How to Participate More Actively in the Celebration of the Mass

Thank you for coming to Mass. Thank you for joining the community in the public worship of God. Thank you for taking your stand in the presence of Christ and being a witness to others. But now that you are here, how will you actively and fully participate in this celebration? How will you become a participant and not a mere spectator at this Holy sacrifice? How can you move from just passively watching what is going on to actively entering into these mysteries?

Here are some practical ideas that might help:

**We Come Together .. Being there**

The first action required of us is being present. We need to be here because of the importance of our presence as a sign of our faith to the other members of the congregation. Christ is present in the Sacrifice of the Mass not only in the consecrated bread and wine but, also, in the proclamation of the Sacred Scriptures and in the assembly, our gathering together.

At Sunday Mass we "make visible and manifest to others the mystery of Christ's Body". Of course, Christ is present in the Eucharist even if no one is at Mass, but when we gather together to form God's Holy People, we give powerful witness to others of Christ’s real presence among us and, at the same time, we help strengthen each other’s faith.

Your presence makes a real difference. Your presence is needed not just to fulfil a moral obligation but to witness to the community that you care enough to get out of bed and come to church. Your presence says that you believe enough to plan your weekend so that you can be here with us to proclaim the death and resurrection of the Lord. This sign, this witness, strengthens the faith of those who see it. Without your presence, our community is diminished and our witness to Christ is weakened.

**Being prompt**

Being on time and ahead of time says that we consider what we are going to do to be important to us, more important than the things that would keep us at home or any other distractions.

**Being friendly**

Taking time before Mass to say hello, to greet others (not just our friends but especially visitors and people we do not know), to offer a handshake of welcome and a friendly glance. These acts are an essential part of our participation. When we assemble we make visible the Body of Christ, and we must make visible that Christ who welcomed all who came to him, even sinners.

It’s not the priest’s “job” alone to welcome others especially in a community as large as our own and with so many visitors and new people each week. This is everyone’s “job”. There are those among us on Sunday who may feel isolated and alienated; so many are hungry for a sign of welcome. We know that when we pray, God listens, God has time for us. But not all of our brothers and sisters believe this; they need signs in order to believe. Every one of us should be a sign of God's hospitality.
Being well located

Where do you sit? Do you find a place which encourages you to respond, sing and interact with the other members of the community? Or do you (especially if you have children) make for the back seats and corners of the Cathedral, thinking that you cannot be seen or heard? Might it not be better to be nearer the front and closer to a door so that you can easily slip out if we really need to? Maybe now is the time to move seats?

Being a responding and singing believer

Praying and taking part in the responses at Mass means we are participating. Singing gives witness to our faith. A community where every member responds and sings is a powerful and joyful witness. Go to any Anglican or Evangelical Church and you will see every person singing heartily. It should be the same here, especially as we have such wonderful musical resources. By our body language and by our voice we give witness to what we believe.

If you do not have the greatest singing voice that does not matter. We should all join in and reflect upon the words we are saying and singing. We can make the thoughts and feelings of the prayers, responses and hymns our own. However, if we stand tight lipped throughout Mass, we are not actively and fully participating in its mysteries and the joy of being a disciple of Christ.
Hearing the Word of God

Hearing the Word of God is an essential part of participating in the Mass. Our stance before the Word is not passive but an active, attentive listening. When God speaks we have an obligation to receive His message. We must prepare ourselves by knowing the language in which God speaks, that is, we must become more familiar with the Bible and its expressions and symbols.

Preparing to hear

In order to really hear the Word when it is read in church, we must have already read and prayed with the Word at home. Why not invest in a Sunday Missal?

Or go to www.universalis.com and download their app with all the Sunday readings? In the parish newsletter, we print the reading references each week for the following Sunday. There is also a link on the Cathedral website http://www.cathedral-brentwood.org/blog-2/readings/ which gives the readings for every day of the year.

We do well to take the time to look up the readings for next Sunday in the Bible and use these texts for our prayer during the week. What homily or sermon would we give on these texts? We might compare our homily with that we hear in Church and experience the various, multiple ways in which the Spirit speaks to us through the Scriptures.

Receiving the Word respectfully, silently and attentively

During the reading we need an atmosphere of quiet, free from distracting movement and noise. Silence doesn’t just happen in church, it must be created. Every adult member of the community has a duty to create that silence. Before the reading starts we must prepare ourselves to be quiet, putting away things that are going to make noise. Our readers, those who have the responsibility of proclaiming the Word, must allow the community to settle into silence before they commence.

