

## Full, Conscious, and Active Participation at Mass

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that **fully conscious**, and **active participation** in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. [Vatican II, *Sacrosanctam concilium*, 1963, #14]

**The sacred liturgy [*Sacra Liturgia*] does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church.** Before men can come to the liturgy they must be called to faith and to conversion....

10. **Nevertheless the liturgy [*Liturgia*] is the summit [*culmen*] toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font [*fons*] from which all her power flows.** For the aim and object of apostolic works is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church, to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord's supper. The liturgy in its turn moves the faithful, filled with "the paschal sacraments," to be "one in holiness"; it prays that "they may hold fast in their lives to what they have grasped by their faith." [Vatican II, *Sacrosanctam concilium*, 1963, #10]

Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *On The 25th Anniversary Of The Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy* (#10) writes: "**Since it is a celebration of the Church, the liturgy requires the active, conscious, and full participation of all, according to the diversity of Orders and office.**" *Conscious* refers to the fact that our participation should be informed, mindful, attentive, and with understanding. *Active* means that what we know in our minds and hearts we express outwardly. *Full* expresses that everyone is to participate in the true worship of God with all their being.

The liturgy is the public worship of the Church, with every member (priests, deacons, ministers, the faithful in attendance) carrying out their proper role. The liturgy is not the collection of every individual's private prayers with the addition of the priest's own private prayers at the altar. It is, in its essence, communal prayer: we all join together in the public worship of the church throughout the world and throughout time.

The Liturgy is "a holy act wherein heaven and earth unite and God's grace flows to us." [Klaus Gamber, *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy*, p. 89]

**2181** The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason **the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation**, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. **Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin.**

**2182** Participation in the communal celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church. The faithful give witness by this to their communion in faith and charity. Together they testify to God's holiness and their hope of salvation. They strengthen one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*]

The Code of Canon Law of 1917 for the first time gathered this tradition into a universal law. The present Code reiterates this, saying that "on Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to attend Mass". (can. 1247) This legislation has normally been understood as entailing a **grave obligation**: this is the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (#2181), and it is easy to understand why if we keep in mind how vital Sunday is for the Christian life.

[John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, 1998, #47]

## **Things That Make A Difference At Mass**

- It is customary for **men** and boys to **take their hats off in church**.
- **Dress modestly and appropriately.** We believe that the Lord comes to meet us at every Mass. So, we should dress up respectfully?
- **Make the Sign of the Cross with Holy Water on entering and leaving the church** as a reminder of our Baptism and our salvation in the Cross of Christ.
- **Silence** is the default practice for conduct in a church. Silence should be maintained *before* Mass in church, except for the Rosary or meditative music. Please work to maintain this prayerful silence. *After* Mass people can socialize outside, in the social hall, or in the church as they are leaving.
- Please **mute cell phone** before Mass.
- **Genuflect** (as you are able) to the Blessed Sacrament before entering pew and when leaving. Genuflection does not involve making the Sign of the Cross.
- It is good to kneel down and pray quietly before Mass to prepare for the liturgy.
- Saying the **Rosary** *before* Mass is a laudable tradition here. However, we do not pray the Rosary *during* Mass. In the liturgy we pray *the* Mass together, not *at* Mass alone.
- Devotional exercises, literature, or additions to the Rosary (except for the Fatima prayer) should be brought to the Pastor for permission before using or distributing.
- **Cell phones should never be used in Mass for calls or texting.** Emergencies are an exception, of course; and if you do use one, please walk out of church to do so. If you are using the phone for readings or prayers, this is appropriate, but try to be discreet.
- **Quietly** lift or put down the **kneelers**.
- If you have to **cough**, especially during the sermon, please quiet it with a handkerchief or by other means.
- **Babies are a joyful and welcome sign of life in our parish.** Yet every parent knows that sometimes their baby is going to have a bad day. So there is no reason to be hesitant about quieting your child in the back of the church or somewhere else out of consideration for the other members of the congregation.
- There is a **moral union** with the celebrant in prayer. So, if the priest-celebrant is starting the Our Father, one does not have to race to get the first two words in, or try to time it. The priest can say the first two words with the congregation picking up on the third and they will still have joined in praying the full Our Father as a community.
- With the large size of the of the church it is crucial to speak and sing **together with the celebrant or cantor**. We cannot be in our own world following a different drummer when it comes to praying and singing.
- Invite people into pews, or make room for them by moving over, etc. We want everyone to feel welcomed here.
- Have children go to the **bathroom before Mass**, either at home or in church restrooms. The church restrooms are not a place to chill out or play on the phone during the sermon. Certainly there can be emergencies.
- School-age children should be awake and participate actively at Mass.
- Church law requires that one **fast for at least 1 hour before receiving Holy Communion**. Water and medicine can be consumed. Be sure to plan ahead.
- Be mindful of the proper way to receive of Holy Communion. (see below "Receiving Holy Communion")

