**STILLNESS AND THE MASS**

One of the universal complaints we as Catholics hear from others is that the Mass is boring. Perhaps at times we’ve even thought the same thing. People lament that they don’t get anything out of the Mass. Oftentimes we forget that the Mass is not so much about us as it is in giving right praise and worship to God. It’s not about how we feel.

In fact, our emotions are an unruly and unreliable source of truth and reality. They change frequently throughout the day and are influenced by a wide variety of external and internal factors. Not to mention that the Enemy is constantly trying to draw us away from God through the movement of our emotions and imagination. God is also not our emotions. If we spend too much time focusing on how we feel all of the time, we shall find the we think that our emotions are more important than God.

 All of us will experience periods of what the spiritual masters call desolation and consolation. We will spend more time in the former than the latter since God desires to cleanse and free us of worldly attachments, including placing our emotions at the centre of our lives. Our emotions, if left unchecked, will lead us down faulty and even dangerous paths. This is an objective truth about our daily lives, but it also applies to how we understand the Mass. We are not the centre of the Mass. Jesus Christ is the centre of the Mass.

**Preparing for Mass**

One of the difficulties we all face in our hectic lives is not taking the time to prepare properly for Mass. We rush into Mass without much forethought and then find ourselves distracted and battling to keep our unruly thoughts and emotions at bay. The Mass is meant to draw us into the mysteries of God, especially through the life, death, and Resurrection of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

 The celebration of the Mass draws us into greater communion with God and our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is also our opportunity to share in the sacrifice of Christ by offering—through and with the priest—the only fitting sacrifice possible, Our Lord, in the Holy Eucharist. Heaven and earth meet at Mass. We quite literally have one foot here on earth and the other in eternity at every single Mass.

 It is important to foster good habits in relation to the Mass so that when the inevitable periods of dryness arrive we are able to persevere and not fall into boredom or despair. It is essential that we learn stillness within our own soul and our bodies. Remember, that the external and the internal both matter and are inextricably linked to one another. This is precisely why the Church is so well known for her emphasis on beauty in all of its forms, especially within the Mass. It is why the Sacraments instituted by Christ Himself are both material and immaterial. Since we are both body and soul what we do with our bodies and how we experience reality itself is both material and spiritual. This is why we face so many temptations that focus on the body ruling our spirit.

**The necessity of stillness**

Stillness itself is not meant to be a form of self-enforced torture in which we expect ourselves to remain perfectly still in body, mind, and soul throughout the entirety of Mass. Rather it is a disposition of the spiritual life that offers us peace. Once this stillness pervades our being, we are able to more naturally rest in God and participate in the mysteries present. This is not easy to achieve and requires both prayer and discipline. We live in a busy, fast-paced time and it can be difficult or seemingly impossible to find stillness in our daily lives. In order to be still at Mass, we must learn to be still each day. Taking a few minutes each day asking God to quiet our hearts and minds will allow us to enter into greater stillness at Mass.

Romano Guardini in the book *Meditations Before Mass* explains the necessity of stillness:

People live, and living things move; a forced outward conformity is no better than restlessness. Nevertheless, stillness comes only if seriously desired. If we value it, it brings us joy; if not, discomfort…Moreover, stillness must not be superficial, as it is when we are not speaking nor listening. Our thoughts, our feelings, and our hearts must also find repose. Then genuine stillness permeates us, spreading ever deeper through the world within us.

 Stillness brings with it abiding peace and joy since it helps us to commune with God to a greater extent. It allows us to enter into the hidden places within ourselves where we can discover God. The Mass is a time when we are able to see the mysteries unfold before us and to be nourished by the Body and Blood of Our Lord. These mysteries will take on newer meaning and understanding if we are able to foster greater stillness in our lives.

**Arrive at Mass early**

In order to grow in stillness at Mass it is essential that we arrive early. Far too many of us enter our churches rushed, distracted, irritated, frustrated, or tired.

 Those of us with younger children know that it can be a real struggle to get everyone out the door to get to Mass on time. Arriving a few minutes earlier gives us the opportunity to ask God to clear our minds and hearts of all distractions. It may seem impossible, but this can even be achieved with children crawling all over you with practice and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It does take practice and patience.

 The spiritual life is about fostering good habits and they take time. Be patient with yourself, but make a concerted effort to arrive even five to ten minutes earlier than usual at each Mass. Romano Guardini explains:

*Above all, we must get to church early in order to tidy up inwardly. We must have no illusions about our condition when we enter the church; we must frankly face our restlessness, confusion, disorder. To be exact, we do not yet really exist as persons—at least not as persons God can address, expecting a fitting response. We are bundles of feelings, fancies, thoughts, and plans all at cross-purposes with each other. The first thing to do, then, is to quiet and collect ourselves. We must be able to say honestly: “Now I am here. I have only one thing to do—participate with my whole being in the only thing that counts, the sacred celebration. I am entirely ready.”*

 Distractions and even spiritual warfare can be an inevitable aspect of the Mass for most of us who are not yet spiritual masters. When we sense ourselves becoming restless, we must gently draw our attention back to the Mass every single time it happens. For most of us this will occur with some frequency, but over time it will diminish as we grow in discipline.

 Asking Our Heavenly Mother to draw you close to her Immaculate Heart before each Mass can be helpful in combating wandering thoughts, temptations, or other distractions. Look at her standing beneath our Crucifix, to turn your attention to her motherly care.

When we find ourselves growing in stillness of body and soul, we will no longer find our attention turned to other things, especially ourselves. The Mass will no longer be seen as boring, long, or as a burden. Our inner disposition has a lot to do with our perception of the Mass. Far too many who complain about the Mass have not done the necessary work to be rightly ordered to God before Mass.

This doesn’t mean we won’t have bad days. There will be times when we don’t feel well, our stress levels are higher, or we are tired, but in fostering the habit of stillness, we can still give our attention to God. We aren’t always going to feel good at Mass. In fact, there may be long periods of dryness or suffering when we feel nothing or when we are clinging to the Cross for dear life. Rest assured, in times of trial and times of peace Our Lord is there nourishing us in Word and with His most Precious Body and Blood while always drawing us deeper into His infinite love and mercy.