



When we come to Mass, we recall the graces of our Baptism, genuflect to acknowledge Jesus truly present, and then we make our way to our seat. What is next? How about one of the best things churches were designed for? If there is a little time before Mass begins, some moments of prayer will help prepare you for the graces of the Mass.

Early Foundation

When I was growing up, I don't remember our family having many rules for us kids to follow. One that definitely stands out is the expectation regarding when we should be in church as a family. Mass was at 8:00 on Sunday morning, and my dad made it very clear that he expected us all to be seated together in the pew by 7:50 am. (Pew is the name for the long bench seats in churches.) Was it so we could get our preferred seat? I doubt it, since everyone in our small country church had our regular places! Looking back now on what dad modeled for us, I realize that the purpose of those ten minutes before Mass was for us to settle in, pray and prepare. I often think about what a great gift dad gave me by making it clear that attending Sunday Mass together was the top priority for our family.

How to Prepare

The *General Instruction for the Roman Missal* says that there should be a quiet opportunity in the church for the faithful to prepare prayerfully for the Holy Mass (GIRM, no. 45). During this time before Mass, you can recall all the great gifts and graces God has given you since you last came to church. This silence also provides the opportunity to reflect on the generosity of our loving Father and to prepare to thank him in the worship of the Mass. In addition to thankfulness, you might also recognize any needs you have—you might talk to God about any difficulties, stresses, or anxieties you are experiencing and offer them to the Lord, asking for his help and grace.

It can be difficult to enter into this time of silence to help prepare for Mass, especially if we have not yet made it a habit. If you are short on time, Charles Belmonte encourages you to pray on the way to Mass. He writes, "Prepare your soul for Communion with acts of love of God. Make acts of contrition and atonement...pray for the priest that he may truly minister to the needs of the parish. Pray for the congregation...pray that you may understand what you yourself will be taught at Mass" (*Understanding the Mass*, pg. 38). Belmonte goes on to also encourage using a missal or missalette to review the readings [1] and prayers of the Mass ahead of time. Being familiar with these will also help you to be more attentive and unite your personal prayer more fruitfully with the Mass.

Intentions

One tradition you may not be aware of is the opportunity personally to offer an intention for each Mass we participate in, asking that the graces we receive from the Mass be applied to someone who might need them or to a particular situation. As he prays the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest offers the Mass for a public intention (usually published in the bulletin or announced). Those present are also able to offer a private intention by uniting with the prayers at the altar. For example, you might make an intention for your family to grow in love, the health of a friend, the soul of a deceased relative, reconciliation for a strained relationship, peace in the world, or a greater recognition of the dignity of all life. In addition to assisting our brothers and sisters in Christ, praying about an intention for the Mass is also a great way to help us be more attentive to the prayers and readings and to receive more fully the fruits of the Mass.

Give yourself a goal of arriving at church a bit earlier, and take the challenge of spending a little time in prayer before Mass. In addition to the suggestions above, any of our classic prayers or even composing a prayer of your own is a great way to help prepare your heart for the celebration of the Mass. In our time, when everything can be so busy and hurried, I often think of my dad's great wisdom in giving the family a few extra minutes of quiet preparation.