

“YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST”—Q & A —FR. STEVE LAPE

We’re halfway through our diocese’s “Year of the Eucharist.” So, in the next few weeks, we’ll look at Catholics’ questions & answers, regarding some aspects of our celebrating the Mass. I call it “Q & A.”

+++ *“I notice that some people come into the church long after Mass has started, even after the readings have been proclaimed, or some leave right after receiving Communion. What does the teaching of the Church say about this? I feel it’s a bit distracting and disrespectful.”* Some may have good reasons for lateness—traffic tie-ups from an accident, bad weather, visitors getting lost on the way, a problem at home, someone losing something just before leaving for Mass, parents trying to tend to an immediate need of a young child, a sudden health issue, being more slow & frail in old age, etc. Thus, we should be careful not to judge those who may be late, considering those and other valid reasons for not making it for the beginning of the Mass. However, if someone makes a habit of coming late to Mass, then perhaps the person should examine why this is occurring. I recall a woman in another parish who often came to Mass when the “Our Father” prayer was being started (near the end)! That’s not a good habit, for it makes the rest of Mass seem unimportant, as if just getting Communion is all that matters. Coming in late or leaving early distracts worshippers in praying and paying attention to what’s being said or done at the time. Thus, lateness can be an inconsiderate or disrespectful act. How could one change? A few suggestions: Plan on leaving earlier than usual from home. Wake up earlier to have more time in the morning to do all that needs to be done. Write a reminding note with a goal to get to church by a specific time. Pray for change.

There is no actual rule about the latest point to come to Mass to fulfill your obligation. Some have suggested that if you don’t make it by the time the Gospel is read, you haven’t fulfilled your obligation. Others have said that it’s when the gifts are being prepared. Yet, there’s nothing concrete. One thing we should never want to do is to make any part of the Mass seem unimportant. To habitually come in late or leave early from Mass can be rather disrespectful to our Lord, who has invited us to fully participate in His special, sacrificial meal. The Church teaches that not only are Catholics obligated to come each Sunday to Mass, but to engage in it with “full, active participation,” through attentive listening to the readings, prayers, and homily, through saying the prayer responses with the whole congregation, and joining in the music as best as we can. An important document called “the Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy” (or under the Latin title of “Sacrosanctum Concilium”), which came out in December 1963, states this. It reinforces that we’re not mere spectators at Mass, but important participants who all can make a difference in adding to the vibrant joy of praise to Christ in this celebration.

+++ *“If Catholics miss Mass on a Sunday, shouldn’t they go to Confession before receiving Communion?”* It depends on the circumstances. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states the following: “The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason, the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin. Participation in the communal celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and His Church. The faithful give witness by this to their communion in faith and charity. Together they testify to God’s holiness and their hope of salvation. They strengthen one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” (#2181-2182) In another section, it states: “The command of Jesus to repeat his actions and words ‘until he comes’ does not only ask us to remember Jesus and what he did. It is directed at the liturgical celebration, by the apostles and their successors, of the memorial of Christ, of his life, of his death, of his Resurrection, and of his intercession in the presence of the Father.” (#1341)

Bishop Matano included #2181 in his pastoral letter that launched our diocese’s “Year of the Eucharist” in June, when he wrote this: “What then are these responsibilities entrusted to the Catholic community in its worship of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament? First and foremost, it means **faithfully attending Holy Mass every weekend**: Jesus personally desires and asks for our presence not just twice, three times a month, or on special occasions, but every weekend; not only when religious education classes are conducted during the academic year, but throughout the year....Why would we ever ignore the personal invitation of Jesus to become one with Him, to unite our very person with His person in Holy Communion? If we can say ‘no’ to Jesus, how easy it becomes to say ‘no’ to any person or institution and break or dishonor any commitment. All that we do as Catholics stems from our attachment to, and is directed back toward, the Eucharist. That one so easily misses Holy Mass reflects a lack of understanding of the Eucharistic sacrifice established by Christ Himself by his death on the Cross.” Recent popes have reiterated this extremely important teaching, which is nothing new. Obviously, if we’re unable to attend due to being very sick, quite elderly or frail, or some emergency or critical situation comes up to prevent us from coming to Mass, then that’s not sinful. However, if we don’t attend due to laziness, boredom with it, opting for entertainment, or other lame excuses, then we’re not living up to the high standards that Jesus asks of us as his disciples, and, thus, would require Confession. What could be more important than Christ?