Some members of the parish community may not be old enough to actively help create this silence, and that is why we provide the children’s liturgy at the 9.30 am Mass for children aged 3 years and above. Parents should also think about where they are sitting with their babies and young children so that they have easy access to an exit if they need to take their child out in order to settle them. The Upper room at the top of the stairs opposite the Cathedral toilets is also a space for settling babies and children.

If we arrive late, we ought to wait until the reading is over to be seated. This is another way in which we show our concern for the presence of Christ both in his Word and in the assembly.

Being and looking attentive

There is a relationship between the effectiveness of the speaker and the attention of the listeners. A good listener makes the speaker want to do better. If a congregation is silent and attentive, our readers and clergy will deliver the Word of God with greater commitment and desire to communicate that God’s word is alive and active in our lives.
How to Participate more Actively in the Celebration of the Mass - 3

Doing the Eucharistic Prayer

Even before the Eucharistic Prayer itself, we should see ourselves as being actively involved in the preparation of the gifts:

Identifying ourselves with the bread and wine

When we see these gifts being brought from the assembly to the altar, we see our food and drink, our very lives, being placed on the altar to be offered to God.

Making the collection part of the action.

Giving our hard-earned money in the collection is a very real element of our sacrifice, our thanksgiving and our playing our part in making sure the community has the resources to do the work of God.

Participation in the Eucharistic Prayer

How to be active while the priest leading the celebration recites the Eucharistic Prayer is an especially important question. The Eucharistic Prayer is our central Christian prayer, the fullest statement of our belief. It is also a time when we can find our minds wandering.

Our participation in the Eucharistic Prayer is not just "listening" and "watching" but "doing." Jesus told us: "Do this is memory of me."

The first thing we do is to remember. The prayer begins by recalling the great saving acts of our God which culminate in Jesus. We must each recall God's activity in our lives. The test we can use to see if we are actively participating in this remembrance is a simple one. When participating well we should begin to feel gratitude, we should feel the need to give thanks. This is what Jesus did: He took the bread and wine and "gave thanks." It is this action that names our sacrifice: Eucharist comes from the Greek verb "to give thanks."

We give external expression to these feelings when we join with the angels and saints and exclaim: “Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory!”

We continue to gratefully remember the saving acts of our God. We recall how Jesus received everything from the hand of his loving Father. Even on the night before he died for us, he took bread and gave thanks. As we hear these words, we can place ourselves with the apostles at the table with Jesus.

In placing ourselves at that table with Jesus we are led to the heart of the mystery of our faith: Remembering God's love for us, we can give ourselves to God confident that no matter what happens, we are loved. We offer ourselves to the Father with Jesus in his Spirit.
How to Participate more Actively in the Celebration of the Mass

**Giving ourselves through the responses**

The enthusiasm with which we join in the responses and acclamations is an essential part of our active participation. Even though on a particular Sunday we may not feel like proclaiming, "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!", we know that we are not prisoners of our feelings. In order for an action to be authentic, it does not have to flow only from our feelings. We know that the feelings often follow the action rather than precede it. We know that a child bored on a summer afternoon will feel differently when the child begins to play at something he or she enjoys. The feeling will come when the behaviour is changed.

Our participation in the acclamations is made easier for us when they are sung in true acclamatory fashion.

**Sharing the Body and Blood of Christ**

Our active participation culminates in our reception of Holy Communion. We get up, go to the altar and share the bread and the cup. The importance we give these actions, and the devotion and reverence with which we perform them, speaks not only to ourselves and fosters our own feelings of reverence and awe, but also speaks to those around us. We are all concerned about passing on the faith to the generations that come after us. Whether we can explain to our friends and our children what the Eucharist means in our lives or whether we find it very difficult to put this meaning into words, the faith and reverence expressed in our reception of Communion speaks louder than any mere verbal explanation.

**Going out into the World**

The ultimate in active participation is the renewed resolve at each Eucharist to go out into the world challenged by the Word that we have heard to share our lives, even as we have shared our bread and wine. The broken bread is the sign of how our lives are going to have to be poured out and "wasted" for the good of all men and women.

This is the ultimate participation, because only if we are breaking and pouring out our lives for the good of others Monday through Saturday will the breaking and pouring out we do in church on Sunday be real for us. And when we have tried, really tried to express love for our families, to be honest at work, to break through our narrow-mindedness, to share our gifts, and when we bring that brokenness to the altar, we will experience what "active participation" really means. And we will never go away empty.