

Hello everyone. Welcome to the second week of our Easter small group series
Last week Deacon Tom gave you an interesting history of the Sacrament of Reconciliation
This week our focus is on the Mass and the Eucharist
It is awesome that we as Catholics have the Mass – I hope you either already felt this way or that our homily this weekend helped to deepen your appreciation for the Mass, which has been around since the beginning of the Church

And like the early Christians, we can receive Jesus every week, and even every day
Now, the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches have very similar beliefs about the Mass

But, as I am sure you probably are aware, it is different in protestant churches
Some churches do not celebrate communion very often

When they do have communion, many believe it is only a symbol
For those denominations who think it is more that a symbol, at most they think Jesus is present **with** the host, but none think that the substance of the host truly becomes the substance of His Body – and usually whether or not Jesus is present is based on the faith of the person receiving communion
It is not the same for Catholics – we believe something significantly different

When the bread and wine become Jesus's Body and Blood, they are transubstantiated – meaning that they no longer have the substance of bread and wine – they now are substantially Jesus, and that doesn't depend on whether or not we believe it – even though it still has the attributes of bread and wine, its essence, its substance is Jesus' Body and Blood

This is why we show such reverence to every host, every crumb, every chalice, every drop

This is why we keep the Eucharist in the tabernacle and consume all the Precious Blood

This is why we feel comfortable praying with the Eucharist in adoration
And, this is why we do not have common Communion with non-Catholic Christians – we are not trying to be exclusive – it is because we believe different things, we are not in communion, so we cannot receive “communion” in common – also, if someone doesn't believe that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist, then we are asking them to lie when they say amen

So, because Catholic Mass and protestant worship services are different, there can be some misunderstandings amongst our protestant brothers and sisters. For instance, they may think:

At Mass, in the consecration, we are re-crucifying Jesus

As I said in my homily this weekend, Jesus gave us the Eucharist at a Passover meal, and for the Jews, their celebration of the Passover each year was a participation in the one Passover

This idea is called Anamnesis

Since Jesus used the Passover meal, the Church has always believed that the Mass, through the idea of anamnesis, is making us present at the one sacrifice of Jesus

There is ultimately one Mass that we are participating in at each Mass
We are not re-crucifying Jesus on the altar, we are making His one sacrifice present on the altar

That we are neglecting the word in favor of a meal

We read through nearly 90% of the Gospels and over 70% of the whole New Testament in our 3 year Sunday cycle

We get passages from all books of the Bible

The Mass is full of quotes from Scripture

Now yes, the Liturgy of the Word is important, but the synagogue service, which was the basis for the Liturgy of the Word, it was not worship, it was study – our liturgy makes it more than study, but as it was for the Israelites, it does not take the place of the worship that happened with sacrifice in the Temple – the sacrifice of the Mass is still most important

That we worship Mary and the Saints

If you read through nearly all of the prayers used in Mass, they are directed to the Father, through the Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, even if they refer to Mary or a saint

The Mass is ultimately worship of the Father, praising Him, thanking Him, and asking for His mercy and favor

Okay, in my homily I talked about some of the benefits of Mass, but here are a few more:
This is the most perfect prayer we can offer, because it is united with Jesus' perfect offering
It unites us to the angels and saints and we receive the benefits of their prayers
This is the best way to venerate the Passion of Jesus and receive its fruits
You will be strengthened against temptation
It is an atonement for your sins, helping to shorten time in purgatory
You give others great assistance by praying for them at Mass

Okay, this is great, and maybe you already knew all of this, but you and I can still struggle to have prayerful Masses.

How can we make Mass more fruitful?

Here are a few suggestions:

Read the readings before Mass so that when they are proclaimed, the proclamation is reinforcing something already in your heart

Try to get to Mass a few minutes early – I know I need to be better about this – but if we have time before Mass to get settled and pray, Mass will be more fruitful

What should we be thinking about as we pray before Mass (or, if we are cutting it close, what should we think about in the car on the way here)?

My suggestion, and you have heard me say this before, is to think about how you will flavor your celebration of the Mass with SALT

S – sins – what sins do we want forgiven that Mass so we are ready for the penitential rite at the beginning?

A – ask – what do we want to ask God for during the petitions?

L – love – what love have we shown since the last Mass that we want to offer with the bread and wine on the altar (this is a way for us to live out our priesthood)?

T – thanksgiving – what do we want to give thanks to God for at that Mass?

And to give you another acronym that can be helpful after you receive the Eucharist (before you blow out of church to go get coffee at McLain's)

ALTARS

A – adoration – what do we adore about God right now?

L – love – what love have we shown?

T – thanksgiving – what are we thankful for?

A – ask – what are we asking for?

R – repent – what do we hope God will forgive through the merit of the Mass?

S – strength – what do we need God to strengthen for us to be good disciples?

It basically is a way to bring to mind again the SALT you brought to the beginning of Mass. Maybe you already have a system for making Mass fruitful, but if not, hopefully these can help. I know they help me, when I actually do them.

Okay, so let's find out what are our conversation starters for this week's small group session:

1. What has been your relationship with the Mass on your spiritual journey thus far?
2. If a non-Catholic asked you to explain the Mass, what would you say?
3. How do you prepare yourself to attend Mass?
4. What part of Mass tends to be the most powerful for you? Why?
5. Do you have ideas on how to better engage the Mass?
6. How do you make thanksgiving after Mass?
7. Have you tried/had success inviting others to Mass? Is there someone that the Holy Spirit is prompting you to invite?