

4 Minute Teaching – 2nd Sunday of Lent 2018

We continue our Four Minute Teachings this week as we reflect on how to best pray at Mass. This series began last week with the idea that we should prepare ourselves to pray at Mass, we should bring our intentions with us to church and offer our participation at Mass, our reception of Holy Communion, and offer ourselves in union with Jesus at Mass for our intentions.

This week I'd like to talk about when we first arrive at church. As we enter the church building we should call to mind that we are entering a holy place, which is to say a place set apart for God. There is a small sign on our doors to help remind us of this reality: the signs read "This is nothing else but the House of God, the Gateway to Heaven!" (Genesis 28:17) As we enter the church we should remind ourselves that this is not the same thing as entering a restaurant, or a grocery store...we are entering the place where Heaven meets earth. More on that later.

When we walk through the door, we can think of Jesus Who said of Himself "I am the gate." (cf. John 10:9) He is the Way to Heaven. As we enter the door of the church, we should think of Jesus and ask Him to help us to be aware that by coming to church we are coming into His Presence.

There is Holy Water near all the entrances. We bless ourselves with the Holy Water as a reminder of our Baptism, through which we first spiritually entered the Catholic Church and became members of the Mystical Body of Christ. As we make the Sign of the Cross over ourselves, we should keep in mind that this action is a prayer. It can be easy to make the Sign of the Cross unthinkingly, but each time make the Sign of the Cross we should do so prayerfully. While making the Sign of the Cross we call upon the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As you make

the Cross over yourself, you should call to mind that Jesus died on the Cross for you personally.

As people enter the pews, I sometimes see confusion about what to do. In churches where the Tabernacle is present in the Sanctuary, it is custom to genuflect to the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle is the golden box where the Lord, truly Present in the Holy Eucharist, is reserved. Our Tabernacle is currently in the chapel; that is why there is a red lamp over the chapel. We genuflect—which is to say touch our right knee to the ground—as a sign of Adoration towards Jesus Who IS truly present in the Eucharist reserved in the Tabernacle. This practice comes directly from Sacred Scripture which says that at Jesus' Name every knee will bow in Heaven, and on earth. (cf. Philippians 2:10) In churches where the Tabernacle is not in the Sanctuary, the appropriate thing to do is to bow to the Altar. As we make this gesture we acknowledge the Altar as the place where the once-for-all Sacrifice of Christ will be made truly present, and from this Sacred Altar we will be fed with the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ when we come forward to receive Holy Communion. We should bow to the Altar whenever we cross before it, and it also appropriate to do so before we get into our pew as we arrive and as we exit our pew at the end of Mass.

We should do our best to be cognizant of the fact that all the gestures and postures we follow during Mass are meant to put us in contact with God. God created us body and soul. Jesus gave us the Sacraments—outward signs that communicate supernatural gifts to us—so that we are able to enter into our worship with our whole being. Our senses aid us in coming into contact with God. In Confession, for example, when we hear the Priest pronounce the words of Absolution we get to hear that God has forgiven our sins. When we receive Holy Communion, we know that we are united to God in a most intimate way as the Priest, Deacon, or

Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion says “The Body of Christ” and we respond “Amen” which means “It is so.”

The Sign of the Cross, the Holy Water, genuflecting before the Tabernacle, bowing before the Altar of the Lord...these are all ways that we really come in contact with God, but we ought to be aware of what we are doing or else these things will not have their fullest intended effect.

To sum up: when you come to Mass be aware that you are coming to a holy place: the church is none other than the “House of God and the Gateway to Heaven.” (cf. Genesis 28:17) Use the Holy Water and make the Sign of the Cross thoughtfully and prayerfully. Bow to the Altar before you get into your pew: call to mind, as you bow, the reality that will take place there: God will come down to join Himself to you. Be aware that we are here in church to encounter God, and that we do encounter Him even through our senses. In His Word He will speak to us, in our postures and gestures we worship and honor Him, in Holy Communion we are united to Him in a way more profound than any other.

We’ll continue this series next week. I just took two weekends to talk about preparation for Mass and getting us in the door and into our pews. Next week my hope is to actually start talking about how to pray during the Mass. May God help you to pray at this Mass with attention and devotion; may you receive Our Lord in Holy Communion with reverence and love. May you be open to all that God wants to do in your soul at this Holy Mass. God bless you!