

WHY DO I NEED TO GO TO MASS ON SUNDAY?

That is a very relevant question today given the fact that 75% of Catholics don't attend Sunday Mass and those that do often don't know the reason why they are there.

Many people incorrectly identify the Catholic religion with an individual personality (a priest, bishop or religious), or a specific community of believers (a parish) or a church building. When religious leaders who are supposed to represent and live the faith act contrary to the Gospel, then oftentimes people of faith are scandalized by their bad behavior. Similarly, when a Parish community is merged or Church building is closed, people who identify their Faith with a community or a building find their Faith traumatized. These adverse experiences can lead to being indifferent or abandoning the Faith.

The Catholic Faith transcends these subjective experiences and finds its reason for existence on the Divine person of Jesus Christ and the Church he founded 2,000 years ago on the apostle Peter, the first Pope. The Church is a family of believers, some of whom are saints and some sinners. Remember, Judas was one of the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus himself. The story of someone in position of authority, not living the faith goes all the way back to the beginning of the Church. A mature and developed Faith is based on the person of Jesus Christ, the testimony of His Church and its teachings on Faith and Morals, and not on individual personalities or buildings.

I would like to address the question concerning the necessity of attending Mass with the following three topical perspectives:

- 1. Worship and Prayer**
- 2. Sin, Grace and Salvation**
- 3. The Covenant Relationship**

Worship and Prayer

God is the Supreme Excellence and man is dependent on Him; God has a right that this fact be acknowledged, and we as creatures have a duty to acknowledge this reality. To acknowledge God as the Supreme Excellence is called **Worship**.

Worship involves adoration, prayer, and sacrifice and must include the entire person, both interior (mind) and exterior (body).

Worship may be an act of a private individual or group, or it may be the act of society. Man by nature is a social being, born into a family and destined to live in community with his fellow man. If Man as an individual is dependent on God and owes Him worship, then also too is society dependent on God and is duty bound to worship Him.

Prayer to God by an individual is called *Private Prayer* and prayer by the Church to God is called *Liturgical Prayer*. Liturgy literally means “work of the people” and is the public prayer of the Church. It includes the Sacraments, the Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours), and the Mass. Liturgy is also defined as the customary public worship performed by a religious group, according to its particular beliefs, customs and traditions.

All throughout the Old Testament we see the Jewish people engaged in both Private and Liturgical worship. Practicing one does not exclude the other. Jesus prayed privately and also worshiped liturgically at the synagogue and the temple.

As a matter of fact, Jesus as a Jew celebrated 7 different Jewish feast days during the course of the Jewish liturgical year. The celebration of the Last Supper by Jesus and his disciples was during the Jewish Feast of Passover and in fact, the Last Supper was a Passover meal.

During the Last Supper Jesus said to his disciples, “***Do this in Remembrance of Me***”. These same words are repeated at every Mass during the Consecration. At the Last Supper, Jesus converted the Jewish Feast of Passover into the Mass and commanded us (***Do this***) to worship him for all generations to come by celebrating the Mass.

So the Mass is not some sort of invention by the Church, rather it is a combination of the two types of liturgical worship that Jesus participated in; the Jewish Synagogue service (the Liturgy of the Word) and the Jewish Feast of Passover (the Liturgy of the Eucharist).

Prayer is the primary instrument by which we worship God and prayer has four basic constituent elements that are ordered to God –A.C.T.S. – Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving and Supplication. The Mass contains all four of these elements; the Gloria is a prayer of *Adoration*; the Confiteor is a prayer of *Contrition*; the petitions read after the homily are prayers of *Supplication*; and celebration of the Eucharist is a prayer of *Thanksgiving*.

So there you have it, we as social beings are obliged by our nature to offer God public worship, Jesus is God, Jesus (God) commands us to remember and worship Him publicly by celebrating the Mass and ***the Mass is the highest form of prayer and worship that you can offer to God. Why wouldn't you want to worship God at Mass?***

Sin, Grace and Salvation

Christianity believes and understands that our first parents were created in a state of Grace. Grace is God's divine life abiding in the soul. So because of God's Grace, Adam and Eve were in right relationship with God.

They were tested and unable to keep God's command and therefore lost the Grace that God had given them (Original Sin). The entire human race descends from Adam and Eve and we all inherit this deficiency of Grace in the soul.

Jesus reconciles humanity back to God by His passion, death, resurrection and ascension. This gift of Salvation then provides humanity an access to the Grace that was lost by our first parents.

We understand that the Sacrament of Baptism restores this Grace lost by Adam. Because we have free will, we can choose by our own actions whether or not we wish to continue in this life of God's Grace or to reject it.

Many Christians today have a distorted sense of Grace, good works and salvation. There is nothing we can do by ourselves to earn salvation (heaven). It is a free gift given to us and this free gift of Grace then produces the Faith and Good works necessary for heaven.

In the natural world we all know that gasoline is the fuel necessary in order to drive a car and in the spiritual world Grace is the necessary fuel for movement. Without gas, the car does not move. Without Grace, there is no life or movement in the spiritual world.

