

The Centrality of Mass

Fr Paddy Carberry SJ, former editor of *The Messenger* and director of the Apostleship of Prayer, now a publisher at Messenger Publications, writes about the Pope's intention for this month.



I suppose it's inevitable that familiarity with the Eucharist sometimes results in a kind of dulled participation. How often do we sit through Mass in a semi-dazed state, present but not really present, listening but not really listening, mumbling our responses somewhat mechanically? This is a common experience especially for those of us who attend Mass frequently. Situations that repeat themselves often take on a routine quality

– not every family meal can be a memorable celebration, for example! – and the Mass is no different in this respect. In addition, if we're honest we have to admit that the prayers of the Mass can sometimes be obscure and formal, the readings can at times be unintelligible (and maybe inaudible), the homilies can often be too long and boring, and the music can frequently be trite and uninspiring. It's not surprising that we sometimes find

Pope's Intention: For a Eucharistic life. We pray that Catholics may place the celebration of the Eucharist at the heart of their lives, transforming human relationships in a very deep way and opening to the encounter with God and all their brothers and sisters.

our minds wandering and our heads nodding in a brief snooze!

Despite all these human failings, however, it's good to remind ourselves why the Mass really matters. The Mass is not about the person of the celebrant, the language we use, the effectiveness of the homily, or the quality of the music. These are important, of course, and every effort should be made to ensure that all elements of the Mass are well prepared. But at its heart the Mass is much more than the sum of our human efforts. It is above all an encounter with the mystery of God, as revealed to us in the person and teaching of Jesus Christ.

As we listen to the readings we are invited to open ourselves to hear the word of God, to welcome it into our hearts, and to allow it to transform our lives. Hearing the word of God means more than sitting passively and allowing the words to flow over us. It involves an active, even eager, kind of listening, in order to find the nuggets of wisdom that may be there for us. If

the first reading is difficult or obscure, we can always look out for some inspiration in the psalm, and above all in the Gospel, which is often the most accessible and moving of the readings. A word or a short phrase may be enough to touch the heart and stay with us for the rest of the day.

At the Offertory, we are invited to offer to God our very selves, symbolised in the humble bread and wine, which we have already received as gifts from God. Shortly afterwards, during the Eucharistic Prayer, in an amazing gesture of boundless love, Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary is made present to us in sacramental form, and our offering is joined to his own offering to the Father. Jesus' great offering embraces all of our little offerings as well. Later, as we receive Communion, we welcome the bread of life, Jesus' own flesh 'given for the life of the world' (Jn. 6:51). It is the nourishment we need for our journey through life.

The Mass doesn't really end as we make our way on to the street. In a sense, it's only the beginning then. In the priest's final dismissal, we are sent on our way to put into practice in reality, what we have just celebrated in ritual. From start to finish, the Mass is all about giving and receiving, and so the gift we receive in Communion is not just for ourselves; it is to be shared generously with others. We are to continue to live the Eucharist in our everyday lives – in our families, neighbourhoods and workplaces – so that we grow just a little bit more like Jesus himself in the integrity of our lives and in our concern for others, especially for those who are of little value in human eyes but who have a special place in Jesus' heart.