

Praying the Mass

At Mass we meet with Jesus and he meets with us.

This is a precious meeting. We meet with the Son of God, who comes to us to share with us his love and his life. He comes to us, to bring us to the Father, and to help us live in the Spirit.

This is an astonishing thing. God, who made heaven and earth, and everything that is in it, loves us this much. God comes to be with us so that we might be close to him and live by his love.

It is important for us to make the most of the opportunity that the Mass gives us.

- To thank God for his goodness.
- To say sorry to God for things we have got wrong.
- To ask God for his help with the things we are asked to do.

A black tilted box with the white handwritten text "Thank you!".

Arriving at church

When we get to Mass we dip our hands into the holy water, and make the sign of the Cross over ourselves as a sign of blessing.

We are back in the house of God and in the home of the Church. We belong here, and we are welcome. This is our spiritual home, and it became our spiritual home on the day of our baptism.

Quiet prayer before Mass

We then show reverence to Jesus, present in the Blessed Sacrament. We genuflect, as a sign of humility and love, and then take our seat.

A black tilted box with the white handwritten text "Sorry!".

It is good to spend the next minute or so in quiet prayer - and especially to talk with Jesus about what we want to say 'Thank You' for and to say 'Sorry' for. This private time with Jesus helps us prepare for the time that follows, when we pray

together with the rest of the community. It helps us quieten down, and to become aware of the presence of God, and of his love for us. It helps us remember some of the reasons that we have come to Mass.

Making the most of the silence

During Mass there should be a number of times when there is silence. Be ready to put them for good use. Use them to think about what you have just heard and what you want to say to God. And in the quiet of your heart, speak to him and listen to him.

A black tilted box with the white handwritten text "Please help me!".

At the end of Mass

Spend a moment in quiet prayer. Again, thank God for the gifts he has given you, especially at this Mass. And before you leave the church, ask God to help you with whatever you think you will need help with in the coming days.

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At Mass we hear God speak with us.

After the readings from the Bible the reader says. This is the word of the Lord'. And we answer: 'Thanks be to God'.

God speaks to us and we can hear him speak to us when we listen.

He speaks to us through the words we hear, and he speaks not only to our ears but to our hearts.

It is important that we listen carefully to the readings. The stories and teachings they contain are an important part of our Catholic history.

They have been handed on, down through the centuries so we can hear of how God was way back then.

And as we hear them again today, God himself speaks directly to us, right here and now.

Quiet

When our parents or teacher speaks to us, we know how important it is to be still and listen. It is even more important for us to listen to God! So when the readings are read, there needs to be stillness so that we need to focus on what is said. There needs to be:

- Stillness and quiet in the church
- Stillness and quiet in our bodies - no fidgeting, and sitting, looking at the reader, wanting to hear.

Listen with your ears!

- Stillness and quiet in our hearts - so that there's space there for what God says to us.

Listening

We listen with our ears.

But we also listen with our heart.

Heart-listening takes us deeper than ear-listening!

Heart-listening means we are thinking about what is being said, and what it means to us and, most of all, who it is who is speaking to us.

Sometimes when we hear a reading a particular word or phrase or sentence just leaps out at us. That's what we need to take to our heart, and listen to more deeply.

Speaking

God speaks to us, because he wants us to grow closer to him.

He wants to tell us about himself, and his love and care for us. He wants to help us speak to him in reply.

He invites us to tell him of our worries and concerns, and our hopes and dreams.

He invites us to learn to love him and place our trust in him. He wants to hear us, and he wants to share with us. God wants to be our friend.

Speak to God from your heart!

Listen with your heart!

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The love of God is made known to us in the most perfect way in Jesus. In his life, in his death and in his rising again Jesus shows us how much we are loved. Jesus gives the whole of himself that we might be helped to receive God's love and live that love in our own lives.

Life given
in love

What Jesus does for us can be compared to how a candle serves us.

A candle, unlit, stands there cold, unappealing, unattractive. It is just 'there', gathering dust and there is no point to it. But when the candle is lit it is as though it has come to life. It glows and attracts our eye. It is warm and it gives out light. In a dark room a candle that is lit drives away darkness and shadow. Its light helps us to see and its light offers warmth and comfort.

The candle does this by giving of its self so that we might have these benefits. The candle is consumed as it serves us. Slowly, slowly the candle gives up its wax as it melts and burns to feed the flame, to give us light and warmth, comfort and hope.