- The Communion procession is a time to focus our attention on preparing to receive Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament or, when returning, communing with the Lord. It is not a time to say "Hi" to people on the way back to ones pew.
- **Do not leave early.** We should stay to the end of the procession and the hymn that accompanies it, if there is one. While there are certainly exceptions to this guideline, most who leave early don't need to and ought not to.
- One should make an **act of thanksgiving** after Mass before leaving the church.
- Please be sure to **gather up all belongs** before leaving the church.
- These can be summed up by the word "**mindfulness**," that is, focusing one's awareness on the present moment and on what one is doing, in this case, participating actively in the Liturgy.

### **Ministers, the Altar, and the Blessed Sacrament**

1. During the Mass the principle point of focus is the altar. Upon entering and leaving, the celebrant, deacons, and servers genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament. But between these the focus is the altar. The celebrant or deacon also genuflects when opening and closing the tabernacle.
2. Lectors and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion **bow to the altar** (not the tabernacle) when **entering and leaving the sanctuary**. It should also be mentioned that *lectors* do not bow to the ambo or lectionary when they have finished their reading. When finished they immediately, without rushing, return to their pew.
3. Cantors when moving from their chair to the ambo, given that they are already in the sanctuary, neither have to bow to the altar or bow (or genuflect) to the Blessed Sacrament.

### **Receiving Holy Communion**

1. Be sure to **fast one hour before receiving Holy Communion**.
2. There should be some **act of reverence** before receiving Communion. This is usually a bow. The most practical way to do it is this: as the person in front of you steps away, you bow and then step forward. That's more efficient than waiting to bow until you are in front of the ordinary or extraordinary minister of Communion (hereafter "minister").
3. Please say "Amen" **audibly after** the ordinary or extraordinary minister finishes saying "the body of Christ." **Don't interrupt** to say "Amen" when he or she is still saying "the body of Christ." It's a conversation: the minister speaks and then the communicant responds when they have finished.
4. **Receiving on the tongue** is the traditional way to receive Holy Communion. After saying "Amen" the communicant presents their tongue and the minister will put the host on it. After receiving the communicant turns and goes to their pew.
5. The church prescribes the proper way to **receive in the hand**. The hand with which one puts the host in their mouth goes under the hand on which the minister of Holy Communion places the host. The reason--the bishops tell us--is your hands are to form a kind of throne on which the King of Kings is placed. The communicant then reverently picks the host up with their dominant hand and places it on their tongue. One should NOT pop it into their mouth with the same hand on which the priest placed the host.
  - ▶ After receiving in the hand **step to the side** and consume the host in the sight of the minister.

6. If a communicant cannot receive properly in the hand, they should receive on the tongue. There's nothing so sacred about receiving in the hand that one can't receive on the tongue when necessary.
7. According to the present guidelines for the Diocese of Erie based on the options provided for the USA by Rome, the congregation remains standing until the last person receives Communion. Then the faithful kneel as they are able. When the Blessed Sacrament is placed in the Tabernacle the Congregation they may sit. However, Rome has said the faithful may kneel in their pew immediately upon returning from Communion if they wish.
8. It is not necessary to have the Rosary in one's hands when receiving Holy Communion.
9. For *Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion*:  
The proper time prescribed by the church to come up to the altar is *after* the priest drinks from the chalice.

"In the distribution of Communion the Priest may be assisted by other Priests who happen to be present. If such Priests are not present and there is a truly large number of communicants, the Priest may call upon **extraordinary ministers** to assist him, that is, duly instituted acolytes or even other faithful who have been duly deputed for this purpose. In case of necessity, the Priest may depute suitable faithful for this single occasion.

**These ministers should not approach the altar before the Priest has received Communion**, and they are always to receive from the hands of the Priest Celebrant the vessel containing the species of the Most Holy Eucharist for distribution to the faithful."  
[GIRM, 162]

10. For Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion taking communion to the sick:  
If you are taking Communion to the sick. We thank you for your work. We ask that you come after Mass to take the hosts that you need and go straight to the people to whom you are giving Holy Communion. See specific guidelines for this.