

Mass: Gathering, Sharing, Eating, Drinking, Praying, And Celebrating

Mass: Gathering, Sharing, Eating, Drinking, Praying, and Celebrating When I was growing up, attending mass was a chore that had to be done on a daily basis. Early in the morning, my mother would wake me and my siblings up so that we can attend mass. As a little boy, I found this to be extremely difficult because as a rule, I would rather sleep an extra hour or two than go to church. One would think that this forcefulness would cause me to be repulsed towards going to church now that I am older. But fortunately, this has not been the case. Instead, my mother has instilled in me a sense of the importance of attending mass. As I come to understand the reason for going to mass, I have been able to appreciate it greatly. Through the years, I've realized that going to Church on Sunday is not just to show off my Tommy jacket or to check out the girls in the choir or a time to hang out with friends. Mass is in fact a special time when Catholics come together in unity to celebrate and give thanks to God for all the blessings that God has bestowed upon us. When I was growing up and even now, I always heard Vietnamese people say "Đi xem lễ" which means to go view a mass. This, unfortunately, is a very erroneous term because mass is not something we go to watch like a stage show and expect to be entertained but rather something that we actively participate in. The mass is a dramatic event that has music, monologues, dialogues, and climax, etc. But instead of being in the audience, each of us who attend mass is an actor with his/her own part to play in this unfolding drama. There are many ways for us to understand a mass. Below, I would like to describe some of these ways. First, mass is a response to God's calling. As in the old days when God called the Israelites to assemble to worship God, we are doing likewise. When we assemble at church, we are displaying our obedience to God who has blessed us with the gift of the world and of life. Second, mass is a celebration of thanks. In mass, we celebrate the paschal mystery of Jesus who died, rose, and will come again. We give thanks to God for the gift of Jesus who died on the cross for our sins. Therefore, we can rejoice and praise God for God's tremendous goodness towards us. Third, mass is a memorial meal. In the Last Supper, Jesus shared with his disciples bread and wine and he asked us to reenact this meal in his memory. In mass, we believe that when we take part in the bread and wine, we are in fact sharing in the body and blood of Jesus. The Eucharist that we share is the pinnacle of our life as Christians. Therefore, it is important that we try our best to be able to participate in communion in every mass. Certainly, it would be strange if we attend a dinner but refrain from receiving the food and the drink being served. While the food and drink served at a dinner can only nourish us physically, the body and blood of Jesus will nourish us spiritually and emotionally. Fourth, mass is a community gathering. It is a time for Catholics to gather as God's unified people. Here, we sing together, pray together, give thanks and praise together, and eat and drink together. Mass is not a time for us to withdraw to our own internal corner and block out all the noises around us. Instead, it is a time when we open ourselves up to the people around us and take part in this great fellowship. Our active participation in this community gathering helps us to feel a sense of belonging in this holy community of people. Finally, mass is a commission. The end of mass is the beginning of our mission to serve God. The final command, "Mass is ended. Go and serve the Lord" explicitly tells us that we have not "finished" our part by being present at mass. Going to mass is in fact a decision on our part to be commissioned to the ministry of being God's people. This ministry requires us serve God by serving those around us as well as the world. There are many ways to describe what mass is. But most importantly, it is a time that we spend with God and with each other. Today's world is hectic with school, work, and many social activities. Going to mass no longer remains a priority for many of us. It seems that week after week, there is little change—the same people, the same celebrant, and seemingly the same prayers. We get bored and tired of the rituals. Mass interferes with our Sunday sleep. It takes away from our Sunday football schedule. It has become a chore. Many of us use mass as a yardstick to measure how good of a Catholic we are. Nevertheless, unless we truly understand what mass is about, we cannot actively participate in it and have it be a source of spiritual nourishment for us.

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