Love
with no end

And in just the same way Jesus gave of his life for us - living love generously in every way he could. He was faithful to that love even when it led to him being arrested and put to death on a cross. His light shone most brightly there - for there we see most clearly the fullness of his love.

The wonder of Jesus' love for us is met by the greatness of the love of God the Father who does not allow Jesus' death to be the end. Our candles burn and then are no more. Jesus was raised from the dead and his love now can have no end.

At Mass we remember the love of Jesus - love without end, faithful love lavished on us, whatever the cost.

We remember how God came to us in Jesus, born of Mary.

We remember how Jesus dedicated his life to us. In everything he did

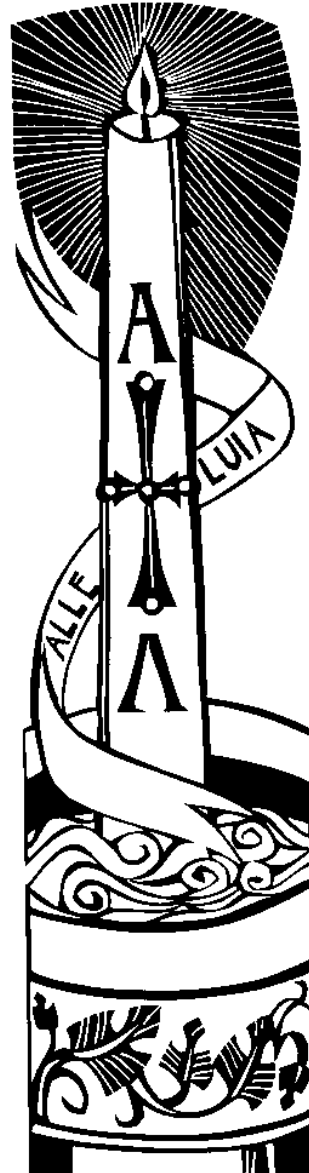
and in everything he said he wanted to help people to know and love God.

In time he gave himself up to his enemies, allowing himself to be arrested and tortured, even to be condemned to death, death on the cross.

In his final suffering we see just how much Jesus loved us. Nothing could stop him loving us: not even the cruelest of deaths, death on the cross. In Jesus love triumphed over death. And Jesus rose again from the dead. His love has no end.

God said 'I want love, not sacrifice'. By loving without end Jesus gave God that love. By giving himself so completely, both to God and us, Jesus became the perfect sacrifice - the only sacrifice pleasing to God.

And that sacrifice is present in the Mass. In the Mass Jesus continues to pour out his love and his life. The bread and wine that becomes his Body and Blood is offered in thanksgiving to God and shared with us in Holy Communion.



Life given
that others
might live

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At Mass we meet with Jesus. Jesus who is God and man. Jesus who is love for us. This meeting is not to be treated lightly or taken for granted. For it is the King of Heaven who comes to us. It is right for us to show him honour in every way we can.

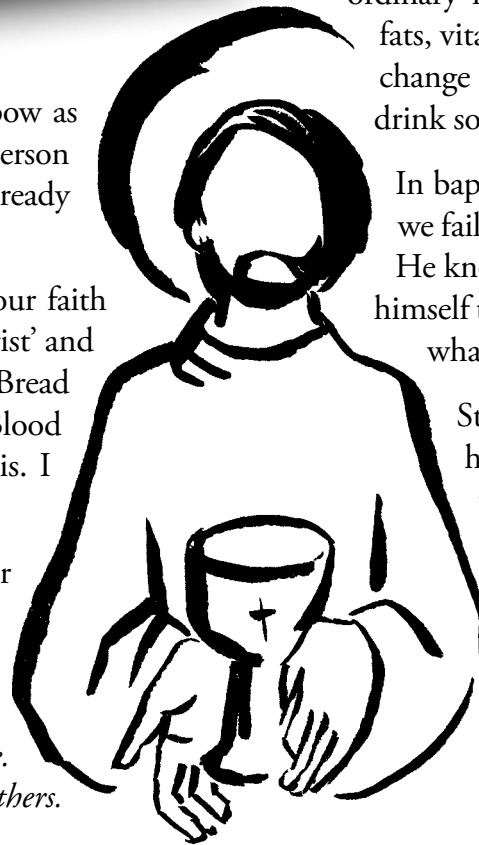
- We honour Jesus present in the Scriptures by thanking God for him after every reading. The reader reminds us these are not ordinary words. After the first readings we hear 'This is the word of the Lord' and we reply 'Thanks be to God.' After the Gospel we hear 'This is the Gospel of the Lord' and we reply 'Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ'.
- We honour Jesus in Holy Communion by making a bow as we come forward ready to receive him. We bow as the person before us receives Holy Communion, and then stand ready and attentive to receive Holy Communion ourselves.
- We honour Jesus in Holy Communion by professing our faith in his Real Presence. The minister says 'The Body of Christ' and we respond 'Amen', that is 'I believe this. I believe this Bread is indeed the Body of Christ'. The minister says 'The Blood of Christ' and we respond 'Amen', that is 'I believe this. I believe this Wine is indeed the Blood of Christ'.
- We honour Jesus again by praying in thanksgiving for giving us the gift of himself, when we return to our seat having received Holy Communion.

