

The title of this article may seem a bit strange but bear with me. Of course, the Mass is “enough” in the sense that it is the central act of worship and the central sacrament of Catholic faith. As I previously pointed out, Adoration derives from the Mass and leads back to it.

But when I say it is not enough, I simply mean that “attendance” at public worship for one hour per week can hardly be the sum and substance of Catholic life or Christian spirituality. No matter how powerful and how essential it may be, the Mass celebrates, culminates, and inspires Christian living but by itself it is not simply equivalent to the Christian life.

The idea that the Mass alone is sufficient is demonstrated by our popular notion of “practicing” the faith. When someone is said to be a “practicing” Catholic, we usually just mean that he “goes to Mass.” Now I ask, does that really make sense? Is that all there is to being a Catholic? Is God just sitting up there taking attendance and that’s that? Of course not.

This error is at the other end of the spectrum from the error of those who never come to Mass at all but insist that they are good Christians anyway. This usually just means they are nice to people. A very minimalist definition of what it means to be Christian! Presumably most Buddhists and Muslims are nice to people but that alone doesn’t make them Christians. Just ask them.

To be Catholic Christians it is essential that we take part regularly in the celebration of the Eucharist but that is not all there is to it. Essential but insufficient. On the one hand, we must be aware of the admonition in Hebrews 10:25: “We should not stay away from the assembly, as is the custom of some, but encourage one another, and this all the more as you see the day drawing near.” (Note, by the way, that this passage gives us two often forgotten reasons for joining in “the assembly”: by so doing we encourage one another and we prepare for the end, which will come to all of us.)

On the other hand, the Christian life is a whole life. Mass on the weekend is not enough. We are Christians in all we say and do. We are united as one in Jesus Christ. We know and follow his teachings and the teachings of the Church he founded. We live the commandments and teach others to do so. We give of ourselves in loving service. We look forward in hope to the eternal life that is to come. All of this and so much more. To “practice” the faith in these ways, we need, besides coming to Mass, a developing spiritual life. We need a conscious daily relationship with the Lord and we need to engage in all the ways available to us for nourishing that relationship.

Is it possible that for many the “practice” of the faith has slipped or disappeared because it could not be sustained by a mere weekly “attendance”? Many of us worry about our children and grandchildren who have abandoned the Catholic faith. Is it possible they were given the impression that all it amounts to is “going to Mass” and that they were never given, by word or example, any introduction into the much wider practice of Christian faith to which we are called? Were they ever taught to pray, to seek a closer union with Christ, to understand and live their faith daily? Did they in fact ever grasp the true meaning of the Mass itself? Have we ever discussed such things with them or just left it all to their religion teachers? I think many of the young have been left with the impression that it’s just a matter of “going to church” and obeying the rules. Such a “practice” of the faith is easily dropped upon reaching adulthood.

Eucharistic Adoration is by no means a cure-all for our impoverished spiritual condition. The Church needs a broad and intense revival of personal spiritual life. But Adoration can serve as an important opportunity for initiating and nourishing that revival. It can be a very effective “elementary school” of the spiritual life.

We must begin somewhere. Let’s begin in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.