

4 Minute Teaching – 3rd Sunday of Lent 2018

Today we continue our Four Minute Teachings as we reflect on how to best pray at Mass. The past two weekends we reflected up the importance of preparing ourselves to pray at Mass, and bringing our intentions with us when we come to church. This week we begin looking at how to pray during the parts of the Mass itself.

As Mass begins the Priest asks us to prepare ourselves for what we are about to celebrate by calling to mind our sins and asking God for mercy. After the Priest invites us to call to mind our sins, there is a pause. This pause is brief—that is why it is important to have thought before Mass about the things for which we need to seek mercy. During this brief pause we should call to mind those things for which we are sorry. The Penitential rite isn't merely a generic request for God's mercy, but in it we specifically ask God to have mercy on us for our shortcomings, our faults, and our sins.

After we have asked God for mercy, the Priest says: "Let us pray." This might seem strange because, as I mentioned last week, the Sign of the Cross that we make together is a prayer, the Penitential rite is a prayer...and now the Priest is saying "Let us pray"? Haven't we been praying all along? Whenever we hear "Let us pray" we should call to mind those people and situations that we have decided to pray for at that Mass. The period of silence after the Priest says "Let us pray" is not just a matter of waiting for the server to bring the book to the Priest. This moment of silence is there for a reason: it gives us time to offer our personal intentions to God.

The next part of the Mass is the Liturgy of the Word. The readings we hear are God's inspired Word to us. They were inspired by the Holy Spirit, Who has spoken through the Prophets, and while they were written a long time ago, they continue to speak to us today. God's Word is alive. The same Holy Spirit that inspired the sacred authors dwells within you. The

Holy Spirit will speak to you, if you are open to listening. Some of the readings are, admittedly, hard to understand. The homily is meant to help you understand and put into practice what you just heard in the readings. It is also good to take a Bible Study in order to better understand Scripture. When you come to Mass prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit: “What do you want to say to me today?” Then, really listen. Sometimes one sentence or one word might stick out and speak to you. If a passage is very familiar, there can be a temptation to not pay as close attention. I have studied the Scriptures in seminary, and read them over and over, and yet I often find that a very familiar passage of Scripture can speak to me in an entirely new way based on what is happening in my life at that time. Come to Mass expecting to hear God speak to you. It can be helpful to read the readings for Mass ahead of time. Think about them. Prayerfully consider them during the week.

The Liturgy of the Word concludes with the Creed and the Prayer of the Faithful. The Creed sums up all that we believe, but it is not a mere summary: it is a prayer. At the end of the Creed we say “Amen” which means “It is so.” As we recite the Creed together, we affirm all that we believe about God and what He did for our Salvation. Think about the words, thank God for all that He has done for you. The Prayer of the Faithful has us pray for the needs of the world and of our community. As we say together “Lord, hear our prayer” we are presenting those petitions to God. We ought to be mindful of what we are praying for. Try to not say “Lord hear our prayer” out of routine, but to truly ask God to hear the prayers that we are offering to Him on behalf of others who are in need of our prayers.

Next weekend we’ll continue with the Liturgy of the Eucharist. 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!