Why Stay Away?

ENCOUNTERING HEAVEN ON EARTH

Companion booklet to The Mass Study Program
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Bishop Barron ends his talk on *The Mass* with three questions:

- Why would we stay away from the Holy Mountain?
- Why would we stay away from this reality?
- Why would we turn away from the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ?

If you are a Catholic parent, you have probably gotten push-back from your children about attending Mass every Sunday. These summary questions from Bishop Barron encapsulate the answers to complaints, such as “it’s boring” or “do we have to go to Mass, even when we’re on vacation?” or, the perennial favorite, “I don’t get anything out of the Mass.” If we’re honest with ourselves, questions like these have probably crept into our heads too at different points in our lives and during uninspiring homilies.

Part of the reason Bishop Barron created and filmed *The Mass* was to help Catholics understand what the Mass is really about. Once we truly understand and
believe, we will embrace the privilege of attending Mass and hopefully, be able to share that enthusiasm with others.

This supplementary booklet to Bishop Barron’s The Mass intends to answer some typical questions about our “obligation” to attend Sunday Mass. It also provides prayers associated with the Eucharist, either within the Mass or during times of Adoration. This booklet intends to be a quick reference for questions about the importance of the Mass, and also a resource for prayerful mediation on the most important and Blessed Sacrament.

Since the Mass is meant for the initiated (the baptized), it often has little meaning for non-Christians. Without faith in Jesus Christ as fully man and and fully God, our Divine Lord and Savior, the Mass can become irrelevant. Often resistance to Mass attendance among the baptized means that they do not fully understand or accept the Catholic faith and the revelation of God in Christ or believe that the truths of revelation make little if any relevant difference in their lives. In these cases, the remedy may come from people and places outside the Sunday Mass first, where these reluctant members can meet the Lord anew and be re-evangelized.
Holy Communion is the shortest and surest way to Heaven. There are others, innocence, for instance, but that is for little children; penance, but we are afraid of it; generous endurance of the trials of life, but when they come we weep and ask to be spared. Once for all, beloved children, the surest, easiest, shortest way is by the Eucharist. It is so easy to approach the holy table, and there we taste the joys of Paradise.

- Pope St. Pius X
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QUESTIONS

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The term “Mass” is derived from the concluding Latin words of the Roman Rite: “Ite, missa est” (“Go; it is the dismissal”). The later Latin word missa corresponds to the older Latin word missio. In antiquity, missa simply meant “dismissal.” With Christian usage, however, it gradually took on a deeper meaning. The word missa has come to imply a mission, going out into the world filled with the Holy Spirit after being nurtured and fed by the Lord at the Mass.

The Mass holds the place of the supreme act of worship in the Church, using the highly-ritualized Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Word includes God’s call to us through the Scriptures and our response to this call. The Liturgy of the Eucharist re-presents Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection and incorporates our gratitude for this saving sacrifice.
If the 2,000-year wisdom of the Church tells us to go, there must be some very good reasons. First and foremost, Jesus told us that if we love him, we will follow his commandments. At the Last Supper, Jesus “took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.’ ” (Luke 22:19)

Consecrating bread and wine and consuming the Body and Blood of Christ is a direct command from him, and cannot be ignored by anyone who calls himself a disciple. Participation in the Eucharist should give rise to an increase in the works of mercy, which is the surest sign that our relationship with God in Christ is authentic and true.

The Second Vatican Council called the Eucharist the “source and summit of the Christian faith,” which, in
other words, means that all we are as Catholic Christians is encapsulated within the Mass.

*Participation in the communal celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church.* (CCC 2182)
Why does attendance on Sunday matter? Can’t we just go during the week on the day that’s most convenient?

While daily Mass allows participants to praise God and receive the Eucharist more often, we are only expected to attend Mass on Sundays. As the Christian way to “Keep Holy the Sabbath” (4th Commandment) and to “Do this in memory of me” (Luke 22:19), we gather on the Lord’s Day (the day of his Resurrection) to offer right praise to the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier–Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The early Church, made up primarily of Israelites who believed the Messiah had come, transferred the traditional Sabbath worship to Sunday, the most “sacred day” because that’s when Jesus rose from the dead. “Keeping the Sabbath” calls for rest from all work and a focus on God and family. The Church encourages us to keep the Sabbath by attending Mass and avoiding unnecessary activity.
While most Christians profess the same Creed, we are not fully united and in agreement about Sunday worship and some other details. Some denominations profess beliefs about the Presence of Christ in the bread and wine that represent partial expressions of what the Church holds to be true, while others view it as entirely symbolic and metaphorical. When we receive “communion,” we are professing unity with the beliefs of that religion and with the participants at that particular service. For this reason, it remains problematic for a Protestant Christian to receive Holy Communion at a Catholic Mass or for a Catholic to participate in a communion service at a Protestant church.

