EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT THE MASS

PARENTS: We have provided this information to help you grow in your knowledge of the Mass. You might also want to share some of it with your older saints.

Why does the priest wear different colors on different days?
Each liturgical color represents the liturgical tone of that particular day. The priest wears green during Ordinary Time to represent our continued growth in the Christian life. White represents purity and celebration, and is used for feasts of Jesus, Mary, and the saints. Priests will often wear white at a funeral as a sign of the great joy we hope to know in heaven. Red represents fire on Pentecost, and blood on the feasts of martyrs, Good Friday, and Palm (Passion) Sunday. Violet represents penance and preparation, and is worn during Lent and Advent. In addition to these four main colors, the priest may also wear rose for Gaudete Sunday and Laetare Sunday, which fall during Advent and Lent, respectively. This color represents a subdued sense of joy as we remember the greater joys to come with the impending seasons of Christmas and Easter.

I’ll be at the cabin this weekend. Can I go to Mass on Monday instead of Sunday?
CCC 2177: “The Sunday celebration of the Lord’s Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church’s life. ‘Sunday is the day on which the paschal mystery is celebrated in light of the apostolic tradition and is to be observed as the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church.’” (CIC, can. 1246 § 1.)

CCC 2182: “Participation in the communal celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church. The faithful give witness by this to their communion in faith and charity. Together they testify to God’s holiness and their hope of salvation. They strengthen one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

Sunday Mass is not just a way to make sure you get to Mass once a week. It is a parish, in union with the entire Catholic Church and with all Christians, gathering to celebrate the day Christ rose from the dead.

There are, of course, legitimate reasons for missing Sunday Mass, such as personal illness, the need to care for someone else who is ill, or a lack of transportation. However, when going to Sunday Mass involves only a change of plans or a slight inconvenience, we are all obligated as Catholics to do so.

Why are some parts of the Mass different every day, while others stay the same?
In the Mass, there are some parts that are the same for every Mass, and some parts that change according to the day. The Ordinaries are always the same, such as the Gloria, the Creed, and the Our Father. Other prayers, such as the Opening and Closing Prayer and the Preface, change according to the day and often have something to do with the saint or feast of the day. These are called Propers, because they are proper to that particular day.

I want my priest to celebrate Mass in my backyard for my family reunion. Can this be done?
The Mass is very holy; the word holy means, “set apart.” To properly accentuate this holiness, we have particular places (churches) that are set apart for the celebration of the Mass. Unless there is a pastoral
necessity (e.g., your parish church is under construction, people living in a retirement home are unable to make the trip to a church, there is a large crowd that could only be accommodated outdoors, etc.), Mass should be celebrated in a church or chapel. Celebrating the special act of Mass in a special place called a church becomes a visible sign of the importance of the occasion.

The Code of Canon Law, Canon 932 says:
“The celebration of the Eucharist is to be performed in a sacred place, unless in a particular case necessity demands otherwise; in such a case the celebration must be done in a respectable place.”

Why is incense used at some Masses?
The use of incense in prayer is a very ancient practice, going back to biblical times:
“Let my prayer be incense before you; my uplifted hands an evening sacrifice.” Psalm 141:2
“Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a gold censer. He was given a great quantity of incense to offer, along with the prayers of all the holy ones, on the gold altar that was before the throne.” Revelation 8:3

The use of incense is an expression of reverence, usually for some particular object (e.g., the Blessed Sacrament, the altar, a crucifix). It is often used on more solemn occasions.

“Incense may be used if desired in any form of Mass:
- During the Entrance procession;
- At the beginning of Mass, to incense the cross and the altar;
- At the Gospel procession and the proclamation of the Gospel itself;
- After the bread and the chalice have been placed upon the altar, to incense the offerings, the cross, and the altar, as well as the priest and the people;
- At the showing of the host and the chalice after the consecration.”

GIRM (General Instruction of the Roman Missal) 276

Why do we pray a different Creed at Mass than we do during the rosary?
A creed is a brief summary of our faith. The Apostles’ Creed takes its name from the fact that it is a faithful summary of the apostles’ Faith. The Nicene Creed comes from the first two ecumenical councils (Nicaea in 321 and Constantinople in 381). We recite the Nicene Creed at Mass and typically use the Apostles’ Creed at children’s Masses and when praying the rosary. Both are accurate summaries of our faith. (See CCC 194-5.)

