

Praying the Mass I

At Mass so much happens. Sometimes we are aware of it, sometimes it passes us by. Sometimes Mass is so busy, we hardly find time and space to pray.

Praying the Mass seeks to unite all the members of the Diocese in a time of rediscovering the Mass and its meaning.

Each month between now and June there will be a leaflet like this one for us all. Please take it away to read and reflect on it. You might do this in a faith-sharing group, or as a family or with friends. You might even do it by yourself. If you have a ministry at Mass, let the leaflet help you look again at what you do and how you do it. But the leaflet is for us all, because the Mass is for us all, and we all have our own particular responsibility for how Mass is prayed in our parishes.

At one with Jesus

In the Mass Jesus comes to meet with us. He comes to speak with us and listen to us, and through the gift of his life offered to us in Holy Communion, to nourish us so that we might live as members of his Body.

In the Mass we come to meet with Jesus, and to offer praise and glory to the Father with

him. Together with the priest we offer again the once-and-for-all Sacrifice of Christ, which wins salvation of the world. We offer our own lives too, to the Father, in union with Jesus.

There is a certain formality about our meeting at Mass. But the meeting seeks to draw us into intimacy with God and with each other: to have us live love together.

St Augustine spoke of how Christ's gift of love makes us become members of his very Body - he is the Head, we are his Body, the Church. We draw our life from him, and he lives in us.



Praying

Our praying of Mass begins before Mass begins, in our preparation.

Preparation may begin at home, with getting the children, and ourselves, ready for Mass. We tidy ourselves up, get into suitable clothes. Maybe we also spend time in prayer. Perhaps we look at the readings which we will hear at Mass. All by way of preparation.

When we get to church our prayerful preparation takes various forms.

- When we dip our hands into holy water as we enter the church we remind ourselves of the baptism that made us members of the Church, members of the family of God.
- We make the sign of the cross: the sign traced over us first at our baptism, and countless times since - and the sign that will be made over us when we have died. We have life because Jesus offered up his life in love on the cross.
- We genuflect in reverence to the Blessed Sacrament present in the tabernacle. Jesus is already here to meet us: we honour his presence.
- We take our place and kneel in quiet prayer, recollecting where we are; calling to mind the week just gone, and the week that lies ahead. We gather ourselves together, all the better to meet with Jesus.

Living

The Catholic Church has a large body of teaching, its 'social doctrine', which presents a rounded understanding of the human person and of the importance of solidarity. Both of these are contained in the concept of the common good.

Promoting the common good cannot be pursued by treating each individual separately and looking for the highest 'total benefit', in some kind of utilitarian addition. Because we are interdependent, the common good is more like a multiplication sum, where if any one number is zero then the total is always zero. If anyone is left out and deprived of what is essential, then the common good has been betrayed.

The common good is about how to live well together. It is the whole network of social conditions which enable human individuals and groups to flourish and live a full, genuinely human life. At the heart of the common good, solidarity acknowledges that all are responsible for all, not only as individuals but collectively at every level. The principle of the common good expands our understanding of who we are and opens up new sources of motivation. The fulfilment which the common good seeks to serve is the flourishing of humanity.

*Choosing the Common Good, 8.
The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales*

Silence

We are realizing more and more clearly that silence is part of the liturgy. We respond, by signing and praying, to the God who addresses us, but the greater mystery surpassing all words, summons us to silence. It must, of course, be a silence with content, not just the absence of speech and action. We should expect the liturgy to give us a positive stillness that will restore us. Such stillness will not be just a pause, in which a thousand thoughts and desires assault us, but a time of recollection, giving us an inward peace, allowing us to draw breath and rediscover the one thing necessary, which we have forgotten.

Pope Benedict XVI. Spirit of the Liturgy, page 209

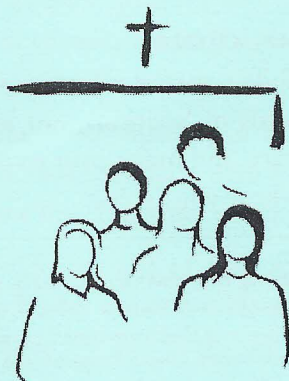
Moments of silence are an important step in creating in ourselves a space, an openness, a receptivity to God, permitting the Holy Spirit to take hold of them. In these moments of silence we stand before the God who forgives, whose Word is about to be proclaimed, whose action we are to celebrate in the sacrament. And we do this not only as individuals, but together as the people called to this moment, this place of truth and life.

*Archbishop Vincent Nichols,
Promise of Future Glory,
page 20.*

Celebrating together

In the Introductory Rites, Christ joins the Church to himself and gathers her children to join their voices to his perfect hymn of praise. Thus, the liturgical assembly, “where two or three come together in Christ’s name, and where he is found in their midst (cf. Mt 18:20), is the ‘first image that the Church gives of herself’”. Indeed the assembly itself is also the first instance of Christ’s presence in the liturgy.

The purpose of the Introductory Rites is to ensure that the faithful, who come together as one, establish communion and dispose themselves to listen properly to God’s word and to celebrate the Eucharist worthily.



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