you," when he asked him what he wanted him to do? Do you think you need to "earn" God's love?

Fr. Mike talks about the importance of a priest acting as a father to his people. How is the priest's role as a spiritual father similar to that of a "regular" father?

Segment 3: The Power of the Priesthood

Why is the Catholic priesthood unique?

What does the phrase *in persona Christi* mean to a priest's daily ministry? Have you ever thought of the priest as "another Christ"?

Has your view of the priesthood changed at all as a result of this presentation?

ENTERING THE MYSTERY

Parents are supposed to live forever ... at least, that is what you think when you are a child.

I will never forget the first time it really hit me that my parents would die one day. I was just out of college and working in my first full-time job. When the phone rang that random Thursday afternoon, little did I know how much my life would change forever.

It was my father on the line. "Your mom's in the hospital, son. Her blood pressure is dropping and they need to get her in for surgery right away. It's not looking good. Get here as soon as you can," he said, as he choked back emotions he wasn't comfortable showing.

When I arrived at the hospital, I found my father and two of my older brothers talking to a doctor. The floor and walls were sterile and cold, but the conversation was quite intense. Apparently, my mother needed immediate surgery, and time was ticking away. "We need to go now, Mr. Hart," the doctor said to my father in an urgent tone. I will never forget seeing my mother as they wheeled her out. She was visibly uncomfortable, holding her rosary in one hand and reaching for my father's hand with the other.

It was at that moment that one of my older brothers—the one who had decided he no longer believed in God and wanted nothing to do with Church—looked at me and mockingly asked, "So where's your God now?"

I had never felt angrier yet at the same time more filled with pity for another person in my whole life. There was my brother, seeking a God whom he had abandoned but who would never abandon him. I replied, "God is expecting me to pray. So why don't you join me and get his attention?" So my brother and I went to the hospital chapel. We fell on our knees on the cold linoleum tile and asked God to heal our mother if it was his will.

My mother's surgery was successful, and she was showing signs of progress. Two days later, though, there were complications, and she needed another operation. Eventually, she was released from the hospital, fragile but healing. Two days after she returned home, I went to help out. I found my saintly mother on the couch, visibly uncomfortable but smiling nonetheless. Upon entering the kitchen, I was reminded that my father's talents, though vast, did not extend to cooking. Dirty dishes had piled up. Trash was overflowing. A used skillet sat upon the stove marked with the visible residue of a culinary experiment gone terribly wrong.

I grabbed the overstuffed garbage bag to take it outside, only to have the red plastic handle snap in my hand from the bag's immense weight. Finally, pulling it all together, I walked from the kitchen through the living room where my mother "rested" looking like a sanitation engineer version of Santa with my bag of trash and takeout containers.

Seeing me, my mom exclaimed, "Mark, honey, you better call the priest." I stopped dead in my tracks. Dropping the trash bag, I rushed to the couch. "What is it, Mom? Are you OK? Can you see Grandma?" (This was a stupid thing to say to a loved one you fear might be dying.)

"No, I'm fine," she said. With a grin, she added, "It's just that in over twenty years I've never seen you take out the trash without being asked." Laughing at how she had gotten me, I took out the trash. As I took off the lid of the garbage can and

dropped in the bag, it hit me. I wasn't a child of God as much as I was a *brat* of God.

For twenty-two years I had taken out the trash because I was told to. Rarely, if ever, did I do so out of love for my parents. It was then that the Holy Spirit launched a full-scale attack on my soul, dropping bombs of grace-filled understanding on me.

How many Sundays and holy days had I gone to Mass not because I loved God but because I was told to go? How many times had I prayed to God to get me out of a jam instead of to become holy? How many confessions had I made in the hope of avoiding hell but not because I really desired heaven?

What about you? Do you go to Mass because you are forced to go or to get to know God better on a personal level? Do you go to Mass for what you "get" or to give something? Is your faith as a Catholic based on rules or on a relationship with God? *Altaration* is designed to help you take a fresh, deeper look at Mass. It isn't just about what you *get* from Mass but what you *bring* to it.

Love doesn't wait for the phone call to start caring ... love pursues. God is love. He is inviting you to love him. He has been pursuing you because he wants you to have a personal relationship with him. The Mass is where you can let God "catch" you. Forget what you think you know about the Mass, and be open to letting it transform your mind and illuminate your soul.

How far are you willing to go for the One who loves you? How well you enter into this study is your answer.

WRAP-UP

Priests like Fr. Mike and Fr. Josh have not just decided to be Catholic but to give their very lives to serve the Church. More specifically, they have given their lives to *you*. They now live as “other Christs,” fully embracing God’s call and serving his people every day. Once they realized the gift of the Eucharist, everything changed. It was clear there was only one vocation that would truly make them happy.

While not everyone is called to be a priest, God’s grace comes to us through the sacraments of

the Church, especially the Eucharist. The very fuel we need to live a happy and fulfilled life is found on the altar at every Mass.

Things are not always what they seem. This is especially true with the Mass. At one time or another, we may have found Mass to be boring or irrelevant to our lives; but once we understand that Mass is not meant to entertain us, we can appreciate the richness and beauty that lies before us. This is exactly what we will be doing over the next few weeks.

