

Preparing for Mass – Gary Wortham, April 17, 2005

We invest a lot of our time preparing for things. We prepare for meetings, school exams, the SAT, taxes, a night out on the town...the list could go on and on, but on that list, we need to include preparing ourselves for Mass.

The Vatican II document entitled, *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, states that, “*full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit.*” Being prepared for Mass (or liturgy) is key to our fulfilling this call and will allow us to participate in the Mass with a much deeper appreciation and understanding. With this in mind, I offer here a few specific strategies to help us to prepare for and participate more fully during Mass.

I. *Preparing by fasting.* The church has a discipline of a Eucharistic fast. This means an obligation to abstain from all food and any drink but water for one hour prior to receiving Communion. This minimal requirement reminds us that we must prepare ourselves to receive the Lord in community, Word, and Eucharist. Certainly, we’re free to do more. For example, how about fasting from noise and media-generated distractions? It’s a good idea to leave the radio and TV off, the newspaper unopened, and the computer idle for an hour or more before Mass. That way, our minds are free of noise and clutter, and we don’t have to fight so hard to be able to concentrate during Mass.

II. *Pondering the readings.* We can prepare for Mass by looking over and studying the readings ahead of time. Put them into context by reading the paragraphs that immediately precede and follow them in the Bible. This gives us a head start in understanding them before we hear them proclaimed in church. Our Bulletin lists the readings for the upcoming Sunday. I encourage you to pray over the readings and ask yourself, “What are they saying to me, right now in my life?” “How can I apply them?”

III. *Pre-prayer.* The church has always recommended that we prepare for Mass through prayer. One practical suggestion is to get to Church a little early. Even five minutes can give us time to dial down, unwind, and focus before Mass begins. Concentrate on arousing your faith. Make conscious acts of faith about Christ’s real presence in the various aspects of the liturgy. Making an “act of faith” is a way of exercising our faith muscles. It’s like working out. We really can’t grow our muscles unless we exercise them.

IV. *More Follow-Up.* Would it make sense to leap up from Thanksgiving dinner and go out and run a marathon? That’s a sure road to indigestion or worse! Neither should we run off from the Lord’s Table without giving ourselves an opportunity to digest what we’ve consumed. The Eucharist is a lavish banquet, a Feast of Faith, and it takes some digestion and follow-up to really profit from it. Since it’s too rich for us to absorb all at once, the church encourages us to take some time to pray after Mass. As the *Catechism* points out, “*prayer internalizes and assimilates the liturgy during and after its celebration*” (par. 2655). What better place to pray than the very church where we’ve just participated in the Mass? Social time with other members of the church is really important, too. Since we’re all members of Christ’s body, we should be getting to know one another and enjoying each other’s company either before or after Mass. Prayerful follow-up to the Mass can also take place later at home. This might happen individually, as we find bits of time for personal prayer, or as a family or with others who have been to Mass that day.

V. *A Challenge.* These are but a few strategies that we can use to better prepare ourselves for Mass. Come up with some additional ones that are customized for you and for your lifestyle. I challenge you to give it an honest try.

Thank you.