A suitable Thanksgiving Prayer is:

*Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for sharing your life with me.
Help me to live my life to your glory and for the good of others.*

Honouring Jesus
who honours
us with his
Presence

This is
my Body



When we receive Holy Communion we receive Jesus Christ. He gives himself to us as food and drink. That which was only bread has become the Bread of Life. That which was only wine has become the Cup of eternal salvation. Under form of Bread and Wine, Jesus gives us his life, his Body and Blood.

He gives himself to us that we might receive life from him. This may not seem so remarkable. This is what all food and drink are for. But the food and drink we receive in Holy Communion is unique.

This food and drink is unique because it really is Jesus present for us. Though it looks like only bread, and looks like only wine - is Jesus himself.

However there is something more to be said. When we eat and drink in the ordinary fashion we digest the food so that the proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and all become available to build us up and nourish us. We change them into us. But in Holy Communion Jesus gives us food and drink so that *we* might become more and more like *him*.

In baptism we became members of the Body of Christ. But sometimes we fail to live like him. So Jesus offers us the help of Holy Communion. He knows the potential for goodness and love that is in us, and he gives himself to us so that our potential might be realised: that we might resist what is sin, and choose what is loving.

St Augustine of Hippo said to his congregation: 'You are the Body of Christ. Receive the Body of Christ. Become the Body of Christ.' This is what we ourselves are invited to when we receive Holy Communion.

Become
the Body
of Christ

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It is good to prepare ourselves before we come to Mass. Some months ago it was suggested that one good way of preparing was to think of three things to bring to God in our prayer.

- One thing we want to thank God for.
- One thing we want to say sorry to God for.
- One thing we want to ask God for his help with.

If it is good to prepare to come to Mass, it is also good - when Mass has ended - to spend a moment or two thinking about what we have received at Mass, and which can now help us in our living the week ahead.

At Mass we receive Jesus and share in his love and peace.

At the end of Mass the priest will often invite us to go in the peace of Christ. This means to go from Mass ready to carry on living like Jesus lived.

So it is good to pause and think how - in this Mass - we have heard that Jesus lived. What did the readings say; what did the prayers say? What part of that would we like to imitate in our living? Maybe his love and care for others? Maybe his love of God the Father? Maybe his courage? Maybe his friendship? It is something you can think of during communion and bring to your communion thanksgiving prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for sharing your life with me. Help me to live my life to your glory and for the good of others.

Go in
peace ...

... to love
and serve
the Lord



We are sent from Mass to love and to serve the Lord

Once someone asked Jesus what was the first and most important commandment. Jesus answered that the first was that we should love God and the second that we should love our neighbour.

Loving God alone is not enough. We need to love others too, and especially those in need. So one other thing we can think about before we leave Mass is who, this week, might we show special love and care for. It might be someone who is sick, someone who is finding things difficult. It might be someone we know well - perhaps in our family, or in our school? It might be someone who lives thousands of miles away but we've seen on television and who we know is in difficulty.

Sometimes we can help them in practical ways - we can share our time with them, make friends with them, help them with things they find difficult. Sometimes - and especially if they live far away - it is not so easy to be of direct help, but we might help raise money for a charity that will help them or, of course, we might take special care to pray for them. It is always good to pray for those we care for.

Being prepared

Taking this effort to prepare ourselves to live love will be a great help to us. It will help us to live out the great gifts of love we receive at Mass.

Love as
you have
been loved