

The Importance of Mass Attendance

Parents, of course, it's well, good and proper that you have placed your children in a formalized parish RE program, but as you should know, that in itself is not enough to bring them up in the Catholic faith as you promised at their baptism. As parents, you are to be practicing, teaching and modeling the faith for your children. A vital part of that responsibility is taking them to weekly Mass.

For those of you who are faithful in attending Mass every weekend, I commend you and ask that you please keep that commitment going forward. For those who don't make weekly Mass attendance a priority and rarely go, please read through and consider the following, which is meant to encourage you to give serious thought and reflection to your own faith life and that of your family.

As parents, do you ever think about what you and your family are missing by not going to Sunday Mass? The Catholic Catechism teaches us that the Eucharist is the Source and Summit of our Catholic faith. With that powerful statement, how can you simply ignore Mass and not receive Holy Communion every week? How can you deprive yourselves and your family from receiving the best gift that God has given us – the very body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ, God's only son, who suffered, died and rose to give us life now, and for eternity? Think of what the graces of that sacrament could do for you if you only open your heart and mind to Jesus and receive him in the Eucharist each week.

And have you ever thought about the long-term effects of not going to Sunday Mass?

- You are depriving yourselves of the divine graces and strength received through the Sacrament of the Eucharist.
- Your faith life and connection to the larger Church will be stagnant and not grow. How can it not, if you never feed it?
- You will not be experiencing the Body of Christ present in the Eucharist, the Body of Christ present in the proclamation of God's Holy Word, the assembly of believers who make up the Body of Christ, and the priest, who acts "in persona Christi" – in the person of Christ.
- You will not be passing on to your children the serious obligation to keep God's third commandment. You know that children follow more what parents do than what they say. If going to Mass is not important to you, it won't be for them either.
- You and your family cannot really be rooted in the Catholic faith if weekly Mass attendance is not a top priority and ongoing commitment.

As parents, you sign up your kids for so many extra activities and events, such as sports, music lessons, school programs... you can fill in the blank, wanting them to develop their skills and talents and become fully-rounded and successful individuals. Of course, that's a good thing because God wants us to use and develop the various gifts that he's given us. And yet, do you think enough about wanting your children to fully develop spiritually and grow deeper in their faith? Compare the hours spent each week on sports to the hours spent on faith. Your children are exposed to about 24 hours of faith formation from September through May, if they attend all the classes, and this is for the entire year! I venture to say that 24 hours could easily be spent on sports in about two weeks' time. And in addition

to RE classes, if you're not taking your kids to Mass each week, how do you expect them to grow in their Catholic Faith?

The result is what they learn in RE class is so isolated and removed from the rest of their lives, you can see why they don't understand and don't appreciate what they're hearing, and probably don't want to go to class. The biggest frustration I hear from Catechists every year is that the kids who aren't attending weekend Mass have a very difficult time relating to the lessons and lack the basic faith knowledge that's expected for their grade. Just like in sports, you can't expect someone to become knowledgeable, competent and improve if they don't practice! Parents and families need to be practicing their faith! And the most basic, fundamental part for us as Catholics is attending weekend Mass! Because of this, the Church explicitly declares that it is a serious sin to stay away from Sunday Mass without good reason.

At a primary level, we should see attending weekend Mass in three ways: 1) as an obligation, 2) the most basic requirement for practicing the Catholic faith, and 3) as a non-negotiable.

1. Being obligated to do something is not necessarily a bad thing. Because of our fallen and weak human nature, we know that we do not always do what we should, and obligations give us the extra incentive and motivation we sometimes need to follow through on our commitments. In the third commandment God has made keeping the Lord's Day holy an obligation for us. We recognize the importance of meeting obligations with our family and others, yet why do we sometimes so easily dismiss obligations from God?
2. To have a true faith, we have to be more than Catholic-In-Name-Only. If you belong to a club or another organization, would you think that merely joining and yet rarely attending meetings or participating in activities makes you a member in good standing? Of course not! And why should this be different with the Church? Attending Sunday Mass should be the minimum for a baptized, practicing Catholic.
3. Accepting Sunday Mass attendance as a non-negotiable helps keep it a priority and ongoing commitment. If you don't see it this way, what this means is that each week you need to think about and decide whether or not you and your family will attend Mass. Why put yourself in such a position each week? If you decide that yes, my family and I will attend Mass every Saturday evening or Sunday, then that becomes part of your routine and you simply do it – no more thought, discussion or decisions are required.

Here's another serious point to consider...

If you don't like going to Mass or recognize the importance of attending Sunday Mass each week, then you need to ask yourself, "How much do I love God, and how deep is my prayer life and personal relationship with Jesus?" People who are faithful and actively practice the Catholic faith have humbled themselves before God, and have made him a priority over the pursuit of wealth, power, honor, and pleasure. We must have an ongoing and ever-deepening relationship with Jesus. Increase your love for him and you, too, will want to go to Mass and be more involved with your faith.

My brother, Bishop Don Hying, when he was here in Milwaukee as an auxiliary bishop, wrote the following in a Catholic Herald article about the Eucharist and heaven. “In many ways, the life of heaven will be like our experience of the Eucharist – gathered in the presence of the Lord as his people, praising and loving him. If we do not want to spend time with the Lord now, here on earth, how will we want to do it for all eternity? Mass forms our hearts and lives for the glorious experience of eternity.”

There is absolutely no reason or excuse for not making weekly Mass attendance a top priority and commitment. If you say you’re too busy or don’t have time for Mass, then you’re involved in too many other things and are doing too much. Cut out from your life what’s not necessary! God has given us 168 hours each week. All that he asks is for us to give one hour each week back to him. If you are not taking your children to Mass each week, you are failing your children as Catholic parents! And not only that, you are placing your salvation in jeopardy and will be held responsible, no matter how old your children get to be. That may sound harsh, but that’s the truth. In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 7, verse 21, Jesus tells us, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”

If you haven’t been a regular Sunday Mass goer, you may find going every week to be difficult at first, but you can’t just be an idle observer. First of all, prepare by looking at the scripture readings ahead of time, and then truly participate in the Mass by singing, praying and listening to the readings and homily. Afterwards, maybe on the ride home, have a short discussion with your children about the readings and homily. If you sincerely do the above, in time, weekly Mass attendance will become something you want to do. You owe it to God, yourselves, and your family. Please, make this commitment and give Mass a chance! But don’t just do it because I’m asking you to; do it for yourselves and for your family, and do it because God asks you to do it. As part of this commitment, if you have not been going to weekend Mass, it’s important and prudent to first receive the Sacrament of Penance, to be sure that you are in a state of grace with God, and therefore, are not receiving Holy Communion in a state of possible mortal sin, which would be a sacrilege against the Eucharist.

As I say on the first page of the Parent/Student Handbook, you as parents are the primary providers to your children, not only in meeting their physical and emotional needs, but also in nourishing their spiritual ones. Remember, as I already said, at their baptism, you promised to raise your children in the Catholic faith. The Christian Formation program is designed to support, nurture and deepen the faith that you as parents are already teaching and modeling for your children at home. However, what we do here cannot be effective if you are not living out these duties and making faith a priority in your family life.

Besides having read this document, please take a few minutes to read through and reflect on the document “8 Reasons to Go to Mass” that I’ve included as required reading for the RE registration process. Thank you.

See you at Mass!

John Hying