So how do we sustain grace in the soul over our lifetime journey? The Old Testament story of the Exodus foreshadows the answer to this question.

The Jewish people were enslaved in Egypt. Moses asked Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to be set free. Pharaoh was obstinate and God through Moses set forth ten various plagues upon Egypt to prove God was with His people.

The final plague required the Israelites to procure a one-year-old male lamb without blemish. The lamb was to be sacrificed, the blood put on the wooden doorposts, the lamb roasted and eaten in order for the angel of death to “Passover” the Israelite homes so the first born son would be spared from death.

After the evening of Passover, the Israelites were set free and journeyed through the divided waters of the Red Sea and began their 40-year journey in the desert before entering into the Promised Land. God miraculously fed them while they were travelling for 40 years with “Manna”, bread that comes down from heaven.

Reading this story with spiritual lenses we see that the lamb is Jesus whose blood is shed on the wooden cross in order that we are set free from the slavery of sin. Notice that not only must the lamb be slain, but it must be eaten in order to be saved. This backdrop gives more resonance to the words of the Jesus “... unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life” (John 6:53-54).

Notice also that the Israelites are saved from Pharaoh's army by passing through the divided waters of the Red Sea. The early Church saw this as a foreshadowing of the Sacrament of Baptism.

God then fed the Israelites in the desert for 40 years with “Manna” bread that comes down from heaven. The number 40 in Scripture indicates a time of testing and a lifetime journey. The Promised Land is a foreshadowing of Heaven. So God fed the Israelites for their lifetime journey until they crossed the Jordan River and entered the Promised Land.

God makes available the Eucharist at Mass to feed us for our lifetime journey on this earth. The Church has always taught that the Eucharist is the source, center and summit of the Catholic faith, that provides and sustains the Grace in our souls over this lifetime journey of testing, trials, tribulations and sorrows.

If Grace is necessary for Salvation (Heaven) and the Eucharist provides this Grace in an extraordinary way, then why wouldn't you want to go to Mass and receive this Heavenly Bread that provides Grace for the journey?

The Covenant Relationship

In order to understand God's Revelation in Sacred Scripture, you need to understand that Old and New Testament form one book that narrates Salvation History through the understanding of the concept of Covenant.

A Covenant is a Sacred Family Bond that God enters into with His people. There are five Old Testament Covenants that lead to and are fulfilled by the establishment of the final New Testament Covenant instituted by Jesus Christ.

The first Covenant of the Old Testament was the Marriage Covenant entered into by Adam and Eve. The Covenant Mediator was Adam and the covenant sign was the Sabbath, the Seventh day of God's Creation.

The second Covenant of the Old Testament was the Household (Family) Covenant entered into by Noah. The Covenant Mediator was Noah and the Covenant sign was the Rainbow.

The third Covenant of the Old Testament was the Tribal Covenant entered into by Abraham. The Covenant Mediator was Abraham and the covenant sign was Circumcision.

The fourth Covenant of the Old Testament was the National Covenant entered into by Moses. The Covenant Mediator was Moses and the covenant sign was the Passover.

The fifth Covenant of the Old Testament was the Kingdom Covenant entered into by King David. The Covenant Mediator was David and the covenant sign was the Throne.

Notice that each successive Covenant grows larger and more inclusive. Adam and Eve are a Married couple, Noah, his wife, three sons and their wives form a family, Abraham and his extended family and servants form a Tribe, Moses represents Israel and the 12 tribes, King David rules a Kingdom that includes not only the 12 tribes but also a number of Gentiles.

The final Covenant established by God is the New Covenant established by Jesus Christ at the Last Supper when Jesus institutes the Eucharist as the Covenant sign. "For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28)

This final Covenant is a universal covenant, everyone is invited. The Greek word for Universal is "Catholic". The sign of the New Covenant is the Eucharist, Jesus himself, both sign and mediator.

It is interesting to see how the Covenant ritual manifests itself in the celebration of the Mass. A Covenant ceremony generally contains three elements:

1. Swearing and Oath
2. Offering a Sacrifice
3. Sharing a Meal

Swearing and Oath

In the Catholic Mass, we swear an oath every time we say “Amen” or when we recite the Creed. Swearing an oath affirms that we are in a covenant relationship with God. The Latin term for swearing an oath is *Sacramentum*, where we get the word Sacrament.

Offering a Sacrifice

The Catholic Mass is a representation of Jesus Christ’s one and only Sacrifice at Calvary. Because God is outside of time and space He allows this great mystery to become present to us now. Thus the Mass is in fact a Sacrifice and is commonly called “The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass”.

Sharing a Meal

The Mass is also a Sacred Banquet (meal), where we partake of the Lamb of God in the form of Bread and Wine.

So there you have it, the Mass is a renewal of the New Covenant that Jesus instituted. Why wouldn’t you want to go to Mass and renew the Covenant that Jesus instituted?