We pray and hope for Christian unity to become a reality, but for now, we need to be honest about with whom we are truly in “communion.” Not receiving communion at other Christian services in no way hinders our ability to
converse and learn from each other, building positive and holy relationships.

As Catholics, Mass attendance unites us within our own parish, universally with Catholics around the world, and supernaturally with all the angels and saints in heaven. There is strength in numbers and Mass attendance for each Catholic contributes to this unity and strength.
Yes, you can pray and interact with God anywhere. “God speaks through all creation,” Bishop Barron says. He goes on to say that God spoke more clearly through Israel and their Scriptures, and that he speaks most fully through his Son, Jesus Christ, God made man (i.e., the Incarnation). As St. Paul said:

“In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe.” - Heb 1:1-2

There are many spiritual benefits to Mass attendance. Jesus has promised to be with you if you pray in the company of others when he said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst” (Mt 18:20). Jesus wants us to be in community, not in isolation, and to worship God the Father along with him.
That is part of the reason why the Church is called the Body of Christ.

Since God doesn’t need our praise, he takes it and gives it back to us enhanced, providing spiritual food in the form of his only Son. There is no substitute and no greater way to be united with the King and Lord of all than through the Mass.

Some Christians may ask people if they have a “personal relationship with Christ?” What can be more personal than bringing the Lord—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity—into our own bodies?
The Mass is in the Bible! As most Christians know, it was instituted at the Last Supper. Also, in Luke’s story of the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24), we can clearly see the concepts of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist at play. First, Christ explains the Scriptures to his companions as they walk along the road, and then he breaks bread with them once they get to Emmaus. His companions do not recognize him until he takes the bread, blesses it and gives it to them. Then, Christ “vanished from their sight,” just as we do not see him in the consecrated bread and wine.

In two books of the Bible—Exodus and Revelation—we can recognize many details of the structure of the Mass, albeit in an evolved way from the temple worship of the Hebrews and in an earthly version of the eternal, heavenly worship.
A summary of the rubrics of temple worship for the Israelites can be found in Exodus chapter 40. So many of the rituals find their place in the Mass today:

• Set up the tabernacle...Put the ark of the covenant in it, and screen off the ark with the veil (40:3): The Catholic tabernacle contains the Body of Christ, which fulfills and includes all the items in the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant: manna, the tablets of the law and the staff of Aaron, the high priest. Jesus is the bread from heaven, the perfect person who actually did fulfill all the laws of Moses, and the eternal high priest.

• Put the golden altar of incense in front of the ark of the covenant (40:5): the sacrifice of the Mass centers around the altar and incense is used often.

• Set up the court round about (40:8): All members of the “court,” the followers of Christ, are gathered around the altar.

• Anoint the altar for burnt offerings (40:10): All altars in Catholics churches are anointed with oil when the church or chapel is first consecrated at its dedication.

• Then bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting. Clothe Aaron with the sacred vestments and anoint him, thus consecrating him
as my priest (40:12-13). As you have anointed their father, anoint them also as my priests. Thus, by being anointed, shall they receive a perpetual priesthood throughout all future generations (40:15): Priests are anointed at ordination and retain their vocation throughout their whole lives.

- Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle (40:34).

The Mass, as Bishop Barron said, is the closest thing to heaven on earth. In fact, when Scott Hahn, a former evangelical minister, attended his first Mass he said that he saw the Book of Revelation unfolding before him, and felt as if he were participating in the heavenly liturgy. He later converted to Catholicism about wrote a book called The Lamb’s Supper: The Mass as Heaven on Earth.

Here are a few verses from Revelation that we can recognize in the Mass:

**REVELATION 4:8**

The four living creatures, each of them with six wings, were covered with eyes inside and out. Day and night they do not stop exclaiming:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come.”
Then I saw standing in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures and the elders a Lamb—that seemed to have been slain. He had seven horns and seven eyes; these are the [seven] spirits of God sent out into the whole world. When he took it [the book], the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each of the elders held a harp and gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of the holy ones. They sang a new hymn:

“Worthy are you to receive the scroll and to break open its seals, for you were slain and with your blood you purchased for God those from every tribe and tongue, people and nation. You made them a kingdom and priests for our God, and they will reign on earth.’ I looked again and heard the voices of many angels who surrounded the throne and the living creatures and the elders.”

