

## **Mass Matters by Fr. Bausch**

### Chapter 4 - Making a Statement

Three reasons why going to church makes a statement.

**First:** The Eucharist is an invitation to socially experience the shared presence of God. (Richard Rohr)

- Why sing a hymn with everyone else when I prefer the experience of singing alone?
- Why pray a psalm with the People of God when I get more out of praying in the privacy of my room?

Because in Catholicism, joining together to pray, coming from all corners of our towns and villages, is an enactment of what it means to belong to the Catholic Church, to begin with. To pray together, to worship together, this is what it means to belong to the Church.

Going to Mass is not fundamentally about my unique spiritual experience, but about my giving over part of myself in love to all other believers so that together we can manifest Christ's love for the world. Even if I'm distracted by work, dealing with a sick toddler, or more interested in watching a football game later in the afternoon, my presence on Sunday is necessary for the Church's mission of divine love. The Church is 'Catholic' because her destiny is to gather the human family into the peace of Christ's love.

#### The Competitions

**Second,** Catholics are no longer an identifiable cohort; they now live in a thoroughly secular environment. Therefore, it is important that you understand when you do "keep the Sabbath" you are making a counter cultural statement. The Sabbath or Sunday concept as 'making a stand' goes back to our Hebrew forebears. As resident slaves when they were in captivity in Babylon...they rebelled. In accordance with their covenant, they declared they wanted one day without work to worship their God. When asked why they needed one day of rest, the Hebrews answered, "To remind ourselves that we are more than workers."

#### More Than

**Third:** Our forebears were making a statement: "We are more than workers." How desperately we need to embrace that truth! That phrase should be the first thing we say when we wake up. It should be enshrined in our hearts and placed over the entrance of every church. We are more than. That's why we're here in church: to affirm this truth.

In today's society, that means a great deal: it's our contribution to generalization. Although going to church may be routine, you should consider that you are making that defining statement: "I do not live by bread alone, even if my lifestyle sometimes betrays me." All day long we are identified and evaluated by where we live, what we do, how we dress, look, smell, perform, and produce. Going to church is our statement that shouts, "We are more than these things." In short, going to church is a statement that "it's not all about me, but about us and who we are."

Do we think of any of these things when we come to church? Hardly! We're worried about the pot roast in the oven or who has Mass today. We are here because we are "more than." Maybe going to church is the only time and place we can state this truth so publicly.

#### Thinking Globally

Every Sunday the Catholic (universal) Church all over the world gathers her children to the Eucharist. The people of the continents, the islands, and the earth's four corners respond. The high and mighty, rich and poor, inhabitants of the cities and slums, well and sick, the free and the persecuted all answer the call. Here we pause to consider that we need to remember this last category. The people in

Yemen, Egypt, Nigeria, Syria and other places go to church with deep apprehension and terrible fears of murderous attacks on their minds because it's happened so often before.

These people worship, if possible, in a church, but for some in secretly designated homes, farmhouses, hidden cellars, or camouflaged hideouts. Those in prisons of the world await one special prisoner who has managed to scrounge a piece of bread and a bit of wine and then sneaks it into the squalor of their cells where he celebrates Mass with them. All over the globe on any given Sunday millions of us answer that summons to renew the face of the earth. Going to church is a statement that says we are in solidarity with the persecuted Church.

Church is "*boring*." So this is too many times. "Boring" is the word. But so is getting dressed, making the coffee, doing the laundry, the daily grinding commute every day to work or school, but it is these stable dependable routines and rituals which anchor our lives and keep them from chaos. They are the taken for granted boundaries that keep us safe. It's only when you can't dress yourself or make your own coffee anymore that you realize how much you miss the boredom.

## Discussion Questions

**Ponder this:** Here's a dozen reasons someone collected about why people stay away from church.

1. I stay away from church because it rains.      You go to work in the rain.
2. I stay away from church because it's hot.      So is the golf course.
3. I stay away from church because it's cold.      It's warm and friendly inside.
4. I stay away from church because I am poor.      There is no admission charge.
5. I stay away from church because I am rich.      We'll take care of that.
6. I stay away from church because no one invited me. People go to the movies without being asked.
7. I stay away from church because I have children.      God loves them.
8. I stay away from church because there are hypocrites there. You associate with them daily.
9. I stay away from church because my clothes are not expensive.      It's not a fashion show.
10. I stay away from church because the church always wants money.      So does the government.
11. I stay away from church because I have company.      They will admire your loyalty, whether you bring them along or ask them to wait until you get back.
12. I stay away from church because I have plenty of time to go later.      Are you sure?

1. How and where can we invite people to join us at St Francis of Assisi? What do we say to people when they ask us about St. Francis? Are we excited about our parish?

2. A follow up to Chapter One comments - In what ways can we be more welcoming to visitors?