

THE MASS and OBLIGATION

The Church aims at leading all men to Christ, Who gives all honor and glory to God the Father in union with the Holy Ghost. This is, in fact, the reason for our existence: to glorify God, i.e., by recognizing His transcendence, His majesty, His power, His goodness and by singing His praises.

And no human being can do this except through Christ, with Him and in Him. This is likewise the first purpose of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

That is why everyone should go to Mass: not just because they must or to avoid committing a mortal sin, but in order to participate in the great liturgy of our Mother the Church, Who wants to gather Her children for this great "action" of Her Spouse. This "action" proclaims to God the Father that His children love Him as well as His beloved Son.

If we would better understand why there is a Church precept to go to Mass, let us recall to mind here the fourfold purpose of the sacrifice of the Cross, which is the same purpose as in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

- The first is adoration: to acknowledge the greatness, majesty and power of God, and to humble oneself before Him.
- The second is thanksgiving: to thank Him for the many gifts, both universal and personal, for many graces, for so much goodness and mercy towards us, poor sinners.
- The third is propitiation, to make reparation and expiation for our faults, and to implore pardon of God for all sins, whether known or unknown, whether committed by ourselves or by others.
- The fourth is petition: to expose to God all our needs and to pray to Him for those who need His graces.

No human being can afford to neglect the accomplishment of these four duties, if he wants to prove to God that he really loves Him and wants to receive all the graces necessary for his eternal salvation. However nobody except our Lord Jesus Christ can wholly fulfil these duties, Whose homage is pleasing and acceptable to God, because of the purity of His love and the offering of Himself. Our Lord Jesus Christ comes to us with the holy and pure gift of Himself, through the hands of the Church and her ministers. He invites us to present our gifts, miserable and imperfect though they be, to combine them with His own so that they may be acceptable to God the Father.

Thus, Sunday Mass summarizes all our prayers from the previous week, and all our efforts and meritorious acts, even those of the following week are contained in the holy oblation of our Lord in such a way that they are rendered pleasing and acceptable to His Father. Isn't this an outstanding proof of goodness and tenderness? Do we really need to be forced by the Church to go and have recourse to our Lord, to tell Him that we love Him, to unite ourselves to His sacrifice in order to receive His Divinity in return, and His soul, His Body, His Blood, His life given up for us, His patience and power, strength and goodness together with the immense blessing which the Father has reserved for his Son and for all those who resemble Him?

Our Sunday Obligation

the Church obliges, strictly speaking, only attendance at Mass. Moreover, this is an obligation for each and every Catholic aged seven and older, under pain of mortal sin, and there are certain conditions to be fulfilled which follow. We will not speak here about dress code, although this is likewise an important issue.

1) The Mass must be whole and entire, that is, one must be present from beginning to end, from the first sign of the cross until the Last Gospel inclusively, and all the ceremonies must be part of only one particular Mass; one may not go to the end of one Mass and then attend the beginning of the next (two halves of a Mass do not equal one complete Mass). It is a venial sin if one misses out on a non-essential part of the Mass, on purpose or by culpable negligence, for example, from the beginning until the beginning of the Offertory, or all that follows after Communion.

There are three causes which may exempt from the Sunday obligation:

- 1.Necessity: physical or moral impossibility such as sickness, convalescence, nervous problems because of the crowd, too far to drive, etc.
- 2.Duties of state: soldiers, doctors, nurses, firemen on duty, mothers with very young children, etc.
- 3.Charity: the needs of our neighbor, such as taking care of the sick, etc.

In all these cases it is not required to make up by attending Mass during the week, even though that would be laudable; but it is still necessary to sanctify Sunday in some other way as best one can. The best thing would be to spend as much time privately in prayer, as one would have otherwise spent at Mass on Sunday.

The above remarks apply only to Masses which are an obligation. There is no sin whatever in missing parts of a weekday Mass.

The liturgy is the public worship of the Church. Now, the Church praying is the priest at the altar with all the ministers and all the faithful. Thus, the liturgy is not the sum of the personal prayers of the faithful while on the altar the Sacred Mysteries unfold. Rather, it is the one, unanimous, common prayer of the whole Church, united to allow Christ to hear the unique voice of his Spouse, and to unite ourselves to the voice of Christ who intercedes with the Father for her. It is the "one heart and one soul" of the Apostles realized in public prayer.