

# Why we are bored at Mass

A few years ago, a family friend from France visited us for a few days, and in an effort to expose him to American culture, we took him to a baseball game. Expectations were high as we drove to New York to attend a highly contentious game between the Yankees and Red Sox, but after a few innings, our friend was nodding off. I quizzed him, "Isn't this awesome?" He simply responded, "I am bored."

How could he be bored? The game was the height of excitement, a storied rivalry, the electricity of a sellout crowd, and the stadium a rush of sounds, smells, and sights. On further review, my friend's boredom makes sense. He did not know the rules of the game, the cheers and chants, the players, or the history of the teams. The unfolding game, which many Americans would enjoy and pay good money to attend, was meaningless for him.

For most people, their experiences at Mass are like a French person at a baseball game. They do not know the symbols, the text or the movements. Due to their lack of knowledge, much of the Mass is meaningless, and therefore, it is boring. Unlike baseball, Mass nevertheless does have intrinsic value, and even without knowledge, a person could experience a profound feeling of mystery and awe.

Furthermore, some liturgists have added numerous aspects of American culture, including popular music, dance and other elements, in order to allure people back to church. This method may be good in bringing people back to Mass, but it is only a first step. It also might be dangerous as amid the new trappings of the liturgy the true meaning of the Eucharist is harder to discern. Returning to the initial analogy, my friend might have enjoyed the baseball game more while indulging in foie gras and a glass of Chardonnay with eurodance blaring over the speakers, but a baseball purest would be horrified. The only way to appreciate something one does not understand is to immerse one's self in its culture.

Recently at a meeting of a Catholic men's group, the speaker began by asking the attendees why they attend church on Sunday. People discussed receiving the Eucharist and the graces that accompanied this gift. Many individuals suggested

that going to Church was like attending a communal meal that unites the members of the parish. Undoubtedly, one receives many blessings by attending Mass, including forgiveness of sins, unity of the community and receiving Jesus in Communion.

Another essential aspect of the Mass is the sacrificial dimension. Catholics believe during Mass the priest offers the sacrifice of Jesus dying on Calvary to the Father in atonement for our sins. After watching the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, I wondered how life changing it must have been to witness in person the final events of Jesus' life, yet I am bored at Mass, forgetting the same sacrifice is unfolding in front of me.

How can one better participate in this mystery? I often thought that I needed to sing louder (I apologize to every person that has ever sat in front of me), say the responses without any errors, or make the sign of the cross with exact precision to better partake in the liturgy, but if Mass is a sacrifice, my participation is connected to my offerings beyond any activities that I might perform during the Mass. We could offer specific sacrifices, such as fasting before mass for an hour or giving a material possession away or accepting a particular suffering. In short, we are called to offer our lives to Jesus, who gave everything, including His life, for us, and thus unite our small contribution to His perfect and infinite sacrifice.

Initially, our men's group expected to receive numerous spiritual benefits by going to Mass, and it is right to desire these graces. Our relationship with God, however, cannot be one sided. As I learned more about the Mass as a sacrifice, it became apparent that we needed to give as well as receive at Mass.

Our culture is centered on activities that excite us and entertain us. Going to a movie or concert, we walk away from these events judging them by what we got out of them. Mass is a cultural oddity, a baseball game in France. For once a week, it is not about us. The concept of attending an event to make an offering is strange. The whole concept of sacrifice is peculiar to many people today. Since the fundamental concepts behind the Eucharist are foreign to most people, we often sit in the pews bored, wondering when the entertainment is going to begin, not realizing we are not fulfilling our role.

