

By
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Ancient African Martyrs

During the cruel persecution of Emperor Maximian (AD 286-305), forty-nine Christians had assembled in a private house to assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which was said by the priest Saturninus. Roman soldiers broke into the house during the Mass, arrested those who were present and brought them before the public tribunal. By order of the judge, they were sent in chains to Carthage, the capital city of the province, where they were again examined and cruelly tortured. Being asked by the Proconsul why they had assembled together in spite of the decrees of the Emperor, St. Saturninus answered in the name of the rest, *“It is because we are not allowed to be absent from the Sacred Mysteries. This is the commandment and teaching of the Divine Law. This Law we faithfully observe, and for it we are ready to lay down our lives.”*

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “The precept of the Church specifies the law of the Lord more precisely: ‘On Sundays and holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass.’ The precept of participating in the Mass is satisfied by assistance at a Mass which is celebrated anywhere in the Catholic rite either on the holy day or on the evening of the preceding day.”¹ The third commandment (which is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is referring to) also obligates us to avoid unnecessary servile work.

From my observations, Catholics in general don’t have a problem with avoiding unnecessary servile work on Sunday. The problem seems to be that they quite often use this day of rest to also avoid going to Mass! You might say, “Joe, the only time we can take the kids to see grandma is on Sunday, and she lives eighty miles away.” Or, “But, Joe, Sunday is the only time we can do things as a family.” Or, “Joe, the only time I can go fishing is on Sunday, and they only bite in the early morning.” That doesn’t matter, because missing Mass on Sunday or a holy day of obligation is a mortal sin? Which is more important? Seeing grandma, family outings and fishing, or spending eternity in hell? Missing Mass is not an option!

Every Catholic knows that sins come in two varieties: mortal and venial—biggies and little ones. But I don’t think modern Catholics really understand them. In the ‘50s, Pope Pius XII told us we had lost our sense of sin. He was right, and the correctness of what he said becomes more and more evident all the time. So let’s do a little hypothetical together that will help us better understand the gravity of our sin.

Let’s say you were somehow transported to Jerusalem in AD 33. You’re there to witness Jesus make the ultimate sacrifice for everyone in the world by dying for the sins of mankind. In order

¹Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2180

to loosen His tongue and make Him more amenable to Pilate, the governor orders Jesus flogged. Two brutish Roman soldiers begin to beat Jesus with whips that have sharp stones and glass at the ends of the leather strips to cut deeply into flesh. They're good at their work, so they zealously beat Him until he is one open, gaping wound.

Then you find yourself standing in the place where He is about to be judged. Most of the crowd is shouting to Pilate, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" They're apparently a bloodthirsty crowd, because crucifixion is a very bloody, painful and cruel way to die. Yielding to their demands, Pilate orders Jesus crucified.

Now you're following Jesus through the streets of Jerusalem as He carries His cross. He falls three times under its weight, and the soldiers begin beating Him again to motivate the "criminal" to get back up and walk. But He has been beaten so badly that He can't carry the cross anymore, so it is carried for Him as He finishes that "longest mile" to Calvary.

At the place of execution, they lay Him down atop the cross on the ground and begin driving cruel spikes into His flesh. They have stripped Him naked and raised the cross so everyone can watch Him die. But they're not content with merely watching to satisfy their bloodlust. Some shout at and mock Him. Others throw mud and garbage and animal feces on Him. A soldier urinates on the cross, causing some to wet His feet.

Now you realize that as you watched the mocking, feces throwing and urinating, you've been looking... into a mirror the entire time. That is what a mortal sin looks like. It makes you a cruel antichrist.

When you commit a mortal sin, you're telling Jesus you hate Him. A mortal sin is committed with cold, calculated callousness. Until you make a good confession, it places you outside the Church. This is why when we make a confession we have to have a firm purpose of amendment not to sin again. It's that serious.

When you cavalierly miss Mass, especially without a second thought, you make yourself no better than the people who treated Jesus so cruelly the day they murdered Him. If you have no choice but to miss Mass—due to health issues or taking care of a sick person, for example—you don't commit a sin. But when you fail to go to Mass and you could have gone, you are telling Jesus you hate Him, mock Him, throw feces on Him, and urinate on Him. You become an antichrist.

By the way, if you've missed Mass without grave cause, don't bother to present yourself for Communion until you make a good confession, lest you compound your situation by committing the additional mortal sin of sacrilege.

Admittedly, I realize some Catholics reading this may have only just now learned what I'm saying here. Catechesis the last sixty years has been so namby-pamby that few Catholics know and understand the most basic tenets of our faith. That can be remedied, though, in a way that is both pleasurable and not at all boring. Here's how. Visit JoeSixpackAnswers.com and sign up for a free email course, with a short lesson arriving in your inbox every three days. You'll also begin to receive personal invitations to free weekly webinars I host about the faith. You can also begin to learn how to apply the Catholic faith to the every day situations in your life by listening to The Cantankerous Catholic podcast. You can find it on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher or at Cantankerous-Catholic.com.