The four living creatures answered, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

After this I heard what sounded like the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying:

“Alleluia! Salvation, glory, and might belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments.”
The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying,

“Amen. Alleluia.”

A voice coming from the throne said:

“Praise our God, all you his servants, [and] you who revere him, small and great.”

Then I heard something like the sound of a great multitude or the sound of rushing water or mighty peals of thunder, as they said:

“All hail! The Lord has established his reign, [our] God, the almighty.”

Then the angel said to me,

“Write this: Blessed are those who have been called to the wedding feast of the Lamb.”

And he said to me,

“These words are true; they come from God.”

REVELATION 22:1-3

Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water, sparkling like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the
Lamb down the middle of its street. On either side of the river grew the tree of life that produces fruit twelve times a year, once each month; the leaves of the trees serve as medicine for the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

For a complete summary of how the Mass is based in Scripture, go to: Catholic-resources.org/Bible/Biblical-Mass-Texts.htm
If someone asks you this question, it is important to understand the level of faith he or she has. Often it is a lack of belief in the Divinity of Jesus Christ that impedes embracing of the Mass. Once we accept this truth, the glory and privilege of the Mass will flood our body and soul.

For baptized Catholics, there may be other reasons they stay away. Here is quick summary of what you miss by skipping the Mass:

• Being in communion with fellow believers and with God, confirming that you are not alone in this world.

• A time to listen to God speak the most important story of our lives, which answers the question “Why am I here?” and “Where am I going?”
• A time to give right praise to God, not because he needs it, but because we need it to remember and thank God for breathing us into life and sustaining us each and every minute of our lives. God is loving the universe into being constantly, and in response we offer him our worship and gratitude.

• A temporary respite from the vagaries of a world that is passing away, so as to experience a foreshadowing and foretaste of heaven that will never pass away.

• The greatest intimacy with God that we can receive on earth through receipt of the Real Presence of Jesus at Communion.

• A clean heart through remission of all our venial sins. (Note: Only the Sacrament of Reconciliation can cleanse us of mortal sin.)
All priests act in *persona Christi* (in the person of Christ) when they celebrate Mass. The Order of the Mass is the same all over the world, so if the priest is offering the Mass as the Church intends, his presence does not have any impact on the true meaning and benefits of the Mass.

For all sacraments, the Church teaches that they are effective by virtue of the saving work of Christ—“they are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work” (CCC 1127). The Mass, or any other sacrament, is “not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God” (CCC 1128). So, we can be assured that the bread and wine are transformed sacramentally into the Body and Blood of Christ as long as the celebrant is a validly ordained priest.

As humans, we enjoy the experience of the Mass much more when we hear an inspiring homily or participate in
great music. But even if these are not present at the Mass, it remains Christ’s gift to us—a gift that is given to us in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood.

We are all accustomed to being spectators of various forms of entertainment, many of which take place on a stage, but the Mass is not a form of religious entertainment. Sitting at Mass as in an audience, some mistakenly confuse the altar or ambo with a stage. The Mass is not a performance, nor is it entertainment. It is not intended to amuse or pacify us, and the ministers are not actors paid to win our applause.

As for the homily, most priests or deacons will in good conscience aim to connect the Scripture readings with our human experience. Some priests or deacons are better preachers than others. If you are struggling to appreciate the homily, focus on the part that relates most directly to the Scriptures just read. Then after Mass, you can re-read the same Scripture and pray over it, asking the Holy Spirit to enlighten you further. In addition, try to hear God speaking to you in the readings directly, and in the prayers and rituals of the Mass. Rise above the common human tendency to judge someone or something based on a single negative experience. Look for the aspects of the Mass that transcend human personalities, which are usually the same aspects that transcend time and space.
If I don’t receive the Eucharist, am I still in communion with the Church community?

All are encouraged to receive the Eucharist at every Mass. The only reasons why you should not take communion are: (1) you are not Catholic or (2) you are in the state of unconfessed, mortal sin or (3) you have not kept the hour-long fast before reception of the Eucharist.

In the first and third cases, you can still participate in the community of Christian believers by listening and responding to the Scripture readings, and by praying the common prayers, such as the Our Father. Spiritual Communion is possible by uniting yourself in prayer to the sacrifice of the altar, even if one does not receive the Blessed Sacrament.

