

Preparing for Mass - Jim Silva, April 17, 2005

This mass is just about over. Imagine, as you leave to go out the door and into the vestibule, pollsters are standing by to conduct an exit interview with you. Their question: "What did you do ahead of time before mass to help you participate actively today?"

Stop for a moment. How would *you* answer this question? Are there things you personally did to prepare?

When the pollsters tally up the results, what do you think they would find? I'll hazard a guess. Maybe a third of us might report that we haven't even thought about the question before. Maybe a third would say that we know there are things we could do to participate more actively, but they're just too much hassle. And maybe a third would report that they took a few concrete steps to help them be more active.

Who knows? Maybe the breakdown would be different, but it brings up an important question: What can I do ahead of time to help me participate, to make me more active?

I'd be willing to bet that people who participate actively have taken two steps ahead of time that made a difference. The first step has to do with the Liturgy of the Word. Let me share with you what I hear time and again from members of our Small Christian Communities. They usually look up next Sunday's Scripture readings ahead of time. They pray over them. They discuss with each other what the readings mean in their own lives.

This is even better than a sneak preview for a movie. Not only does it whet your appetite, it gets you in high gear. When you come to mass and the rubber hits the road, you're ready. You're revved up. You *hear* the reading; you really *get* it, because you're already up to speed. How many times do we have the experience that the reading just passes us by? We can't even remember what it was about. That's because we weren't up to speed.

Take a hint from the Small Christian Communities. Look up the readings. They're listed each week in the bulletin. Come in ready to roll.

There's a second step to participating more actively in the Mass. This second step has to do with the Liturgy of the Eucharist. One word makes it easy to remember: *Eucharist*, thanksgiving, taking time to remember what we're thankful for. The Church has a simple way of reminding us to do this. It asks us to refrain from eating or from drinking anything but water for one hour before we receive communion.

What's the connection? We're used to eating or drinking just about whenever we want. By refraining for one hour, it gives us pause. This helps us realize that something special is about to happen.

What is it? It's our special time of thanksgiving, our Eucharist, when we are thankful for all that God has given us. It's the time when we remember that ultimately it is God who feeds us and gives us life.

So, in conclusion, if the pollsters were to ask you what you've done ahead of time to help you participate actively in mass, here are two concrete steps you could report. Prepare for the Word by reflecting on it ahead of time. Prepare for the Eucharist by refraining from eating and drinking, using that change of pace to remind you to be thankful. It's as simple as that.

Jesus gave us great blessings in the Word and Eucharist. Let's prepare ourselves so that we can participate more actively in them.