I see people bowing during the Creed when we say, “and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.” Why is this?
At this point in the Creed, we make a profound bow (from the waist) in reverence at the amazing thought that Christ would leave the glories of heaven and humble Himself to become one of us. It is also interesting to note that we bow at the same thought when praying the Angelus.

What can be done about that REALLY noisy child behind me during Mass?
While it is inevitable that young children will misbehave at times while we are in the process of training them to behave at Mass, that does not mean that everyone around us needs to be subjected to this training as well. Prolonged noise is distracting, so we must always be respectful to those around us who are trying to worship.
I’m allergic to wheat. Why can’t we make some hosts out of rice instead?
The Code of Canon Law states:

**Can. 924:**
§1. “The Most Sacred Eucharist must be celebrated with bread and wine, with which a small quantity of water is to be mixed.”

§2. “The bread must be made of wheat alone and recently made so that there is no danger of corruption.”

§3. “The wine must be natural wine of the grape and not corrupt…”

**Can. 926:** “In accord with the ancient tradition of the Latin Church, the priest is to use unleavened bread in the celebration of the Eucharist whenever he offers it.”

The reasons for using wheat for the matter of Eucharist are both historical and symbolic. Wheat is used over and over again in Scripture as a metaphor for the Body of Christ. John 12:24, Luke 22:31-32, and Matthew 13:24-30 are all examples of this. In Psalm 147:14, God speaks of filling his people with “finest wheat.”

Those who cannot receive Communion under the species of Bread may receive just the Wine, since both species contain the whole Christ; Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. Those who have Celiac Sprue or a related disease should consult the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/celiasprue.shtml) for more information, and then speak with your pastor about options available for receiving this wonderful sacrament.

**Why does the priest or deacon put a little water in the wine?**
Before the priest prays over the wine, he pours a few drops of water into it. He prays, “By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled Himself to share in our humanity.” The water symbolizes our humanity, which, as it is poured into the chalice, becomes totally immersed in the divinity of Christ (the wine). This action also symbolizes the Blood and water that flowed from Jesus’ side when the soldier pierced His side on the cross.

**What are the different parts of the Eucharistic Prayer?**
There are four main Eucharistic Prayers that you may hear at Masses, but all these options contain the same basic parts:

- **Thanksgiving:** A prayer of thanksgiving to the Father is found in the Preface, which begins, “It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Father most holy…” (See CCC 1352.)
- **Acclamation or Sanctor:** (“Holy, holy, holy…”): Through the Mass, we are united to the universal Church, including all the saints in heaven. In the Sanctor, we join with them in the song of the angels.
- **Epiclesis (eh-puh-CLEE-sihs):** (“Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall…”): A prayer in which the priest asks the Holy Spirit to consecrate the gifts and that through them, we might share in salvation. (See CCC 1105-1107, 1353.)
- **Institution and Consecration Narrative:** This is the most familiar part of the Eucharistic Prayer, in which the priest recounts the Last Supper.
- **Anamnesis (a-nam-NEE-sihs) is the part of the Eucharistic Prayer that commemorates the Lord’s Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension into heaven. It comes right after the Memorial Acclamation (“When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup…” etc.). (See CCC 1354.)
• Offering: A prayer in which the priest offers Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit. The Mass is a sacrifice in which Christ's sacrifice on the cross is re-presented.
• Intercessions, in which the priest prays for the universal Church.
• Doxology (“Through him, and with him, and in him…”): The Eucharistic Prayer concludes with the priest offering praise to God, and we all join in this praise by offering our “Amen”.

NOTE: Quotes included are from the 2nd Eucharistic Prayer

Whatever happened to the bells?
In the Tridentine Mass, the priest says many of the prayers silently. The sanctus bells are rung at the elevation to signal to people that Jesus has become present in the Blessed Sacrament. In the Novus Ordo Mass, since most of the priest’s prayers are spoken aloud, the bells were made optional, although they are still allowed to draw our attention in a particular way as we adore Christ.

