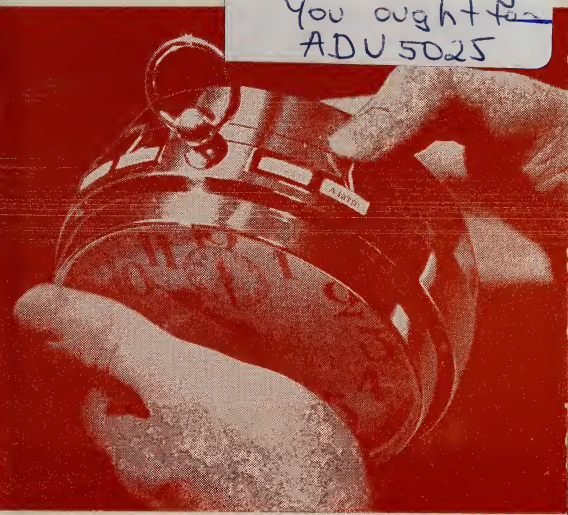


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Archbishop, Bishop of Fort Wayne

You Ought to Go to Mass

YOU ought to go to Mass. I write this as one of Christ's priests to you, one of God's children, not in any spirit of fault finding but in a spirit of interest and love. When I raise aloft the Body and Blood of Christ, you ought to be there, adding your participation in the worship of God.

You used to go to Mass every Sunday. Remember! Perhaps you were very fervent then and you appreciated the Mass with the simple, direct knowledge of a child. Perhaps you were there only because you were sent; and, lacking much instruction, you didn't understand very well what was going on.

Anyway you did attend Mass regularly once upon a time and you don't go very often, if at all, now. Your presence at Mass then pleased God and earned His blessings; your absence now offends Him. Will you take a few minutes now with me to see if we can do something about that?

In the first place, there is a God on Whom you completely and entirely depend, from Whom you came, to Whom you will one day answer for all you think or say or do.

Yes, I know that the world is in a mess, nations hating other nations, men murdering and stealing from other men, husbands and wives being unfaithful to each other, children being abandoned and abused. And I know that the evil in the world is often given as a proof that there isn't any God or that God doesn't care.

But that isn't true. Rather is evil a proof that God does care. God cares about us so much that He made us free, with an ability to choose modeled after His own freedom.

The sun and moon in the sky serve God. The horse and cow in the pasture serve God. Just by being what they are, they reflect God's purpose in making them. But theirs is not a conscious service, not a service of respect and love. They don't serve God because they deliberately decide to. "To will" or "to will not" doesn't belong to them.

In the case of you and me, men, it is different. God wants us to serve Him, not blindly, automatically, but because we know and love Him, because we choose to. God wants us to appreciate Who He is, who we are. He wants us to choose Him out of our regard for Him.

And so God made man free.

That very gift, of course, introduced

the possibility of evil. Freedom is two-edged. I can use it or abuse it. Many men abuse their God-given freedom and cause evil. God does not immediately interfere. But one day they will answer to the justice of God. You do not want to be among them.

Other men use their freedom as God planned for them to use it. Their service, given freely out of love, is precious in God's sight. It outweighs the evil that is done by others. Your service is precious to Him too.

The evil in the world, then, is far from being a proof of God's indifference to us. It does, however, prove the indifference of many men to a loving God.

There is a God and you owe Him worship or adoration, both private and public. To adore God is to acknowledge His supreme importance, your complete dependence, and to approve, as it were, that state of affairs; be glad that it is as it is.

That word "owe" expresses an obligation not of physical force but of the moral order. No arm is going to drag you to your knees. But it is right and fitting and facing the truth to give God adoration. It is wrong and unjust and living a lie for you to deny Him your worship.

He is God and you are His creature.

As an individual, you owe God the private personal adoration of your own prayers. Perhaps you fulfill that debt of honor.

But you are more than an isolated individual. You are a member of human society. You live and work and take your recreation with other men and women. You have a family, you vote as a citizen, you bowl as a member of a team. You help and are helped by others in gaining your living.

This living with others is fundamental to our human nature. Philosophers bear witness by defining man as a social animal. Criminals testify to it by their dread of solitary confinement. We all experience it when we are lonely.

If then it is natural for man to live in society, it is natural for him to worship God in society; giving public expression of the dependence of the whole of human society on Him.

And that is why you ought to join your family, your friends and neighbors in the worship of God at Mass.

Why Mass?

Jesus Christ was God as well as man. He chose His death on the cross because it was the perfect expression of man's utter dependence on God, the perfect act of adoration, the complete surrender, the

complete gift of Himself in sacrifice of adoration to His Father. Because Christ was God, the gift was infinite, not merely the offering of man to God but the gift of God to God.

On the night before Christ died, He changed bread and wine into His own Body and Blood, and offered Himself to the Father in a way that is repeated every time your priest stands at the altar at Mass.

The offering of Christ on the cross was perfect worship of God, divinely perfect. Because the Mass is the renewal of that gift, the repetition of that offering, it, too, is perfect.

