

HOW TO ASSIST AT MASS

The Holy Sacrifice is offered to the Holy Trinity

First of all, we must never forget that the Mass is a Sacrifice, an act by which the Church gives to Almighty God, officially and in the name of all, worship of the highest kind, adoration or Latria, which is due to Him alone, in virtue of the supreme excellence of His divine Being from which everything comes and to which everything must return. Therefore the Mass is offered only to the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity.

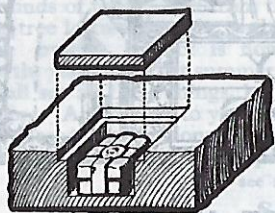
What the priest offers to God as an acknowledgment of His sovereign dominion over all creatures, is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who, by His sacrifice on the cross has rendered to His Father an infinite act of worship, consisting of adoration, thanksgiving, expiation and impetration. The sacrifice of the Mass, by placing on the altar the Victim of Calvary, enables us through Him to adore God in a suitable manner, to thank Him worthily for all His favours, to render Him full satisfaction by the offering of the Blood of Jesus, and to address to Him requests which are always heard because they are made in His name, who by the very act of showing His glorious wounds to His Father, intercedes unceasingly for us in heaven and in the Eucharist on earth. Moreover, since all the mysteries of our Saviour's life have helped, in union with Calvary, to bring about our salvation, the Church commemorates them in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass by the different feasts of the Temporal Cycle or the Cycle of Christ. At Christmas, she offers to God the divine Child of the manger, with all that stage in our Lord's life that has specially contributed to the Father's glory; and by that means ensures to us the application, quite special also, of the graces which Christ merited for us, and which will enable us to practise each year more and more the virtues of which the Son of God and Mary then gave us an example.

The Holy Sacrifice offered in honour of the saints

But the Mass is offered also in honour of the saints, as the Sanctoral Cycle shows. In this way is emphasized the fact, that it is to the Sacrifice of Calvary and to the Eucharist that the saints owe the graces which God gave them in such abundance. And the saints themselves are honoured when the work of the most High is glorified in them.

We offer to the saints also a fitting homage when we unite their memory with our Lord's at the altar. This is done on the anniversary of their death and every day in the Canon of the Mass. As members of the mystical body of Christ it is right to associate them with the sacrifice of their Head, since by their sufferings and often by their martyrdom, they have mingled

their blood with that of this divine victim. Moreover the Church encloses the relics of the saints, especially those of the martyrs, in the altar-stone (see illustration) at the very spot where the priest places the Sacred Host. "It is the whole city of the redeemed," says St. Augustine, "the assembly and company of the saints, which is the universal sacrifice and which is offered to God by the High Priest, who offers Himself for us in His Passion."



We render to the saints the greatest honour we can give them when we offer to God, in their name, the Blood of Jesus to adore the most High and thank Him for His favours to them. The

saints, full of zeal for the glory of the Holy Trinity, are beholden to us if we honour God in union with their intention, for this increases their joy. The efficacy of their merits in the past and their prayers in the present is in a special way increased, when these are offered to God closely united with the merits and prayers of Christ Jesus, the universal Mediator, and this happens especially on their feast-day when Holy Mass is celebrated in their honour. "Most humbly we pray," says the Church in the Collect for the feast of All Saints, "that since so great is the number of Thine elect pleading for us, we may partake, in all their fulness, of Thy abounding mercies."

Most willingly does God accept the offering of the Blood of Christ made through the saints as intermediaries.

How the faithful can take an active part in this Sacrifice

Assisting at Mass, we should do four things :

1. **Reconstruct** the historic setting in which took place the event in our Lord's Life, or in that of one of His saints which is being commemorated on the appointed day. In doing this much help may be gained from the Mass of the Catechumens with its different features: the vestments, the chant, the Introit, Epistle, Gospel, etc

2. **Offer** to God, for His greater glory, the mystery of our Redeemer's life which is being commemorated, or the acts of virtue which have been practised by the saint whose feast it is. This is done in the Canon of the Mass; it is not fitting to communicate before having made this offering which appeases the most High and brings us divine grace

3. **Ask** of God (this is done in the *Pater noster*) and receive from Him by the merits and intercession of our Lord and His saints, the graces which they themselves received when they were living on earth. (This is the fruit of the Communion and the Postcommunion.)

