

# My Sacrifice and Yours

On the ancient practice of Mass offerings

Have you ever wondered what that list of names and Mass times in the parish bulletin is all about? How did Mrs. So-and-so get associated with the 7:00 AM Mass on Tuesday? And why?

## The greatest possible prayer

As Catholics, we know that the Mass is central to our lives. That is what we “do” each Sunday. But what is the significance of this “source and summit of the Christian life”, as the Second Vatican Council called it?

The great theologian Pope Benedict XVI explains: “The Eucharistic Celebration is the greatest and highest act of prayer, and constitutes the center and the source from which even the other forms receive ‘nourishment’”<sup>iii</sup> Through the Eucharist, we participate in Christ’s unique sacrifice on the cross and the once-and-for-all redemption he won by that sacrifice. It is not just one prayer among many, but it is the greatest possible prayer--the perfect offering of Christ to the Father. It presents again the paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection.

## Praying the Mass for others

The practice of offering the Mass for a specific intention is an old and venerable one. From the earliest days of the Church, the people of God have brought their prayers, sacrifices, and offerings to the Mass where they could be united with the perfect sacrifice of Christ. To this day, Masses are requested and offered for the intentions of the living and for the souls of the dead.



## Praying for the dead

Part of the work of the Church has always been praying for the dead, a practice rooted in the Old Testament (see 2 Maccabees 12). From the beginning, the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God.<sup>ii</sup> This isn’t simply memorializing our loved ones, nor is it simply a means of facing grief. Through the Communion of Saints we find “the mutual sharing of

help, atonement, prayers and benefits among the faithful, those already in the heavenly fatherland, those consigned to the purifying fire, and those still making their pilgrim way here on earth.”<sup>iii</sup> By praying for the dead, we assist them on their journey to the Kingdom.



## An offering of soul and body

There is a long and praiseworthy tradition of making a monetary donation when requesting to have a Mass offered for a specific intention. Pope Saint Paul VI spoke of this when he said: “The faithful, moved by a religious and ecclesial consciousness, should join a kind of self-sacrifice of their own to the Eucharistic sacrifice, so as to share in the latter more effectively.”<sup>iv</sup> A stipend, or better yet an “offering”, is asked for two reasons: First, it helps the benefactor enter into the sacrifice. We are not disembodied spirits; our faith is lived out bodily and spiritually, and making an offering is a bodily action to accompany the spiritual act. Second, such an offering helps to provide for the needs of the Church, particularly the support of the Church’s ministers. Although small, this donation helps all our priests, especially those who are retired but still offering Mass each day.

## A hidden treasure

We have all been there: face to face with the grim reality of a loved one in pain. Whatever the cross that is being carried—grief over loss, an unfortunate diagnosis from the doctor, concern about employment, we want to do something. But what? Perhaps the answer has been hiding in plain sight; for there is wisdom and beauty in the ancient practice of offering a Mass for your loved one. It is a treasure listed in your parish bulletin each week.

**To request a Mass stop by or call your parish office.**

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**Worship Office**  
**Diocese of Ogdensburg**

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# Did You Know?

## A Top Ten about Offering Masses

1. While most Masses are offered for those who have died, Masses can also be requested and offered for the living—both for their health and other intentions. There is also the practice of offering Masses in thanksgiving for some grace bestowed.
2. All Masses that are requested of a parish are to be offered within one year of the request. If a parish cannot satisfy that obligation, they send the remaining intentions and stipends to the Diocesan Mission Office who insures they are offered by priests elsewhere, including our own retired priests.
3. Regardless of how many Masses he offers, a priest is only able to retain one stipend per day.
4. No Catholic should ever think he or she can *buy* a Mass. The phrase sometimes comes up: “How much is a Mass?” or “I’d like to pay for a Mass.” But the Code of Canon Law makes it very clear: “Any appearance of trafficking or trading is to be excluded entirely from the offering for Masses.”<sup>v</sup> Another way of saying it is the Lord himself paid the price for the Mass on the cross. No other cost will suffice.
5. Stipend comes from the Latin word “*stips*” which is literally a gift or a donation (not an allowance or salary). In fact, the Code of Canon Law no longer uses the term “stipend” (which became associated with the payment of a fee), but instead refers to an “offering” which is made in honor of God and in order to contribute to the work of the Church.
6. The amount of Mass stipends varies. In the Diocese of Ogdensburg all announced Masses encourage an offering of ten dollars.
7. Since the stipend is an offering or a donation, you cannot be denied a Mass just because you cannot afford the stipend.
8. When you request a Mass, please do not hesitate to ask for a Mass card to send to your friend or family member. This will let them know that they are being prayed for—which will probably be appreciated far more than flowers.
9. You have had Masses offered for you! Each Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation every pastor is required to have a Mass offered for the people of his parish.
10. While in this resource we have emphasized the importance of requesting Masses to be celebrated by our priests, each of us as baptized Catholics can and should “offer” each Mass; that is, we can and should unite ourselves—with all our joys and sorrows, our petitions and thanksgivings—not just with the priest we see standing at the altar, but to our Eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, as he offers the one, perfect sacrifice for our salvation: the total giving of himself in love to the Father by his death on the Cross. Thus, at each Mass we hear the words: “Pray brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.”

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<sup>i</sup> Ordination Homily, Pope Benedict XVI, St Peter's Basilica, 3 May 2009

<sup>ii</sup> Council of Lyons II (1274) as quoted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church 1032

<sup>iii</sup> Pope Leo XIII “*Mirae caritatis*” cf. CCC 1031

<sup>iv</sup> Apostolic Letter on Faculties Concerning Mass Stipends by Pope Saint Paul VI, 1974

<sup>v</sup> Code of Canon Law 947