

What can I do to get more out of Mass?

 bulldogcatholic.org/2022/10/06/what-can-i-do-to-get-more-out-of-mass

October 6, 2022



Q: I don't like going to Mass. I had to go when I was a kid, and I never got the point. But I also realize that it could just be me; I could be the one missing something. What can I do to get more out of Mass?

A: I'm glad that you have written, and I'm grateful that you have asked this question. I have to tell you, we were one of those "front pew" families when I was growing up. According to my mom, it wasn't because we "got it" better than other families or because we were holier than anyone else. Far from it. In fact, I think that one of the primary reasons we sat in the front is because we were always late to Mass. (I don't mean "sometimes" When I say "always," I mean that the priest could tell that he was late for Mass if the Schmitz family was already there when he got to the front of the church.)

We sat in the front because Catholics are so hospitable that we always leave the front pews for visitors — and for the late families, I guess.

My mom says that, when she and my dad were new parents, some more experienced moms and dads had told them that if you want your kids to pay attention, then bring them to the front so that: a) they can see what's going on and b) they will be on their best behavior.

I think that it kind of worked. I mean, there were no shortage of times when we had to be escorted from our spot by one of my parents for one reason or another, but overall it was probably a good plan.

Even though I hated going to Mass as a kid, there still were a couple of things that my parents instilled in me (and in all of us) growing up.

The first is that Sunday Mass is not optional. This was huge. We were all in sports, and as we got older, we were all relatively good at sports. Yet, no matter what, if we were traveling with our team or traveling on vacation or had any number of other things going on over the weekend, Mass was absolutely and without question going to be a part of our plans.

I know that I did not appreciate that at the time. At the time, it was annoying. And I have known many people who have said exactly what you said about how this affects your willingness to go to Mass as an adult. They claim that their unwillingness to go to Mass as adults comes from the fact that they had to go to Mass as children.

I see that, but what if we applied that same logic to any other thing we “had to do” while growing up: Someone might say, “I no longer eat vegetables because I had to as a kid.” Or, “I no longer brush my teeth because my parents made me brush my teeth when I was little.” Or, “I don’t wash my hands after using the bathroom because my parents would always make me do that when I was younger.”

If we were to say any of those things now, it would be more than a little immature and foolish. So let’s not say that about the Sunday Mass requirement. It would be better to say that you just don’t like clean teeth or you just don’t see the point in brushing them regularly.

Maybe you don’t see the point in going to Mass. I understand that. That would make sense to me. I think about those years while I was growing up in the front pew. And what was I taught? “Be quiet. Watch.”

That’s it. When it came to going to Mass, we were almost all of us simply told that to be a good Catholic you have to be there, you have to be quiet, you have to watch. If that is the case, no wonder we might not see the point! Show up, be quiet, and watch someone else pray ... and maybe someday it will all matter to you?

There is one thing that we need to make absolutely clear: There is a massive difference between “watching” and “worshipping.”

Think of your favorite sport or event. Would you rather watch the concert or your game from your couch on the TV? Or would you rather be in the stands live? Would you rather be in some far-off seat in the nosebleed section or right there on the sidelines? Would you rather be sitting on the bench or out on the playing field?

My guess is, if you love the music or the sport or the game, and you have the skill and the opportunity, you would rather be out there.

The same is true when it comes to the Mass. For too long, we have been so busy teaching people what NOT TO DO during the Mass that by the time we could tell them what their role is, they've already checked out. But when you were baptized, you were anointed a priest, prophet, and king or queen.

You were anointed a "kingdom priest," and a priest who is one who offers the sacrifice. All of the faithful exercise their kingdom priesthood when they unite their prayers with the ministerial priest who is uniting all of their prayers with Jesus, the One, Great, High Priest. When we go to Mass, we are there to offer the sacrifice to the Father with the priest at the altar and Jesus the High Priest. You have a job to do!

And this job accomplishes something. At every Mass we pray, "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church." And that is what happens: The Father is glorified, and the world is sanctified! When you pray..., when you offer the sacrifice with the ministerial priest, those two things are accomplished in reality.

I like to think of it this way: When you exercise your kingdom priesthood, the Father is just that much more glorified and the world is just that much more sanctified. Something happens that wouldn't happen if you weren't there. Your priesthood is needed, because this world needs your presence and your prayers.

This is the point of going to Mass each Sunday — not to simply "Be there. Be quiet. Watch," but to unite your prayers with the ministerial priest and Jesus the High Priest, to truly worship God, and to participate in the salvation of the world.