

GOING DEEPER – Understanding Active Participation – The Bells, Smells, Movement & Symbols (Do we worship w/everything we have?!)

Merry Christmas!! On behalf of our entire parish here in Shippensburg, I want to wish everyone that comes to Our Lady of the Visitation Catholic Church (OLV) a blessed Christmas celebration. This bulletin article is based off of a series of articles I have written over this past year of time here at OLV, and it is because the Catholic Church in the United States of America has been in the midst of a Eucharistic Revival. We are in the middle of the 3rd year and final year of this revival, and over these last five bulletin articles (including the one from this past weekend), my goal is to summarize and emphasize what I think are the most important truths and approaches to understanding and getting the most out of the Catholic Mass. Last weekend, we really zoomed in on the concept of **active participation** and how it is primarily about our **internal listening** to God's word at Mass {rather than about us doing things or ministries at Mass}. The Church teaches this in part because the entire goal of every Catholic Mass (as well as the entire goal of our faith as followers of Christ) is to "**be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God**" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* par. 48).

Today, my main encouragement for you all is to zoom out and try to understand the role of all the smells, sounds, visual symbols, movements, and mini rituals within the Catholic Mass. For example, at every single Catholic Sunday Mass, the faithful are supposed to technically bow during the recitation of the ancient Creed or Profession of Faith, and specifically just bow during the words about God becoming incarnate as a man on this earth. On Christmas, because this is the day when the world visibly sees Jesus for the first time outside of the womb of the blessed virgin Mary, we are actually asked to do more and instead to genuflect or bow on one knee during this prayer and part of the Creed. This might seem a bit strange to visitors, but *the entire purpose* of this genuflection is **to help us think and pray internally about this most amazing and beautiful truth and mystery of our faith**. If I am asked to move my body in a physical way, it can either distract me **OR** it can remind me to pray and talk to God internally about ...why are we doing this action? ...maybe the church is asking me to bring my knee to touch the physical ground, in order to awaken my heart, and to remember that the infinite God becoming a man in the person of Jesus Christ is an incredible act of love and humility for our sake!! God doesn't need to come to this earth. God doesn't need to come down out of heaven. He is perfectly happy already. Therefore, the physical movement is meant to help me think about and pray about the meaning of this great truth and God's love for me that is present right now in this moment and trying to break through our hardened hearts.

Overall, this one example is meant to help us realize that **all the symbols, visible images, sounds, smells, and movements** during each and every Catholic Mass have this same purpose. Every time we stand, sit, bow, or kneel; every time we smell incense or see the priests robes/vestments or see statues of saints, angels, or of Jesus the crucifix; every time we hit our chest in a three-fold instance; every time we do the sign of the cross or we cross our minds, lips, and hearts with our thumb before the Gospel; every time we hear the bells ringing or sing the music of the liturgy/Mass; every time we do any movement, see any visible symbol or image, hear any sound, smell any incense, or encounter any symbolic ritual in any way --- we can simply pause. Ask the question in our hearts – what is the deeper meaning? How is God speaking to me through this physical symbol? ...we can worship God with our physical bodies at every Catholic Mass, and all these symbols can lead me to hear His Word in my soul.