

MASS REALITY

*Unveiling the
Divine Adventure
of the Catholic Mass*

We see it in so many parishes.

Even in a packed Mass on Sunday morning, if you scan the faces of those present, you often find blank stares or even looks of boredom (and it's not just the teens in tow). Of course, we can't judge what's in a person's heart, but we might suspect that some people in the room are less than enthused to be there.

Contrast that with a packed movie theater. Chances are you'll see people riveted to the screen, unable and unwilling to look away. There's no hint of boredom here.



Some Catholics are not shy about sharing their opinion that “Mass is boring.” In his book *Bored Again Catholic: How the Mass Could Save Your Life*, Timothy P. O’Malley wrote, “It often seems that what we desire most in the celebration of the Mass is an occasion to be entertained. We want a homilist who can make jokes and tell engaging stories about his life. We want music that is upbeat, a liturgical equivalent to what we listen to while working out at the gym. We want liturgies that are short so that we can resume our busy schedules. Yet in this desire for entertainment we distract ourselves from the contemplative encounter that each celebration of the Mass offers.”

O’Malley argues that some boredom at Mass can be productive and can open us to a quiet interior space where we can encounter God. In essence, he suggests that we can lean into the “boring” nature of the liturgy, allowing it to lead us into a contemplative state where we can allow the Holy Spirit to speak to our hearts through the liturgy.



But this goes beyond mere “feeling” or emotion; there is something very real and present in the celebration of the Mass.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, “The Christian liturgy not only recalls the events that saved us but actualizes them, makes them present. The Paschal mystery of Christ is celebrated, not repeated. It is the celebrations that are repeated, and in each celebration there is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that makes the unique mystery present (1104).”

As St. John Vianney once said, “If we really understood the Mass, we would die of joy.”

But, [statistics show](#) that seven out of ten Catholics in the US do not believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Even among Catholics who attend Mass weekly or more often, nearly 40% believe that the bread and wine are purely symbolic.

This lack of acceptance and understanding of what the Church teaches about the Eucharist may be pointing to one of the reasons for the lack of full and active participation in the Mass. After all, if they do not see the Eucharist as the “source and summit” of our faith, then the liturgy itself is probably either a habit, a lost hour, or just another item to cross off a weekly “to-do” list.

Here, we will break open some barriers to Catholics fully realizing the rich reality that exists in every Mass and some ideas for breaking through.





*It's not me,
it's you.*

One of the common complaints among parishioners is that they don't feel warm and fuzzy toward their parish priest. We're only human, of course, so perhaps Father isn't someone you'd want to go bowling with (and the feeling may be mutual). They may not like his homilies or his accent, or something about him just rubs them the wrong way.

Personality conflicts can be enough to send a parishioner packing to the next parish. But there are several things we can do to remind them that parish-hopping isn't the ultimate solution. At the same time, we can unveil one of the amazing things that happen at Mass that can help someone work past it and maybe even begin to marvel at it.

Here's the reality:

The priest *is Christ* for us in the Mass. Regardless of his looks, his demeanor, or his idiosyncrasies, Father acts in the person of Christ.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, "In the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth. This is what the Church means by saying that the priest, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, acts *in persona Christi Capitis* (1548).

This is not to say that the priest is without sin, but that the sacrament confers on him a "sacred power" which is none other than that of Christ (CCC 1551)."


In Mass during the epiclesis, "the Church asks the Father to send his Holy Spirit (or the power of his blessing) on the bread and wine, so that by his power they may become the body and blood of Jesus Christ...(CCC1353)" It is not any

power of the priest himself that transforms the bread and wine into the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ; it is through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is an amazing reality that could help change the way some parishioners think about their priest and help them move past their own perception to accept and embrace him, removing the barrier and allowing them to experience the life-giving power of the Mass.

What can we do?

