

# **The first-timer's guide to the Catholic Mass**

Catholics celebrate our faith in God in a variety of ways, but our chief act of communal worship is the Liturgy of the Eucharist. In the Western Church we call this service "Mass."

Sunday Mass (which also may be held on Saturday evening) includes prayers, hymns, readings from the Bible, a sermon (also called a "homily"), and the Eucharist. In all this we worship the Triune God: we offer thanksgiving and praise to the *Father*, in the sacrificial memorial of *Christ* and his Church, by the power of his word and of the *Holy Spirit*.

Attending Mass for the first time can be intimidating or even confusing, but don't worry! Relax, reflect on the sights and sounds, take time to pray, and listen to the Word of God. It is easy to find entertainment in today's world. Mass is something different: a place to contemplate and pray, a place to bring the joys and struggles of daily life to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Below are some common questions people have if they are planning to attend a Catholic Mass:

## **How long is Mass?**

The celebration of Mass usually lasts about an hour. You are encouraged to stay until the priest and other ministers process out of church.

## **What will happen during Mass?**

The first part of the Mass is called the Liturgy of the Word. We begin with an opening song as the priest and altar servers enter the church. After an opening prayer and a greeting from the priest we will listen to the first reading from the Old Testament. This is followed by a sung Psalm and a second reading, this time from the epistles (the letters of St. Paul). After the second reading everyone will stand to listen to the Gospel. After the Gospel is read the priest or deacon will offer a reflection on the readings called a homily. The creed and the prayers of the faithful (also known as the intercessions) conclude the Liturgy of the Word.

The second half of Mass is the Liturgy of the Eucharist. During the Liturgy of the Eucharist the gifts for communion (bread and wine) are brought forward and then consecrated by the priest. Through the consecration the Catholic Church proclaims that the bread and the wine become the body and blood of Jesus. After the consecration the Our Father is prayed and a sign of peace is exchanged with those nearest you. The congregation will then come forward to receive communion. After communion there is a prayer, possibly announcements about upcoming activities, and then a closing song.

Song lyrics and some prayers will be projected onto the screens at the front and back of the church so people can join in singing and praying together. The readings proclaimed from the Bible will be listed (book, chapter, and verse) but everyone is encouraged to listen instead of reading along in their own bibles. There will be times during the Mass when the assembly will stand, sit, and kneel. You are encouraged to join in these postures of prayer as you feel comfortable.

### **Do I need to give to the collection?**

Collection baskets are passed person-to-person down each pew. The collection is used to support the various ministries of the church, including charitable outreach. Occasionally, a second collection will be taken for a missionary or some other need. No one is required to give, neither visitors nor parishioners. Parishioners do commit themselves to supporting the church as an offering back to God as their circumstances allow. Visitors are not expected to give, but may if they feel moved to.

### **Do I have to shake hands with people?**

After praying the Lord's Prayer — the Our Father — we exchange a sign of peace. This is usually a handshake or, between couples and families, a kiss or hug and people saying to each other, "Peace be with you." You are invited to shake hands with those near, but if you are not comfortable with this gesture, you are not obligated to participate, a simple smile is fine.

### **Can I receive communion?**

Christian churches vary in their understanding of communion and most Christian churches do not preach that the body and blood of Christ become truly present during the liturgy as the Catholic Church does. The basic condition for receiving the Eucharist at a Catholic Church is to be able to honestly say "Amen" (which means "I believe") to the Catholic faith with integrity of one's belief and actions.

We grieve the division within the Body of Christ, because division is contrary to the will of Christ, Who is the Head of the Church. These divisions in teaching and community are real, the sad result of human sin. Because of these divisions, those who are not already Catholic should not receive communion at Mass. We invite all those not receiving communion to come forward at the time of communion with the rest of the assembly to receive a blessing. When approaching the priest, deacon, or Eucharistic ministry, simply cross your arms over your chest and they will offer blessing, raising their hand over you and possibly placing it on your head.

### **How should I dress?**

As a visitor, you are our honored guest — please dress as you are comfortable. We encourage respectful dress for Mass that helps us embody the idea that Mass is the highpoint of our week. Some parishioners wear suits and business attire to Sunday worship, and others dress more casually.

### **Do I have to identify myself as a visitor?**

No. Our parish will not ask you to raise your hand, fill out a "visitor's card," or be identified in any way. However, if you would like to talk to someone when you attend an event or Mass, please introduce yourself to a volunteer at our welcome center.