In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and
so acquire a new value. Christ’s sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering. (CCC 1368)

All believing, baptized Christians are united in Christ as members of his Mystical Body as St. Paul says in Galatians: “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (3:27-28).

The Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christian, but do not profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor of Peter.” Those “who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church.” (CCC 838)

If you are living in mortal sin (“sin whose object is a grave matter [Ten Commandments] and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent”-CCC 1857-58), pray to gain a heart and mind for repentance, then have recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Mortal sin separates us from God in all ways, not just at Communion time, and could do so eternally, if true repentance and forgiveness are not sought.
The Church wants the local culture to be present in the Mass in terms of language, music, and customs. While the rubrics (rules) of the Mass as presented in the Roman Missal are non-negotiables, these same rubrics will provide instructions and parameters regarding options within the Liturgy that clergy can choose to best respond to the particular needs of their communities. As it says in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “It is fitting that liturgical celebration tends to express itself in the culture of the people where the Church finds herself, though without being submissive to it.” (CCC 1207)

Some examples of this diversity include:

- Reciting the Apostle’s Creed or the Nicene Creed
- Penitential Rite can be with the Confiteor (i.e., “I confess to Almighty God, and to you my brothers...”
and sisters, that I have greatly sinned ...” or without it

- Type and style of music and instrumentation
- The recitation or singing of certain prayers
- Use of incense
- Use of bells at the First and Second Epiclesis
- The priest can give the faithful an introduction to the Mass of the day after the initial Greeting, to the Liturgy of the Word before the readings, and to the Eucharistic Prayer before the Preface; he may also make concluding comments regarding the entire Mass before the Dismissal.

- Communion under one or both species (Host only or Host and Cup)

With all these options, it could seem that the Mass varies between churches. However, most of the Order of the Mass is constant and transubstantiation occurs at every valid Consecration, so the key mystery of the Mass remains the same everywhere.

In the liturgy, above all that of the sacraments, there is an immutable part, a part that is divinely instituted and of which the Church is the guardian, and parts that can be changed, which the Church has the power and on occasion also the duty to adapt to the cultures of recently
ADORATION of the
BLESSED SACRAMENT
Parishes are increasingly making Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament available to their communities. Some Catholics may not have much experience with Adoration. Here are some suggestions for incorporating Adoration into your prayer life—another way to commune with the Real Presence outside of Mass.

Adoration commences when the consecrated Host is placed in a monstrance (an open or transparent receptacle, often elevated on a stand, in which the consecrated Host is exposed) and displayed publicly for prayer and adoration. It is a time of quiet prayer and unity with the Lord. There are no prescribed rituals for Adoration, except a reverent silence and appropriate acknowledgment of Jesus among us (e.g., genuflecting on both knees). It is often recommended that you spend an hour at Adoration; however, any amount of time is infinitely valuable.

Adoration is a perfect occasion to enter into the prayer of contemplation. One simple approach to contemplative prayer is to speak from your heart to Jesus, and then quiet your mind and body to listen for his wisdom and love. Allow enough time for listening—many contemplatives spend most of their time before the Blessed Sacrament just listening. St. John Vianney said of his time praying before the tabernacle: “I look at him and he looks at me.”

Contemplation is a gaze of faith, fixed on Jesus. This focus on Jesus is a renunciation of self. His gaze purifies
our heart; the light of the countenance of Jesus illumines the eyes of our heart and teaches us to see everything in the light of his truth and his compassion for all men. Contemplation also turns its gaze on the mysteries of the life of Christ. Thus, it learns the “interior knowledge of our Lord,” the more to love him and follow him.³

Any form of prayer is appropriate during Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament: praise, thanksgiving, repentance, and offering intercessions for others. Here are a few suggestions to consider:

• **Praise:** Offer praise to God by reading the Psalms that are Songs of Praise (e.g., 23, 56, 95, 98, 100, 117, 139, 145, and 150)

  I adore You, Lord and Creator, hidden in the Most Blessed Sacrament. I adore You for all the works of Your hands, that reveal to me so much wisdom, goodness and mercy, O Lord. And although You have hidden Yourself and concealed your beauty, my eye, enlightened by faith, reaches You and my soul recognizes its Creator, its Highest Good, and my heart is completely immersed in prayer of adoration.
  
  –St. Faustina

St. Francis of Assisi taught his community to praise the Lord in front of the Blessed Sacrament with this prayer, which can be repeated over and over again as a type of chant:
“I adore you, O Christ, present here and in all the churches of the world, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.”