4. To these three ways of interior or spiritual participation, which can be practiced at every Mass, we should, as far as circumstances allow, add exterior or material participation, which may consist: in reading liturgical prayers with the priest, in singing congregational and Gregorian chant at High Mass, in responding aloud at Low Mass, and best of all, in receiving Holy Communion with the priest during Mass. In this way, we shall draw plentiful fresh draughts of the true Christian spirit at its primary source as Pius X wished.

Certain texts of the Mass are reserved to the priest, and should never be said aloud by the faithful: we can still make these parts our own, not by a mechanical repetition but by reverent and serious reflection, corresponding to the thoughts expressed by these prayers.

Other parts of the Mass were originally, and are still meant to be said by the people. They are of two kinds: those that are to be chanted by the congregation at High Mass, and those that are responded by the ministers, or by the server at Low Mass, on our behalf.

A first degree of "*Missa dialogata*" consists in responding aloud with

the server. A second degree (which deserves properly the name of "Missa recitata") adds to the first degree the recitation with the celebrant of all the prayers which are sung by the people at Missa Cantata, the Gloria (Et in terra, etc.), the Credo (Patrem omnipotentem, etc.), the Sanctus and the Agnus Dei¹.

Before Holy Communion, we should say not only the Confiteor with the server, but the Domine non sum dignus, which the priest says at that moment on our behalf, may also be said three times with him.

In the Ordinary of the Mass, all sentences that may be said by the faithful, are printed in heavier type.

This assistance at the Holy Sacrifice is the ideal preparation for Holy Communion since it is the same that the Church imposes on the Pope, the bishops and all priests, whenever they celebrate Mass. It develops in the soul those sentiments of contrition (from the Introit to the Collects), of faith (from the Collects to the Credo), of hope (at the Canon of the Mass), of love (at the Communion) and of gratitude (from the ablutions to the end), which are indispensable if the Eucharist is to be received with fruit. By means of this preparation, the highest act of participation in the Mass is Holy Communion. It obtains all of its fruits, because it is one of the most perfect applications of the conditions required by the decree of the saintly Pius X, when he said, "a most abundant attainment of the effects of Holy Communion is by a careful preparation and a thanksgiving proper to the reception of this divine Sacrament".

PREPARATION FOR MASS AND HOLY COMMUNION

Before celebrating Holy Mass, the priest, if he has time, says the following prayers, which the faithful may say also, as an excellent preparation for Mass, or for Holy Communion when, for some reason, this cannot be received at Mass. Pope Leo XIII granted an indulgence of one year to those who say these prayers, up to the prayers of St. Ambrose and St. Thomas inclusive.

Ant. Ne reminiscáris, * Dómine, delícta nostra, vel paréntum nostrórum, neque vindíctam sumas de peccátis nostris. (T. P. Alleluía.)

Ant. Remember not, O Lord, our offenses, nor those of our fathers; and take not vengeance on our sins. (In Paschaltide: Alleluia.)

Psalm lxxxiii

Recited by the Israelites when they went up to the Temple for the Feast of the Passover.

Quam dilécta tabernácula tua, Dómine virtútum: concupiscit, et déficit ánima mea in átria Dómini.

How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! my soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord:

1. The lawfulness of this use is henceforth beyond any doubt, although it remains subject to regulations from the diocesan authority. It has been expressly authorized, recommended, or even put into practice in the first or in the second degree by bishops of different countries, and it is most favourably regarded by Rome. The approval was given to the first degree in Belgium in striking terms: the Sacred Congregation of the Council approved in November 1922 the following decree of the Provincial Council of Malines: "In order to instill into the souls of the faithful, a truly christian and collective spirit, and prepare them for active participation, as is the evident desire contained in pontifical documents, one must approve (laudanda est), the practice at least in religious houses and institutions for youth, in which all people assisting at the Mass make the responses at the same time with the acolytes." On November 30, 1935, the Sacred Congregation of Rites explicitly approved both degrees of this practice, whenever the Bishop has no objection owing to local circumstances.