

Why I Go to Mass

During the course of my priesthood, people have asked me all sorts of questions. But of all the questions I have been asked, one stands out: “Why do we have to go to mass?” This, of course, is the question parents hear from their children all the time: “Why do we have to go to mass; it’s so boring?” And because children ask this question, parents ask me, “What should I say to my children.” So today, on this feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, a day we celebrate the centrality of the Eucharist in our lives, I want to address that question.

Let me begin by saying that the question is the wrong question, for when we ask “Why do I *have* to go mass,” we reduce the mass to a matter of obligation, something we have to do because someone is making us do something we don’t want to do. There is, of course, an obligation on the part of Catholics to attend mass, but today I would like to move beyond that.

The question I want to ask is this: “If the Eucharist is what we say it is—the Body and Blood of Jesus, the Bread of life, the promise of future salvation—why wouldn’t I want to attend mass every week? Allow me to make this more personal.

I have been receiving the Eucharist for over sixty five years, and during that time I have grown in my understanding of what the mass means for my life. What I have learned can be summarized in three points.

First, the Eucharist has been the food for my life’s journey; it is the food that has empowered me to live as a Catholic Christian and carry out my life’s work as a priest. Just as I can’t live without eating, so I cannot live my Christian life without sharing in the Eucharist. The Eucharist has been the food that has strengthened me for my life’s journey. The Eucharist has given me the strength to follow Christ in the way of discipleship.

My second point is this. *The Eucharist provides me with an intimate relationship with the living and risen Lord Jesus Christ.* When I receive the Eucharist, Christ dwells in me, and I dwell in Christ. When I receive the Eucharist, I am united with everyone else who receives the Body and Blood of Christ. When I receive the Eucharist, I enter into the Body of Christ, the Church. The Eucharist is not just a piece of bread or a cup of wine; it is the body and blood of Christ.

Finally, *the Eucharist has been important to me because it is the promise of eternal life, the seed of resurrection life.* In today's Gospel Jesus promises: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." Notice what Jesus says. When we receive the Eucharist, we have the seed of eternal life within us, and because we have this seed of life, Christ will raise us up on the last day.

The question, "why must I go to mass," is the wrong question. The right question is this: Why wouldn't I go to mass if the Eucharist is the food that sustains me on my life's journey? Why wouldn't I go to mass if the Eucharist unites me so intimately with Christ? Why wouldn't I go to mass if the Eucharist is the promise of eternal life?

I no longer go to mass because I have to; I go to mass to hear God's Word and receive the Eucharist.