Why does the priest elevate the Host?
The Roman Missal states that the priest “shows the Consecrated Host to the people,” and that he also, “shows the Chalice to the people.” The priest lifts the Body and Blood of Christ high enough so that the people can see it and adore Jesus truly present. The custom of elevating the Host very high came from the Tridentine Mass, in which the priest faced in the same direction as the people. Thus, in order to show the Host or Chalice to the people, he had to raise them above his head. The priest usually still lifts the Host and Chalice high at the elevation, even when the people can see it otherwise.

This action also symbolizes offering the Sacrifice to the Father, and provides an opportunity to silently express adoration for Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament. Many people pray silently, “My Lord and my God,” (See John 20:28) when the Host is elevated, and “My Jesus, mercy,” when the Chalice is raised.

Should we hold hands during the Our Father?
The General Instruction of the Roman Missal states that the priest prays the Lord’s Prayer with hands extended, but does not specify any particular action or posture for the people at this point in the Mass.

Why does the priest drop a piece of the Host into the Chalice at the Breaking of the Bread?
In the Early Church, the Pope would send a little piece of the Bread from his Mass to every church in Rome, to symbolize the unity of the Body of Christ. The priest would then drop this into the Chalice at Mass. Over time, as the Church grew, this became impractical, and the custom changed to the priest breaking off a small piece of the Host from the Mass and dropping it in.

Why do they call them Extraordinary Ministers?
Priests and deacons are the Ordinary (usual) Ministers of the Eucharist, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders. However, in cases when the congregation is too large for them to distribute Communion in a timely manner, they are able to commission lay people to be Extraordinary (out-of-the-ordinary) Ministers of the Eucharist.

Sometimes, when we are running low on Hosts during the distribution of Communion, the priest breaks them in half. Am I only getting half as much Jesus?
No! Even small crumbs of the Eucharist are totally Jesus Christ, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. That is why priests so carefully clean the chalices and patens after Communion is distributed at each Mass.
CCC 1377: “Christ is present whole and entire in each of the species and whole and entire in each of their parts, in such a way that the breaking of the bread does not divide Christ.” (Cf. Council of Trent: DS 1641)

Why do we receive both the Bread and Wine at some Masses and only the Bread at others?
With sacraments, it is always important that the sensory signs (things we can see, hear, taste, touch, smell) point us to what they represent in a tangible way. At Communion, for example, the Bread and Wine are signs of the Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ and are therefore a more complete picture of the reality. At the same time, we must remember that Christ is truly and completely present, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in the consecrated Bread alone, or in the consecrated Wine alone. For this reason, it is acceptable to receive Communion under the species of Bread alone. There are even some circumstances under which a member of the faithful may receive the Wine alone (e.g., an allergy). Either way, the recipient would still receive Jesus completely.

CCC 1390: “Since Christ is sacramentally present under each of the species, communion under the species of bread alone makes it possible to receive all the fruit of Eucharistic grace. For pastoral reasons this manner of receiving communion has been legitimately established as the most common form in the Latin rite. But the sign of communion is more complete when given under both kinds, since in that form the sign of the Eucharistic meal appears more clearly.” (GIRM 240)

I see some people bowing, some genuflecting, and some doing nothing special at all before receiving Communion. Which is right?
The United States bishops have designated that the norm in this country is to bow one's head before receiving Communion. This is usually done as the person in front of you in line is receiving Communion.

GIRM 160: “When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister … When Holy Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood.”

Is it holier to receive Communion on my tongue?
In the United States, you may receive Communion either in your hand or on your tongue.

GIRM 160: “The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant.”

The decision of how to receive is based on your personal preference for whichever method will help you receive with the most reverent attitude towards the Blessed Sacrament.

