

Are you REALLY helping out/participating at Mass? – How Silence Unlocks the Key to Active Participation from the Heart

We have a wonderful group of volunteers here at Our Lady of the Visitation Catholic Church who help out during Masses on the weekend. From Sacristans, to Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, to Lectors, to Ushers, to Greeters, to Cantors, to Altar Servers, to Musicians, and the list goes on and on! Now, even though we can always use more help/volunteers in these areas (please see the bulletin to ask if you can help!), the question remains for many people – if I'm not doing something active or some ministry, am I really helping out OR am I *really* participating at Mass every Sunday?

The answer is that the most important and essential type of participation at Mass is not done with our physical actions and our visible ministries that we accomplish. **The most important type of helping or participating at Mass is done within our hearts and our souls** as we try to worship the One True God and Jesus Christ who becomes present at every single Mass we attend. This worship involves adoration from the heart, petitionary prayers from our hearts for others, listening of the heart to what God may be saying to us from His Word, and loving from our hearts with Faith, Hope, and Love. This all happens in the hidden places of our minds and souls that no one else can see from the outside. It often will happen in silence, and it is what God cares about most at each and every Mass!

One quick analogy to help you begin to understand the Church's perspective on this is simply thinking about students during their classes at school. If students are not teaching the class, are they no longer good students? Of course not! Students are supposed to be engaging with the information and trying to their best to take notes and allow the information to sink into their minds and hearts the best that they can. The Catholic Mass is meant to be this same way, but not just in regards to learning book information. We are supposed to try our best to engage every word that is said during the ceremony: from the prayers, to the songs, to the readings from Scripture, to the words of the homily, and the prayers of consecration and worship from the priest as well. Our goal is for these words to sink into our hearts and minds because they are truly God's words spoken to us and to our personal life and situation.

For example, Pope Saint John Paul II said in 1998 to the U.S. Bishops,

"Worshippers are not passive, for instance, when listening to the readings or the homily, or following the prayers of the celebrant, and the chants and music of the liturgy. These are experiences of silence and stillness, but they are in their own way profoundly active."

In other words, if you are bored during Mass or distracted during Mass, or if you are tempted to think that you are not DOING SOMETHING IMPORTANT because you are sitting in the pews, then just try to remember to engage in a conversation with Christ in the depths of your heart. Just try your best to do this. One place to start would be with a Prayer of Thanksgiving right after you received Holy Communion or during that time of the Mass. Talk to Christ about your life and your desires, but also more importantly, try to listen to Him speaking His words into your heart, mind, and soul. What word, or prayer, or experience might God be using today to speak to me at this Mass and at this moment!! That is what is most important to God. May we thank him for giving us the ability to help out during the Mass (myself included – as I'm trying to be an instrument the best as possible), and may we ask Christ to convince us that whether we physically help out or not, the best way we can truly help out/participate at Mass is by engaging our hearts, minds, and souls with His Words and with His presence.