

Faith on Fire
The Third Step
A Commitment to Communal Worship

Last week I wrote about the need to be *committed to personal prayer*; for if we are not committed to a daily life of prayer, we cannot be intimate with the Lord. Nor will we grow in the spiritual life. Our faith will never be on fire. This week, I am writing about the need to be *committed to communal worship*, by which I mean our weekly participation in the celebration of the Eucharist, the Mass.

There are two ways we can look at Mass:

1. As an obligation, or
2. As a moment we gather as the Body of Christ to enter the central mystery of our faith—the death and resurrection of Christ.

We do, of course, have an obligation to attend Mass. It is part of what it means to be a Catholic. But to view our presence at Mass as primarily an obligation, as something we must do, is to miss what is most important and fruitful about our life in Christ. Our presence at the Eucharist is the moment we are most truly the Church, the moment we become the visible Body of Christ, the moment we are intimately united with Christ and each other. Those who are mature adults in Christ attend Mass week after week because they want to, not because they must.

There are three reasons why the Mass is so important for Catholic Life.

1. When we attend Mass, we are fed from the Table of the Word and Table of the Eucharist. We hear the Word of God that nourishes and strengthens our faith, and we share in the Eucharist that changes and transforms us into the image of the risen Christ.
2. When we attend Mass, we are joined with a community of believers that becomes the Body of Christ. The risen Lord is present in our midst, and we become the outward manifestation of his risen body. We become the Body of Christ.
3. When receive the Eucharist, we enter the great mystery of the Lord's death and resurrection. We die with Christ to the powers of Sin and Death, and we rise with Christ into newness of life.

If we are to be renewed so that our faith is on fire with love for Christ we must be committed to the weekly celebration of the Eucharist as well as to personal daily prayer. The Mass must become the source of our devotion and spiritual life. When this happens we no longer attend Mass because we must but because we want to. Here are four suggestions for making attendance at Mass more fruitful.

Prepare. Read and mediate on the readings in advance so that you are prepared to hear God's Word. Ask what they are saying to your life this week.

Listen. Listening is an art. It takes power and concentration. Give all your attention to the readings and prayers you hear, remembering that you are listening to the Word of God.

Participate. The Mass is the liturgical work of the entire assembly, not just of the priest and ministers in the sanctuary. It is the work of the People of God because all of us share in the priesthood of Christ through our Baptism. As one of the Prefaces of Mass says, “We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood. Therefore, we need to be actively engaged in the work of worshipping in our singing and responses.

Live the Mass. In addition to attending Mass, bring the Mass home with you. Let its power guide and strengthen you in the week ahead. Remember what you heard, prayed and experienced at Mass. Find practical ways to let the Mass guide your conduct in the week ahead.

Father Matera