“Since the question involves human attitudes, this mode of communion is bound up with the perceptiveness and preparation of the one receiving.” Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, Letter “En reponse a la demande.” 29 May 1969

Receiving the Body of Christ in your hands is the more anciently attested of the two practices, found in the writings of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem in the year 390:
“Approaching, therefore, come not with thy wrists extended, or thy fingers open; but make thy left hand as if a throne for thy right, which is on the eve of receiving the King. And having hollowed thy palm, receive the body of Christ, saying after it, ‘Amen.’ Then after thou hast with carefulness hallowed thine
eyes by the touch of the holy body, partake thereof; giving heed lest thou lose any of it; for what thou least is a loss to thee as it were from one of thine own members. For tell me, if anyone gave thee gold dust, wouldst thou not with all precaution keep it fast, being on thy guard against losing any of it, and suffering loss?” Catechetical Lectures 23:22

Some people prefer to receive Communion on the tongue to avoid handling the Blessed Sacrament any more than necessary, or to place a greater emphasis on the fact that they are receiving the sacrament, (rather than taking it for themselves.) Whichever way you decide to receive the sacrament, make sure you do it with the utmost reverence for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

Protestants are Christians, too. Why can't they receive Communion?
As the Body of Christ, the Eucharist symbolizes our unity; that is why we call it Communion. For this reason, only baptized Catholics in a state of grace may receive Communion. Even if a Protestant does believe that Jesus is present in the Eucharist in some form, the unfortunate reality is that our churches are divided. For them to receive the Eucharist would be a false symbol of a union that sadly does not exist. Communion is the ending point of unity and not a starting point.

There are some times when even Catholics may not receive Holy Communion. Mortal sin separates us from the Body of Christ so, because of this, those in a state of mortal sin may not come forward to receive. There are also other reasons to refrain from receiving Communion, such as not observing a one-hour fast before Communion, arriving at Mass after the Gospel has been read, or having already received twice in one day.

I am divorced. Should I go to Mass?
Yes! All baptized Catholics are required to attend Sunday Mass. Divorced Catholics may come to Mass and receive Communion. However, if you have remarried without obtaining an annulment for your previous marriage, you may not receive Communion when you come to Mass. You may make a Spiritual Communion. There is a special prayer included in “My Holy Mass Book” and “The Liturgy of the Eucharist” Home Lesson that can be used for this purpose.

How many times may I receive Communion in one day?
Twice. Typically, this may happen on a special occasion. For example, you may go to a wedding on a Saturday afternoon, and then attend Mass on Saturday evening to fulfill your Sunday obligation. In a case like this, you may receive Communion twice in the same day.

“A person who has received the Most Holy Eucharist may receive it again on the same day only during the celebration of the Eucharist in which the person participates.” CIC 917

In short, this means that one may receive Holy Communion for the second time in one day only if one attends the entirety of that Mass. The first time, however, could be in the context of a Communion service or under some other circumstances.

What is done with the leftover Precious Blood?
After Holy Communion has been distributed, whatever remains of the Precious Blood is consumed, usually by the priest, deacon, or Extraordinary Minister who distributed it. Then the chalice is purified with a little water, which is also consumed, to make sure that none of the Precious Blood is lost. The patens are purified by either carefully brushing the crumbs into a chalice, or by rinsing it with a small amount of water which is then poured into a chalice. This chalice is then purified, and the water is consumed.
If a crumb of a Host or some of the Precious Blood falls upon the floor, the place is to be washed with water, and then the water is to be rinsed down a special sink in the sacristy called the sacrarium. This sink drains directly into the ground, rather than the septic or sewer system, and thus reverently buries whatever traces might be remaining.

A Protestant friend told me that Catholics re-crucify Christ at each Mass. How can I answer him? Hebrews 7:27 says that Christ's sacrifice was "once for all." This is true; Christ's sacrifice on the cross was a one-time, historical event. However, since God exists outside of time, this event is always present to God. The Mass is a re-presentation of Jesus' one-time, historical sacrifice. Jesus is not sacrificed again at Mass, but His unique sacrifice is made real and present to us. The crucifixion is a divine reality that transcends space and time.

Why do some churches pray the Saint Michael Prayer after Mass? Pope Leo XIII composed the Saint Michael Prayer after receiving a vision of evil spirits attacking the Church. He then ordered it to be prayed after every Mass. While it is no longer required, many parishes still continue the custom of praying this prayer at the end of Mass.