What Are We Doing at Mass?

You probably know what to do when you’re at Mass—you know when to sit, stand, and say Amen. But how would you answer if asked why we sit, stand, or say certain words at certain times during the Mass? Could you explain our reasons for engaging in each of these actions? When we don’t understand the meaning of what we do at Mass, it can start to seem boring or irrelevant. But it shouldn’t ever feel boring or irrelevant, because what takes place when we celebrate the Mass has the potential to transform us and the world!

The overall meaning of what we do when we gather to celebrate Mass has changed very little since the beginning of the Church. But the rituals associated with Mass have evolved significantly. The rituals that we experience at Mass today came to be as a result of the Second Vatican Council, which we often refer to as Vatican II. In 1963, Pope John XXIII called bishops from around the world to this council in order to engage the Church with modern times. The first document that the Council produced was called the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. It called for the restoration and promotion of the liturgy. This year, we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of that document. In this series of handouts, we will be using this document to help us understand more about the significance of the rituals we participate in at Mass.