- **Scripture:** Look at the readings for the day or for the upcoming Sunday liturgy. Be aware of anything in the passage that stands out for you. Then ask the Lord to enlighten your heart on those passages. Remember to sit quietly and listen for his response!

- **Pray the Rosary:** As we know, Mary is the perfect disciple and, as his mother, is united with Jesus in a uniquely special way. St. John Paul II wrote: “...is not the enraptured gaze of Mary as she contemplated the face of the newborn Christ and cradled him in her arms that unparalleled model of love which should inspire us every time we receive Eucharistic communion?”

- **Repentance:** Pray the Penitential Psalms (6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, and 142) or recite the “Jesus Prayer” continuously: “Lord Jesus, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me a sinner.” Spending a short time at the tabernacle or in Adoration before you receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation can prepare your heart for repentance and help you make an honest confession.

- **Liturgy of the Hours:** Also known as the Divine
Office, the Liturgy of the Hours is the daily prayer of the Church that all priests are required to pray and that lay people are welcome to use as well. These prayers mark and sanctify the five “hours” of each day and serve as a meditation on the mystery of Christ. Each of the hours includes selections from the Psalms and Scripture and can be prayed during Adoration or in any other place. The hours are defined as: Office of Readings, Morning Prayer, Daytime Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Night Prayer.

• *Lives of the Saints*: Most holy men and women have a strong devotion to the Eucharist and many have composed prayers of Adoration. Reading their writings or biographies and joining with them in praise of God can enhance time spent in Adoration.

> “When you have received Him, stir up your heart to do Him homage; speak to Him about your spiritual life, gazing upon Him in your soul where He is present for your happiness; welcome Him as warmly as possible, and behave outwardly in such a way that your actions may give proof to all of His Presence.”

–St. Francis de Sales

> “What wonderful majesty! What stupendous condescension! O sublime humility! That the Lord of the whole universe, God and the Son of God,
should humble Himself like this under the form of a little bread, for our salvation.”
–St. Francis of Assisi

• Intercessions: Bring prayers of petition to the Lord for friends and family and anyone for whom you have promised to pray.
ANIMA CHRISTI
St. Ignatius of Loyola

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.
Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.

Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O good Jesus, hear me.
Within Thy wounds hide me.
Suffer me not to be separated from Thee.

From the malignant enemy, defend me.
In the hour of my death, call me.
And bid me come to Thee.
That with Thy saints I may praise Thee.
Forever and ever. Amen.
PRAYER AFTER HOLY COMMUNION
St. Padre Pio

Stay with me, Lord, for it is necessary to have You present so that I do not forget You. You know how easily I abandon You.
Stay with me, Lord, because I am weak and I need Your strength, that I may not fall so often.
Stay with me, Lord, for You are my life and without You I am without fervor.
Stay with me, Lord, for You are my light and without You I am in darkness.

Stay with me, Lord, to show me Your will.
Stay with me, Lord, so that I hear Your voice and follow You.
Stay with me, Lord, for I desire to love You very much and always be in Your company.
Stay with me, Lord, if You wish me to be faithful to You.
Stay with me, Lord, as poor as my soul is I want it to be a place of consolation for You, a nest of Love.

Stay with me, Lord, because at the hour of my death, I want to remain united to You, if not by Communion, at least by grace and love.

Stay with me, Lord, for it is You alone I look for, Your Love, Your Grace, Your Will, Your Heart, Your Spirit, because I love You and ask no other reward.
but to love You more and more.  
With a firm love, I will love You with all my heart 
while on earth and continue to love You perfectly 
during all eternity.

Amen.

PRAYER OF BLESSED JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

I place myself in the presence of Him, in whose Incarnate Presence I am before. I place myself there.

I adore Thee, O my Saviour, present here as God and man, in soul and body, in true flesh and blood.

I acknowledge and confess that I kneel before that Sacred Humanity, which was conceived in Mary’s womb and lay in Mary’s bosom; which grew up to man’s estate, and by the Sea of Galilee called the Twelve, wrought miracles, and spoke words of wisdom and peace; which in due season hung on the cross, lay in the tomb, rose from the dead, and now reigns in heaven.

I praise, and bless, and give myself wholly to Him, Who is the true Bread of my soul, and my everlasting joy.

2. “Guidelines for the Reception of Holy Communion,” USCCB (cites Canon 844 and 916).
