

Being present at Mass

In every celebration of the Mass, Christ is present: in the assembly that gathers to pray and sing, in the priest who acts *in persona Christi* in the celebration of the Eucharist, in the word proclaimed, and in a most special way in the sacrament of his body and blood.

What about us? How present are we? Most of us will acknowledge that there are times when we are physically present, but don't quite "show up" with our whole mind, heart and spirit. So many distractions and anxieties can get in the way of our full, conscious and active participation. How can we be more present at Mass?



1. Prepare for Mass with prayer.

This can be as simple as taking a moment to say, "I'm going to Mass. Lord, you are present to me in so many ways at Mass. Help me to be present to you." Reading the Sunday readings in advance is a great way to prepare for Mass. There are no spoiler alerts when it comes to the Scriptures! This practice can help us be more attentive to the readings as we listen to them proclaimed during the liturgy. Reflecting on the readings in light of our own lives helps us recognize in the Bible the living word of God.

2. Bring your problems along.

When we come to Mass, we do not leave our real selves and our real struggles at the door. God wants to know what we are experiencing — our doubts, our fears, our resentments, our temptations — all of it. If we are honest with ourselves about what we are going through, we can bring these struggles and place them on the altar, together with the gifts of bread and wine, to be transformed. When we don't bring our whole selves to Mass, the bad as well as the good, we risk shutting ourselves off from God's transforming love.

3. Take it home with you.

Mass isn't over when it's over! When the priest or deacon sends us forth at the end of the liturgy, we are being commissioned to carry the body of Christ into the world by *being* the body of Christ in the world. In this way, the treasure of the Eucharist, which we have received, is not hoarded, but shared with a world in need.

Source: Corinna Laughlin is the pastoral assistant for liturgy at St. James Cathedral, liturgy consultant for the Archdiocese of Seattle, and author of *The Liturgy: The Source and Summit of Our Christian Life*.