- Parish families may need a refresher on the Sacrament of Holy Orders. There are some informative and entertaining videos online. You can link to one or more of these from your website or push them out through your communications tools.
- Invite parishioners to get to know their priest(s) better! This is especially important if the priest is new to the parish. The parish priest could host an informal gathering (or make a video) and share the experience of his call to the vocation, what his vocation means to him personally, and how he hopes he can guide the parish. Getting past those first impressions can help.
- Ask parishioners to pray for the priest, the deacon, and all clergy in the Church. Here is one you can use or create one that is personal to your clergy.
 - Lord Jesus, you have chosen your priests from among us and sent them out to proclaim your word and to act in your name. For so great a gift to your Church, we give you praise and thanksgiving. We ask you to fill them with the fire of your love, that their ministry may reveal your presence in the Church. Since they are earthen vessels, we pray that your power shine through their weakness. In their afflictions, let them never be crushed; in their doubts, never despair; in temptation, never be destroyed; in persecution, never abandoned. Inspire them through prayer to live each day the mystery of your dying and rising. In times of weakness, send them your Spirit, and help them to praise your heavenly Father and to pray for poor sinners. By the same Holy Spirit, put your word on their lips and your love in their hearts to bring good news to the poor and healing to the broken-hearted. And may the gift of Mary, your Mother, to the Disciple whom you loved, be your gift to every priest. Grant that she who formed you in her human image, may form them in your divine image, by the power of your Spirit, to the Glory of God the Father. Amen. (Manual of Prayers)

A photograph of a woman with her hair in a bun, seen from behind, sitting in a church pew. She is looking towards a large painting of Jesus Christ with a halo, set within an altar. The scene is dimly lit, with a warm glow from the painting and some lights on the left.

*Nah,
I'm okay.*

Another barrier to Catholics being amazed by the divine adventure of the Mass is a lack of participation. Oh, they are physically present, but another quick scan of the sanctuary during a hymn and you usually find quite a lot of closed mouths. Some pick and choose what prayers, singing, or responses they engage in.

In *Bored Again Catholic*, O'Malley wrote, "We need to know what is happening at Mass during a specific time. We need to reflect on the spiritual implications of the Mass for our lives. We need to think about what keeps us from participating fully, whether it's bad music or the frenzied nature of daily life."

Catholics may struggle to participate fully during Mass for a variety of reasons. One common challenge is distractions – in a world filled with constant stimuli, maintaining focused reverence or active participation during the liturgy can be difficult. Personal struggles, doubts, or spiritual dryness can hinder one's ability to engage deeply in the rituals and prayers of the Mass. Some may also feel alienated by aspects of the Church's teachings or practices. (Of course, in some cases, language barriers or physical limitations may hinder full participation. It's important that parishes recognize these challenges and work with Catholics to provide support.)

In a plenary session at the 2023 International Catholic Stewardship Conference, Bishop James Golka of the Diocese of Colorado Springs urged ICSC attendees: “I ask you; I implore you as a Catholic. We are experts in going through the motions at Mass. Please don’t do that anymore. To stand in front of your Father, you get to speak to your Father face to face, now at Mass today. Do that. He’s there, enthralled by you, looking at you, wanting to be with you.”

Bishop Golka’s words can be helpful in our work to help Catholics understand the spiritual reality of the Mass. He’s not talking about a list of rules for people to follow; he’s talking about the Mass bringing us so close to the Trinity and all the angels and saints that we are among them.

Here’s the reality:

In the Mass, heaven and earth converge, and the divine presence can be palpably felt.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that “In the earthly liturgy we share in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle. With all the warriors of the heavenly army we sing a hymn of glory to the Lord; venerating the memory of the saints, we hope for some part and fellowship with them; we eagerly await the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, until he, our life, shall appear and we too will appear with him in glory.”



Bishop Golka described it this way, “Where are we now? We’re in heaven. Somehow, God took this little community and lifted it all the way up into the heavenly realm. God took all of heaven and crammed it down into our little local churches. Wherever we are, this is the divine liturgy.”

