



UNDERSTANDING
THE MASS

Fr. Michael G. Witczak



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Introduction



Why do we gather on Sunday for Mass? What is the meaning of all those actions we do and prayers we recite Sunday after Sunday? At the most basic, they help us experience the presence of Jesus, our Lord and brother, sent by God to show us how to live life for God and one another. Our celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday—all the actions, gestures, postures and words—help us deepen our experience of Christ in our midst.

Entering

You've been busy gathering everyone together, you've hopped into the car, and you're heading to church. Your mind may be a million miles away from God, from prayer. But the celebration of the Mass is already beginning.

When you arrive at church, you see neighbors,



friends, acquaintances. You nod recognition, exchange a couple of friendly words. This is the Body of Christ gathering!

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ....Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12, 27

As you enter the church, you dip your hand into the **holy water font**, touch the water, and sign yourself with the blessed water, helping young children in the family to do the same.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

ROMANS 6:3-4

As you walk into the church, you see people bowing or genuflecting before entering the pew or chair.

*...so that at the name of Jesus every knee
should bend, in heaven and on earth
and under the earth....*

PHILIPPIANS 2:10

When the tabernacle with the reserved Blessed Sacrament is in the body of the church, people usually genuflect as a sign of reverence to the real presence of Christ. When the Eucharist is reserved in a special chapel, or in a part of the church away from the altar area (sanctuary), it is more customary for people to bow: The bow is an even more ancient form of reverence than the genuflection and means the same thing. The altar itself is a symbol of Christ because it is where the most solemn and sacred event of the Mass takes place—the Eucharistic Prayer, during which the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ.

Once in the pew or seat, you spend a minute or two settling in, getting the family members around you organized, and getting ready for the beginning of the celebration.