

What We Believe...



Why We Believe It...

## **Twenty-six Miles by Joe Sixpack**

In the early part of the twentieth century, a missionary priest in Jamaica was riding his horse drawn carriage to the next place where he was to celebrate Mass. With several miles yet to go on this hot, sultry day, he encountered a youth who stopped him to ask, “Father, what time is Holy Mass?”

The missionary stopped his carriage. The native youth was about eighteen years old, a lad he’d recalled seeing at various times in his little church. “Are you going to Holy Mass?” the priest asked.

“Yes, Father. Am I too late?”

“Are you going to Montego Bay?”

“Yes, Father.”

“How far have you walked already?”

“From over the mountain, eight miles back.”

“You are walking thirteen miles to Holy Mass?”

“Yes, Father, and I’m fasting for Holy Communion.”

“Do you intend to walk back home today?”

“Yes, Father.”

The missionary invited the boy to climb into the seat beside him, and they rode together on to the mission church five miles away.

We could learn a lot from that Jamaican lad. The boy had walked twenty-six miles in the hot and humid tropical environment of Jamaica, going from home and back, just to participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass to meet his Sunday Mass obligation. He could have been excused from the Mass obligation because of the hardship in getting there. Yet, not only did he put forth the heroic effort to attend Mass, but he was also fasting for Communion—a fast required in those days from midnight the night before. Would that we all had such love and devotion to Our Lord and the sacrifices He made!

We think we are good and devout Catholics if we attend the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass a couple of times a month. We grumble and feel inconvenienced that we have to interrupt our weekend activities to attend Mass. Many of us also ignore the simple one hour fast required for receiving Holy Communion.

Perhaps some of you grow weary of my frequent articles about devotion to the Mass and respect for the Holy Eucharist, but this is something we have to focus on. As Pope Pius XII said after the Second World War, we have lost our sense of sin...and many of us—perhaps even most of us—commit sin every week through our carelessness when it comes to Mass and Communion. So let’s spend a moment looking at some of the ways we sin or disrespect the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Communion, and Our Lord’s redeeming sacrifices.

It is indeed an obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation under pain of mortal sin. If we commit mortal sin by our failure to attend Mass, we can’t go to Communion again the next time we attend Mass unless we first go to confession. Otherwise, we are committing the additional

mortal sin of sacrilege, and we need to recall that to die in a state of mortal sin is to condemn ourselves to eternal punishment.

Although the Church requires Mass attendance under pain of mortal sin, one may be excused from attendance for some grave reasons. For example, if you're too sick to get out of bed, you're certainly too sick to go to Mass. Another example of a grave reason that would excuse you from the Mass obligation would be to care for someone else who is too ill to attend Mass—perhaps your child or an elderly person.

Back in the days when our Jamaican lad was fasting for Communion, the fast was from midnight the night before. Since Vatican II, the Church has reduced that fast to only one hour prior to receiving Communion, but still required under pain of sin. The only things allowed that don't violate the fast are water and *prescription* medication. So forget about your breath mints, chewing gum, or any sort of snack. I see parents all the time bringing "finger food" for their children to occupy them during Mass. It's bad enough that they do that rather than beginning the discipline of teaching their children about participating in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, but from time to time I see them sharing in their children's finger food before they themselves receive Communion. Oops! That's a no-no.

Another mortal sin observed in parishes regularly is when people leave immediately after receiving Holy Communion; that is, leaving before Mass is over. Mass isn't over until the priest gives the final blessing. To leave immediately after Communion on a week day Mass is terribly disrespectful to Our Lord and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, but to leave immediately after Communion on a Sunday or Holy Day is a mortal sin. Why? Well, if you leave before the final blessing, you have failed to meet your Sunday or Holy Day obligation because you have not attended Mass...only part of It. And whether it be a Sunday Mass or week day Mass, it's like saying, "Okay, Lord, I realize You're representing Your sacrifice on the cross and all, but I've really go this other thing I have to do, so adios." Can you imagine John walking away from the cross and Mary at the crucifixion because he had something else he wanted to do? Or because he wanted to beat the traffic in the parking lot? Really? How much difference can it make to wait another five minutes? For the sake of propriety and respect, we really shouldn't exit the church before the priest, but to leave before the Mass has ended with the final blessing on a Sunday or Holy Day of Obligation is sinful because, in effect, we haven't been to Mass at all.

The other day, I witnessed an adolescent girl receive Communion in her hand, then play with It as she walked away before receiving It into her mouth. Receiving Communion in the hand is legitimate, but you are obligated to put Our Lord into your mouth immediately prior to leaving the presence of the priest, deacon or extraordinary minister. Communion in the hand began as an abuse, as the Church never allowed such a thing to take place. This abuse began in the United States, initiated by some who thought that after Vatican II virtually anything was allowed. By the time Rome found out about the abuse, it was already so wide spread that to try to stop it would have caused a lot of confusion and turmoil. Resultantly, the Church very reluctantly made the practice legitimate with the idea of gradually phasing it out later. Learning about this during the course of my conversion to Catholicism, and knowing the only reason a priest's hands are worthy to hold the Body of Christ is because of the anointing his hands receive during his ordination, I resolved to never receive Communion any way except on the tongue. Perhaps you would want to reconsider this practice yourself. As St. Paul points out in his writings, not all things that are permissible are necessarily good.

The abuses heaped against the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass are often done by people who really don't know any better. Others are simply careless. This comes from the lack of proper catechesis. Bishop Sheridan of Colorado Springs points out in an August 2015 article in his diocesan paper that "there are many reasons why the Gospel of Jesus Christ is still dismissed by the majority of those who call themselves Catholic. Not least among those reasons is the failure of catechists in the post-Vatican II years to announce the Good News in all its power and fullness." Of course, to help correct that is the reason for What We Believe...Why We Believe It.

Go to [JoeSixpackAnswers.com](http://JoeSixpackAnswers.com) to learn more.