

Why Do I Have to Go to Mass?

The Catholic Review

In a culture when freedom is supreme, the notion of obligation is repugnant to many, especially when it comes to “freedom of religion.” Nevertheless, obligations surround us: paying bills, faithfulness to spouse, keeping promises are all obligations which we readily recognize.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states (#1389): The Catholic Church obliges the faithful to take part in the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and feast days. And yes, to miss Sunday Mass intentionally, without a serious reason, is still a mortal sin because our life as a disciple dies without the it (Eucharist).

Isn't it a pity that we have to speak in those rather negative terms!

Father Randall Roberts speaks of his experiences as an Air Force Chaplain in Saudi Arabia where any public Christian activity is punishable by imprisonment. Troops spread the word that the padre was to celebrate Mass in a remote area—an abandoned recreation shack encircled by a chain-link fence. Somehow, a Filipino (of whom there are many, working for virtually slave wages in such countries) got wind of the Mass pressing himself against the other side of the fence. Father Randall continues:

He appeared to be straining his whole body—or at least his heart—through the chain-link fence, like water through a filter, to make himself more present at a ritual he sorely missed and cherished. The sheer ecstasy in his face from being present at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass—though not able to move closer—is an image that will be indelibly etched in my heart until I die.

Our gathering together for Sunday Eucharist is no ordinary celebration and should be the source and summit of our week. It is not something to be squeezed into a busy schedule. We must do everything within our power to ensure that our Sunday celebrations of the Eucharist can be a transforming experience encountering Christ so we can meet the challenges of our times.

Father Randall's story hearkens back to the likes of the Diocletian persecutions when a group of early martyrs faced their accusers:

"Without fear of any kind we have celebrated our Lord's Supper, because it cannot be missed; that is our law. We cannot live without the Lord's Supper."

As one of them was led off to death, she admitted:

"Yes, I went to the assembly and I celebrated the Lord's Supper with my brothers and sisters, because I am a Christian."

Our Masses are meant to enrich our lives in a variety of ways and to call us into a deeper communion and relationship with one another. I experienced that Communal belief at memorable Eucharistic celebrations recently at St. Ambrose Church in Northwest Baltimore and St. Ignatius in Hickory, as I have in parishes throughout our Archdiocese. In the months to come, I am asking all of the faithful to help renew Sunday Masses as true celebrations.

We must have fuller churches. Invite others who have been away for any reason. When necessary, join Masses that are now half empty.

- Establish liturgy committees on parish and area council levels.
- Call upon new Director of Worship, Catherine Combier-Donovan for a friendly review and advice.
- Ponder and compare the Church's traditional terminology for Sunday Eucharist with your experiences;
 - Celebration
 - Festival
 - Joyful encounter with the Risen Lord
 - Intense experience of the Apostles that first Easter evening

The Church calls it the responsibility of the bishop to "ensure that Sunday is appreciated by all the faithful, kept holy and celebrated as truly 'The Lord's Day.'"

Will you help?