Closing Prayer

“I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

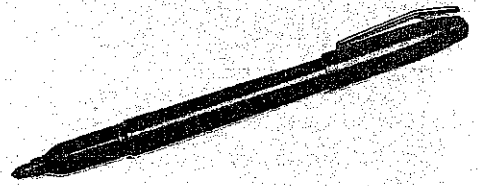
—Jeremiah 31:33

Lord God, thank you for the priesthood. Thank you for loving us enough to call these men to serve us, your people, by celebrating the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Thank you for reminding us that you not only want to love us from heaven but to be with us on earth. Help us to be more attentive at Mass, to focus more on what you are saying to us through your Word, your priests, and your Eucharist. Please bless our Church, our pope, our bishops, and our priests. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

FIND IT

Early Christians in Rome, threatened with death for practicing their faith, celebrated Mass in the catacombs. What are the catacombs? Why were they considered “safe”?

Any Questions?



Why do we have to go to Mass?

God doesn't have to love us as a Father; he freely chooses to do so. Nor did he "have to" give us his only Son to die for our sins and grant us the possibility of eternal life. God's creativity is outdone only by his generosity.

So rather than asking why we should go to Mass, here is the question we should be asking: "Is God worth it?" Is taking one hour a week to worship the God who has blessed us with everything we have worth it? Is having an hour set aside to let God love us while we try to love him worth it? Do we think created things are more important than the One who created them?

Everything we have is a gift from God—every blessing in our lives, every person, talent, ability,

and interest—every good gift. The Mass is the greatest gift God gives us. When we come to be more aware of our own sins and our need for a savior, the more clearly we see the Mass as not merely an obligation but an opportunity not to be missed.

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Why is the priesthood so important?

In a nutshell, because without the priesthood, there would be no Mass, no celebration of the Eucharist.

The role of priests in the Old Testament was simple: They were God's representatives to his people, offering sacrifices on behalf of the people in atonement for their sins.

Jesus established a "New Covenant," a new, binding relationship between God and his people, the Church. This New Covenant has a new priesthood, one that shares in the authority of Christ the High Priest. The priests of the Church, then, bring God to us—and us to God—through their teaching and ministry (particularly the sacraments). They act *in persona Christi* ("in the person of Christ"), with Jesus' own authority

and power, given to them in their ordination. They are his hands, feet, and voice on earth; they are the instruments God uses to carry out his saving ministry to his people.

Think of it this way: The Catholic priesthood is the continuation of Jesus' healing, teaching, and feeding since his ascension. It is Jesus' way of keeping his love and mercy "real" and personal in every generation. In his priests, Jesus is borrowing other men's hands, eyes, and voices to deliver his Body and Blood to each living soul in every generation for their freedom and eternal life. A priest sins and has the same struggles as the rest of us, but he uniquely brings Christ to the world through his ministry.

WHAT'S THAT WORD?

GENUFLECTION

Prior to entering or exiting a pew, we *genuflect* (from the Latin *genuflectere* for “to bend one’s knee”), kneeling down on one knee as an outward sign of our interior reverence for the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, which is reserved in the tabernacle.

Kneeling is a profound symbol of adoration, falling on our knees before the King of the universe. Throughout Scripture, we see heroes and heroines falling prostrate to worship God, as the Magi did in Bethlehem before the infant Jesus (see Matthew 2:11) or Christ’s disciples did in Simon Peter’s boat following a mighty storm at sea (see Matthew 14:33).

SANCTUARY

From a Latin word for “sacred” or “holy place,” the “sanctuary” is the area of a church, where liturgical actions take place. Usually elevated by steps and located at the front or center of the church, the “sanctuary” contains the altar, the tabernacle, the *ambo* (where the readings are proclaimed and the homily is given by the priest or deacon), the credence table, and the presider’s chair (where the priest celebrant sits). The sanctuary is set apart and entered only by those who are ministers for the Mass, such as the priest, deacon, altar servers, reader, cantor, and extraordinary ministers. It is appropriate to bow to the altar when entering the sanctuary to acknowledge the sacredness of the space. If, as in many churches, the tabernacle is present within the sanctuary, it is appropriate to genuflect as well. Though church sanctuaries have different architectural designs, the

sanctuary is a holy space that deserves our highest reverence.

AND WITH YOUR SPIRIT.

Right back at ya.

You got it.

Peace.

You, too.

I am sure all of you have had a conversation with someone where they say something and you immediately reply—where you throw back a comment or answer a question without really thinking about it. You might fall into the same routine during Mass, responding without thinking. When the priest says, “The Lord be with you,” why do we respond, “And with your spirit”?

There are a number of reasons, actually.

In the Mass, the priest acts not as an individual Christian, but in the place of Christ himself: He acts *in persona Christi* (Latin for “in the person of Christ”). So we are not just greeting the celebrant, akin to saying, “Right back at ya, Father.” We are acknowledging the very essence of who he is—the one standing in the person of Christ leading us in the “source and summit” of the Church’s life, the Mass (see CCC 1324–1327).

This formal greeting acknowledges the very core of the person—his spirit. When St. Paul wrote to Timothy, he addressed his “spirit” (see 2 Timothy 4:22). Hippolytus, writing in the year 215, noted that Christians offered greetings to the “spirit” of a priest. As we say the words, “and with your Spirit,” we pray for the priest, that he might continue to live his priesthood with faith and enthusiasm for God’s people.