The Mass, in all that matters, is the same as the sacrifice of the cross. The same Jesus Christ offers the same victim of sacrifice, Himself, to the same loving Father. Now He is present under the appearances of bread and wine but He is present, really and truly, the living God-man. Now Christ makes use of the ministry of a human priest, His representative, but Christ is still the principal priest making the offering. The human priest is but His instrument.

Christ loved us so much that He died on the cross for us. But His love went beyond even that. He knew that you and I in this twentieth century would still have the need to worship God. That we

might perfectly fulfill that obligation, Christ left us His own adoration of God. And so you ought to go to Mass.

Yes, I know that you are busy on Sunday morning; or tired; or going away; or expecting company; or the thousand and one excuses that you have given me or some other priest or your own conscience.

But let's be sensible about this. First things come first. And what is more fundamental, more pressingly important, than that you should begin your living with the service of Him Who gave you life; than that you should give public worship to God?

Six days did God labor in the creation of the world. The seventh God rested and sanctified it for Himself. "Remember that thou keep holy the sabbath day." That is God speaking to you.

I can't plan your life or your week's activities. You must do that. But when you put work or play, trips or company, or whatever else in the way of Sunday Mass, your plan just doesn't make sense. It is putting other gods before God. It is living a lie. God is first. You must put Him first in your life.

One day God will call you to report on your life. The loving Father who created you to be His child, Who sent

His Son to die for you, Who has given you merciful forgiveness for your offenses as often as sincerely you sought it; that loving Father will then be a just Judge to reward or punish you as you deserve. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Every Sunday, you ought to go to Mass.

What will you do when you get there? That's a good question because what you do makes quite a lot of difference. It is one thing merely to be there; that is joining in the worship of God but on a minimum level, so to speak. It is quite another thing to become part of the action of the Mass with all your heart and soul.

Remember that the Mass is a sacrifice, an action of giving, of offering. Christ on the altar is making a present of Himself to God. And not only Himself, He includes in His offering you and me and all the men and women He died to redeem. If His offering of you and me is not to be a meaningless gesture, we have got to ratify it. In the depths of our hearts, we have got to make a present of ourselves to God.

Every moment you spent last week was a gift from God; every action you performed you did with his help. Only

your sins are not from Him. They belong exclusively to you.

Offer that week back to God then, holding out only the sins you committed. For them, be sorry; will now that they had not been; resolve that with God's help they will not be in the future. And then offer that sorrow, too, to God.

Every moment that you will spend in the week to come will likewise be a gift from God, loaned to you that it might be spent in His honor and glory whether it be at working or eating or sleeping or praying or "having a good time." Dedicate that week to come, then, back to God. Give it to Him in advance. Ask His help that it be truly spent in honoring Him. Ask Him in advance for the help that you know you are going to need if that week is to be spent without grave sin.

You don't have to say anything, thus to take an active part in the action of giving at Mass. You have only to think and will and love. But it does help if you frame your action of giving in the same words that the Church has framed Christ's action of giving, the words of the Mass.

You must have seen a Sunday Missal, that little book that contains in English,

for you to read and make you own, all the beautiful words and thoughts that the priest on the altar, in the place and person of Christ, addresses to the Father in Latin.

You may have heard that it is very difficult and complicated to follow the Mass from the Missal. Don't you believe it. It takes a little practice, yes, but you aren't going to be beaten by what a child in seventh grade readily masters, are you?

Most of the Sunday Missals contain self-explanatory suggestions for following the Mass. Get one like that (ask your pastor if you don't know where) and study it for a few evenings. You will learn more about the Mass as you do and, in this case, more knowledge just can't help leading to a greater appreciation.

Then on Sunday morning, when, after offering the bread and wine, the priest turns around and says: "Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be well pleasing to God the Father almighty," you will be praying right back: "May the Lord receive this sacrifice at thy hands, to the praise and glory of His name, to our own benefit and to that of all His holy Church."

Yes, and when, after the bread and

wine have been changed into the Body and Blood of Christ, the priest "offer(s) up to Thy most excellent majesty of Thine own gifts bestowed upon us, a Victim which is pure, a Victim which is holy, a Victim which is stainless, the holy Bread of life everlasting, and the Chalice of eternal salvation," you will find yourself echoing Christ's action of offering as you echo the words of offering.

And you can't seriously echo that offering of Christ in which He includes you, unless you include yourself. You are led forcibly and spontaneously from an intelligent following of the Mass to a whole-hearted participation in the action of self-giving to God that is the hearing of Mass.

Try it and see.

In one sense, this won't be completely God's world, even though He made it, until every intelligent creature recognizes God as the source and foundation of the world and gives to God the adoration, love and obedience to which He has every right.

In a sense, this can't be completely God's world until you, His intelligent creature, freely and lovingly add your voice and heart and soul to the action of worship that God's Son has given us to call our own, the Sacrifice of the Mass.

Christ came to the world to win all men's hearts for His Father and Himself. Isn't that a strange position for you to be in, standing in the way of Jesus Christ.

Go to Mass next Sunday.

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