While we cannot *mandate* participation – imagine telling the parish they are required to sing at Mass! – we can subtly encourage them and hope to break down this barrier so they can experience the fullness of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

What can we do?

- Send out a series of brief communications on the parts of the Mass to remind parishioners of the mystical aspects of what is happening. Include information for adults as well as children so families can discuss it together.
- Consider a pastoral letter to the parish, inviting them to full participation, or provide a link to Cardinal Sean P. O’Malley’s excellent letter: [*Jesus’ Eager Desire: Our Participation in the Sunday Mass*](#). (Also available in ebook format.)
- When parishioners understand more about what is really happening during Mass, it goes a long way to encouraging them to be attentive and active during the entire liturgy. Teaching Masses are often used for RCIA but can be a helpful refresher for the entire parish. Record your session or sessions and post them online, then push links out to your parish via email or text.
- Gather “what I love about Mass” stories from parishioners and feature them in the bulletin and online. These can be written or recorded on video and shared far and wide. Active and engaged Catholics can be a source of inspiration for others who may need just a little nudge.





Present, not accounted for.

As mentioned earlier, there is a real crisis in our Church that involves the disbelief in our fundamental doctrine concerning the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

Of Catholics who don't believe in the Real Presence, 22% know what the Church teaches but do not believe it, and 43% think that the Church teaches that the bread and wine are only symbols.

Here's the reality:

In the Mass, bread and wine are transformed into the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ.

In *Bored Again Catholic*, O'Mally wrote, "Transubstantiation declares that Jesus is really and truly sacramentally present in the Eucharist. There's not half bread and part God. There's not partial wine and part of Jesus. Bread and wine cease functioning anymore as bread and wine. Their accidents or physical characteristics remain. But what the bread and wine really are is Christ's Body and Blood, his soul and his divinity. It's Jesus' very personal presence dwelling among us."

While this is easy enough to say, many Catholics find the leap nearly impossible. They reason that if it can't be proven by a scientific method, it can't be real. And to them, whether or not they know what the Church teaches, it



remains simply bread and wine. This is especially concerning considering that the Church teaches that “no one may take part in it unless he believes that what we teach is true, has received baptism for the forgiveness of sins and new birth, and lives in keeping with what Christ taught (CCC 1355).”

St. Ambrose, one of the early Church fathers, offered this argument, “Shall not the word of Christ, which was able to make out of nothing that which was not, be able to change things which already are into what they were not? For it is not less to give a new nature to things than to change them.” (*On the Mysteries*, chapter 9.)

For those who accept this by faith, it is very powerful and transformative, both personally and as the Church, the Body of Christ.

“The Eucharist is the whole movement of Jesus, who once again does what he did at the Last Supper. This is my body; this is my blood. Give it away. Shared, broken, open, poured out,” explained Bishop Golka at ICSC 2023. “There’s a moment of the Mass called the Fraction Rite, where the Blessed Sacrament, the consecrated species, the Body of Christ, is broken. I remember the first Mass that I celebrated after being ordained a priest. Nobody prepared me for what it was like to break God in half.”

Bishop Golka’s startling comment just reveals his deep, abiding belief that the Holy Spirit has indeed transformed the bread into the Body of Christ.

What can we do?

Recognizing that our world and Church are in pain and divided, the US Bishops called for a three-year National Eucharistic Revival as a path toward healing and renewed faith in the mystery of the Eucharist.

Launched on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, June 19, 2022, the Revival started with bishops, priests, and diocesan staff who were called to a year of prayer and fasting for the success of the Revival. The year of parish revival began on June 11, 2023, and will culminate in a Eucharistic Congress in July 2024.

[*The Leader's Playbook*](#) for the Parish year of the National Eucharistic Revival identifies four “invitations” that are what they hope parishes will strive for. These are offered as general pathways for encountering Christ in the Eucharist; parishes are urged to ask the Holy Spirit for guidance in how they implement them, best using their gifts and charisms.

