

Why Participate at Mass?

In short, it is the whole community; the Body of Christ unites with its Head (Jesus Christ) that celebrates the Liturgy (CCC, 1140). Therefore, when we go to Mass, we are not going only for our 'individual development', but for the development of the parish community as a whole. Liturgical services have to do with the whole body, the church; they make it visible and have effects upon it. They also touch individual members of the church in different ways, depending on the level of participation. (Sacrosanctum Concilium – Vatican II Document on Liturgy, 26). So when you come to Mass, sit, stand, kneel and sing with pride and vigor – for it is your role and right to do so!

Our gestures during Mass (standing, sitting, and kneeling) are also essential parts of the liturgy. When we stand (especially at the Gospel and at the Eucharistic Preface), we give due attention to these essential parts of the Mass for they give direct praise to God. When we sit (as in the readings or after reception of Holy Communion), we are allowing ourselves to recollect our thoughts and to be attentive to the will of God within our own hearts. When we kneel (as in the Eucharistic Prayer or at the reception of Holy Communion) we give reverence to the miracle taking place within our midst – Our Lord transforming ordinary earthly elements into His Body and Blood which edifies our souls and hearts. A common bodily posture (during all of these important times) is to be observed by all taking part and is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community gathered together for the Sacred Liturgy, for it expresses the intentions and spiritual attitude of the participants and also fosters that same attitude among others (GIRM, 42,2).

Singing is a part of our total participation in the liturgy. As St. Paul tells us, we are to sing the Psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles (cf. Colossians 3:16) as they too make up the fabric of the liturgy and we are called as Christian faithful to come together as one in expectation of the Lord's coming. (General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), 39) Therefore raising our voices in prayer (as horrible as we may think we sound) is actually adding to the praise and dignity of the Liturgy. The Mass is not a spectator sport, nor is it a form of entertainment – it is a form of prayer. Our participation in every aspect of that prayer edifies our own personal prayer and elevates the quality of the prayer of our community of faith.

Many come to the celebration of the Eucharist week after week and 'go through the motions' of the liturgy. Some even wonder why they are standing, sitting, and kneeling at the prescribed times. Why do I have to sing at Mass? I have a horrible voice. No one wants to hear me sing. Why do I have to shake the hand of my neighbor at Mass? They have a cold, and I don't want their germs! The truth is that our participation in the Mass goes much further than our own personal prayer. The communal gestures we go through during each celebration actually add to the rhythm of prayer that continually builds up our Church and enhances our prayer to the Lord.