

"Why Go to Mass?"

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Why Go to Mass? - Part I

Recent statistics show a significant decline in the percentage of Catholics attending mass in the U.S. as well as the frequency with which they do so. Beginning this weekend and following I want to share a few reflections on "Why Go to Mass". This first reflection is taken largely from a column in *America Magazine* by Fr. James Martin, S.J.

"The past few years have been painful ones for Catholics, especially in this country. If you are divorced and remarried, you may feel unwelcome in your parish. If you are a woman, you may feel anger over the Vatican's stance on ordination. If you are married, you may find yourself at odds with the church's teaching on contraception.

But it is not just 'liberal' Catholics who struggle. You may feel that the beauty of the Mass has been watered down, and that the mystery that you treasured has been taken away. You may think that too often the 'spirit of Vatican II' is taken to mean that anything goes. You may lament that so many Catholics seem to disregard church teaching and tradition without bothering to learn or understand it. You may have been angered by the hierarchy's increasingly strong opposition to capital punishment, or by the Vatican's opposition to the war in Iraq and its support of the United Nations.

Finally, no matter what your theological bent, you may feel angered, confused, saddened or disgusted over the sexual abuse scandal.

In his best-selling book *The Holy Longing*, Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I., offers nine reasons why one should go to church. They are: because it is not good to be alone; to take my place within the family of

humanity; because God calls me there; to dispel my fantasies about myself; because the saints have told me so; to help others with their pathologies and to let them help me with mine; to dream with others; to practice for heaven; and for the pure joy of it.

In these times, I think, it is particularly important to focus on the third reason – because God calls me there.

The church in this country needs help. It needs single and married Catholics, and it needs divorced and remarried Catholics. It needs Catholics who protest at the former School of the Americas, and it needs Catholics who pray at Medjugorge. It needs Call to Action and it needs Opus Dei. It needs conservatives and liberals, men and women, gays and straights.

As St. Paul wrote, the body of Christ ‘does not consist of one member, but of many.’ And in order to be healthy the church needs all of its members – especially those who feel in any way marginalized. ‘The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’.

How do we know this? Because in baptism all of us were called by God to be active members of the body of Christ. So while it may be difficult at times to believe that the church wants you, never stop believing that church needs you.”