

Dear All,

As promised, we begin to talk about ‘going to Mass after Vatican II’. Let’s start with the ‘end’ first: *why?*

As trite and flatfooted as it sounds, we go to Mass because we are Catholics; because we belong to the Catholic Church (not another one) and because, in a certain sense, the Church belongs to us. As we have lived through these Covid days we are aware that the Church – and Mass – is not something foreign to us; it *is* us. Even if we do not miss Mass, finding a Mass on the net has a familiar feel that stirs something like ‘interest’ or ‘curiosity’ or ‘affection’ in us. We pause to ‘look at’ it like we check out a family album we haven’t seen in years.

We ‘go to Mass’ to *be* at it. Mass is where our Catholicism finds its most unmistakable expression. Catholic social teaching or sexual morality or personal morality may or may not be a major definer of my identity as a voter, as spouse or a friend. But at Mass, my Catholic identity becomes the thing that is most obvious about me – to others and to myself.

Think about how smug you feel when the guy behind you comes out with a loud *and also with you*; you just know that it’s been awhile since he last warmed a pew. There is an easy familiarity (family feel) that goes with knowing when to sit, stand, kneel (this drives Protestants crazy), when to sign yourself and where and how and how to hold your hands for Communion. And you have to be a real insider to notice – when you’re on the road – that they do things differently somewhere else; and you have to be an insider at home when you feel close enough to your own pastor to question him about why this is so.

As I read this at the half-way point, it sounds a little (a little!?) elitist, almost like a secret handshake. So, let me back up and point out that none of us made himself or herself Catholic. Even those who ‘convert’ in maturer years, know that this is something that they were drawn to, not something that they just picked off the shelf at the religious supermarket. The rest of us are ‘cradle Catholics’; Catholicism came to us a gift from those who loved us earliest and best. It is no credit to us that we are such; only that we are smart enough to remain such.

But it is no small thing to belong to (apart from Judaism) the oldest religious body in human history – sharing one hierarchy, one body of faith, one pattern of worship, one hope of glory and one promise of forgiveness. These identifying traits of the Catholic are not all equally important to all of us all the time, but they are like the backs of our heads, without them our brains fall out and our faces fall off!

Some things we do because we can, because of who we are and that is important to us at some level.

We will say more on this as we go ahead.

Really and truly and universally (Catholic-ly) yours,

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