

Go to Mass and Get Jesus!

(How To Develop a Personal Relationship With Jesus in the Mass)

I have put together a little primer on how to enhance your personal relationship with Jesus by active participation in the Mass! Note: this is not a complete exposition on the Mass, but I have detailed the parts that will provide the opportunity for a Catholic truly to experience Jesus in a meaningful way while at Sunday worship

1) It starts even before you get to Church. Fast for one hour before, and ask the Holy Spirit to prepare you to receive all the grace that will be made available to you.

2) Before you enter the body of the church, there's a little cup with some water in it attached to the wall in the foyer. This is holy water blessed by the priest. The parishioners dip their fingers in it and make the Sign of the Cross on themselves. So, even before you step into the church proper to begin worship, by this action, you are acknowledging that Jesus is your Savior and that you have died with Him in the waters of baptism and have risen to new life in Christ (1 Peter 3:21). By making the Sign of the Cross on your body, you are identifying yourself with Jesus and His death on the Cross, and you are also telling the devil that "you are none of his."

3) As you enter the pew, you kneel on your right knee towards the Tabernacle, the golden or ornately decorated "box" which contains the Holy Eucharist (Jesus). As you kneel, you are acknowledging the holiness and presence of God in this place. Catholics believe God is really here, not only in His people and in His word, but in the Blessed Sacrament.

4) The Mass begins with our admission of our sinfulness and our asking Jesus to forgive us. Now, convicted of sin and having been forgiven, we proceed. By humbling ourselves in the sight of the Lord, we are better prepared to hear the Word of God and later to receive the actual Word of God in the Eucharist.

5) The priest then prays and leads the congregation in the *Collect* uniting all of our prayers and the prayers of the church together, reminding us that worship is not just an individual experience, but a participation with the whole Mystical Body of Christ throughout the world.

6) The Word of God is then proclaimed--usually a passage from the OT, a sung psalm, and a reading from the NT. The congregation then stands, and we once again make the Sign of the Cross on our foreheads, lips and hearts. As we do this we pray silently that the Word of God would touch our minds, be on our lips and dwell in our hearts. The priest or deacon then reads the gospel passage as we stand in attention.

7) A short sermon or homily follows, which expounds on the Word of God just read. We then pause for a few moments silently to reflect on the homily in light of the Scripture readings.

8) We then stand to recite and pray the Nicene Creed (dating from 325 AD), once again acknowledging our belief in the Trinity and the core tenets of the faith - Christ dying for our sins, rising again and coming again to judge us at the end of time. This is the gospel in a nutshell reiterated in the Creed.

9) An offering is taken, and the gifts of bread and wine are brought to the altar. At this time we are also invited to bring our own gifts to the altar--not just our monetary gifts but even our fears, joys, sorrows and anxieties. This is our opportunity to give it all to Jesus.

7) We then begin the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We are asked to "Lift up our hearts to the Lord," which serves to re-focus our attention on what the Mass is all about: Jesus! As we praise God in union with all of heaven we sing: "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts..." (Isa. 6:3). We all kneel at this point. Once again, our bodies, hearts and minds prepare for the miraculous mystery experienced at this pivotal part of the Mass. We are invited to unite our prayers with those of the priest as he consecrates the bread and wine and they become the actual Body and Blood of Christ. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the message of the gospel is repeated once again: "Fulfilling your will and gaining for you a holy people, he stretched out his hands as he endured his passion, so as to break the bonds of death and manifest the resurrection." We then once again offer ourselves to God along with the Eucharist. This is the time we can surrender all: *Take me Jesus, take all of me, the good, the bad, and the ugly parts of me as well. I surrender myself to you and offer myself to you.* Just as Saint Paul tells us in Scripture *"to present yourselves as a living sacrifice which is your spiritual worship* (Rom: 12:1). It is very important to note that Jesus is not re-crucified, instead the priest re-presents Christ's timeless sacrifice on the altar for our sins to the Father (Mal 1:11). To put it another way, the Mass may be likened to a mystical time machine which takes us back to the Last Supper and the Cross or else brings the Last Supper and the Cross into our lives now.

8) Now the very best part of the Mass! We receive Christ personally, as our Lord and Savior. First we begin by getting on our knees and repeating the words of Scripture, "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the Word and my soul shall be healed" (Matt 8:8). Once again, we surrender to Him acknowledging our unworthiness and that it is only through His sacrifice on the cross that we can approach Him and have Him come into us.

9) Next, we approach the altar, and bow or genuflect, giving honor to the Lord of Lords and King of Kings who will allow us to partake of His real Flesh and Blood. Saint Augustine said:

"that the bread which you see on the altar having been sanctified by the word of God is the body of Christ. That chalice or rather what is in that chalice having been sanctified by the word of God is the blood of Christ. "

With hearts open to all the grace He has to offer, we take and eat, and allow ourselves to be filled completely with God, to consume Him and most importantly to be consumed by Him, for "our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29).

10) We then return to our pews, and kneel and pray giving thanks for the amazing gift Jesus has just given us- viz. Himself! We commune with the God of the Universe whom we have just taken and eaten. With the same heart as Saint Elizabeth upon receiving Mary carrying the savior of the World, we can pray in thankfulness and awe: “who am I that my Lord should come to me? “(Lk 1:43).” You can’t get any closer to Jesus on this side of the veil then in receiving Him in the Eucharist.

11) In the short span of less than an hour, we have transcended time and space and have had eternity opened to us. We have confessed Jesus as Lord, acknowledged our sinfulness and asked for forgiveness. We have surrendered ourselves to God, uniting ourselves to Christ and have received Him as Lord and Savior. Finally, the Mass is ended, and we are encouraged to go out to all the world proclaiming the Gospel to all the nations (Matt 28:19).

To learn more about how to let Jesus transform you through participation in the Mass, I highly recommend Dr. Thomas Howard's (former editor of *Christianity Today*) book: *If Your Mind Wonders at Mass*. This can be had for as little as \$1.60. Just think, your experience at Mass can be transformed and your personal relationship with our Lord greatly enhanced for less than the price of a latte. Get to know Jesus personally receiving Him as Lord in Savior in the way that Christians have been doing for 2000 years!

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