

# Harvard Student Black Mass: A personal Catholic response

Via social media sites such as Facebook, I heard there is a student club at Harvard planning a “Black Mass” for today. When I first heard of it, I didn’t think much about it except to pray for all involved, on both sides of the issue.

Then, as today approached, I started to see more in my feed about this “Black Mass,” and I wondered if someone had penned a response, official or otherwise.

You see, I’m not looking for official guidance on how to respond to a group of students exercising their first amendment right to free speech, especially if they change venues and go off campus. I was looking for someone to give a response from the average Catholic; from the perspective of someone who isn’t personally involved, but, as a Catholic, has an opinion and a reaction.



Some of you may remember I have a degree in history from the U.S. Naval Academy. My unofficial specialty was religion and I continue to spend a lot of time researching more about my Catholic faith and learning about the faith traditions of others. I’m a history/religion geek, what can I say?

One of those I happen to be a bit familiar with is Satanism. Oddly enough, despite the name, they don’t actually worship Satan – at least not in the way we worship God. Satanism, according to its official website, espouses much of the opposite we value in the Christian church and in other faith traditions. They celebrate vengeance, indulgence (as opposed to abstinence), kindness only to those who deserve it, and other similar statements (nine satanic statements in all).

So, what does that mean when Satanists, who don’t really believe in Satan go and celebrate a “Black Mass?” They are usually, deliberately, poking fun and parodying the rest of us, especially Catholics.

The ultimate question is, how do we respond?

We could align ourselves with the Harvard Chaplains and ask the university to

cancel this event. You can see the official statement from the chaplains [here](#).

We can pray in solitude for the hearts and minds of those who choose to participate in such an event, which I'm sure many are doing and have been since this gained media attention.

We can be offended, which is precisely the reaction a "Black Mass" is intended to elicit.

We can speak out and say that we will continue in our Catholic faith regardless of mockery and insult.

Or, we can do a combination of the above, including ideas I haven't even dreamed of yet.

You see, I haven't seen anyone really take a stand on this, other than the chaplains and the students. When our religious freedom is at stake, can we tell someone else not to practice theirs? I don't have the answer to that question. But I do know we should not be quick to judge or quick to hide in the corner when something controversial comes up.

Should you pick your battles? Yes. So if your cause is social justice or pro-life or any of the other many things we try to fix in this world, you might not want to spend too much time or energy on this one. However, if you have some time and energy, pray about whether you should publicly make a declaration of your faith and how you are proud to be Catholic (even if that public sentiment is only on social media).

I can't tell anyone what to do. I can only say that many people I have discussed the Christian faith with over the years turn to groups like this because they are hurting and blame God. They want answers that never satisfy and many abandon their faith in God altogether. We all search for meaning and satisfaction in our lives, and for some people, this is where they think they will find it.

So, pray fervently for everyone today and remember that our saving grace in Christ is good news we share with the world in every manner in which we live our lives.

If you want to read more about the situation at Harvard, please see the following articles:

<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2014/05/12/harvard-groups-plans-to-stage-black-mass-anger-catholics/>

<http://www.catholicreview.org/article/news/world-news/harvard-student-groups-blac>

[k-mass-plan-spurs-outcry-on-off-campus](#)

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles ...

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God’s decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.” Romans 1:16-23, 28-31, NRSV

These are powerful words from St. Paul, but are they no less true today than when he first wrote them to the Romans? What do you think? Has this story even been on your radar?