1. Attentiveness to the *Ars Celebrandi* - the art of celebrating. The goal is to reinvigorate worship, ensuring that “the Paschal Mystery is made present so that the baptized, through their participation, can experience it in their own lives” (Desiderio Desideravi 49).
2. Monthly “Encounter Nights” that Help Parishioners Encounter Jesus in the Eucharist Personally. Parishes that have not already established a monthly hour of Eucharistic Adoration are encouraged to begin and promote it to parishioners as an opportunity to encounter Christ in the Eucharist.
3. Preaching Series and Small Group Initiative “Jesus and the Eucharist.” Parish priests are encouraged to develop a series of homilies devoted solely to the Eucharist. Alongside this series, parishes are invited to participate in a small group program developed by Catholic experts.
4. “Invite One Back” and Accompany Those in Need and on the Margins. This is the sending of the faithful out into the world to make disciples. This two-part initiative asks Catholics to invite someone to Mass who has been away or is open, and to find ways to minister to the poor or marginalized.



With each of these invitations, parish staff and pastors can get creative, incorporating elements of your individual customs and culture. The Leaders Playbook has ideas for going deeper. Here are a few of our own.

- **Ars Celebrandi**

- Help parishioners prepare for the upcoming week by sending Sunday's readings out in advance using email or text, or post them on your website and push out a link.
- Develop a series of short, 60-second videos on how best to prepare for Mass and the Eucharist. Push these out through your ministry tool like MinistryPlatform or Realm.

- **Encounter Night**

- Manage Adoration time slots via forms on your website or app. Push reminders for those signed up.
- Invest in some helpful resources like pamphlets, booklets, or prayer books to have on hand during Eucharistic Adoration to help parishioners who may need some guidance in making their holy hour.

- **Preaching Series**

- Invite parishioners to a monthly lunch or dinner to explore homily topics and discuss how to bring the readings alive in light of the Eucharist.
- Make the text of your Eucharist homily series available on your website or app. These could be sent out via email on Monday and include reflection questions for the week.

- **Invite One Back**

- Have visitors text to a number to receive a gift from the parish, and follow up with an email or text thanking them for coming and inviting them back.
- Offer your parishioners a little assistance to make it a little easier to invite someone to Mass. Several publishers offer "welcome" pamphlets that you can provide for parishioners to give to friends or family, or you can create your own. Make sure to include your Mass and confession times.



*The
reality is...*

People are hungry for truth, peace, and direction, and we know this can be found only in the person of Jesus Christ. We are all called to “proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching.” (2 Timothy: 4)

The barriers that prevent people from truly experiencing the life-giving experience of the Mass are symptoms of the real issue. While people may say they don’t like the music or the priest, they don’t like all the singing, kneeling, and standing, or any number of other complaints, there is something deeper they may never verbalize. And that is, they don’t believe that Christ is present in the Eucharist.

If Catholics in the pew begin to fully embrace and understand that the Eucharist is the Real Presence of Christ, the other issues they may have will simply melt away. And, they will become passionate disciples, confident in their faith and able to share it with others.

Man should tremble,
the world should quake,
all Heaven should be deeply moved
when the Son of God appears on
the altar in the hands of the priest.
– St. Francis of Assisi

Another reality: choosing the right ministry partner matters.

The know-how you need from experts you trust.

ACS Technologies is the original pioneer of Church Management Software (ChMS). But we don't just know technology and software, we know how to help you put it to best use to keep parishioners engaged, feeling welcome, and their pastoral needs tended to. We are evolving and changing to meet the changing needs of the Church. We're with you every step of the way.

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Let's Talk

We know the challenges of switching or implementing new technology—it can be intimidating! But we also know the unbelievable changes that have happened within churches that have partnered with us. Let's connect and see how we can assist you in the greatest thing you do - proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

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