

# The Catholic Parish of Petworth & Midhurst West Sussex

## Fr Peter's Homily for The Fourth Sunday of Lent (Year C) 27<sup>th</sup> March 2022

I have been speaking to you about what difference Mass makes – in what ways being at Mass makes my life better, but also the lives of the people around us. I really hope that this will be helpful. Today I want to do something even more practical and reflect on the question: 'How do I go to Mass?' This may sound rather obvious, but there is much more to it than just turning up and being here for as long as Mass lasts. This is going to be a bit disjointed, and it may be helpful for you to look at it in writing, but here goes.

Before Mass even starts, you might like to read through the Sunday readings. It is SO easy to lose concentration for a moment and miss what is being read. The readings are in missals, but also easy to find on the internet. Maybe as an exercise you could pick one sentence each Sunday that really speaks to you (you never know, it might even be the one the preacher picks up on!) If you were going to tweet a phrase from this Sunday's readings, which one would it be? This Sunday maybe: 'We are ambassadors for Christ! It is as though God were appealing through us, and the appeal that we make in Christ's name is: be reconciled to God!' OR 'My child, you are with me always, and all I have is yours'.

Keep that phrase with you throughout the week, write it on a post-it note on your computer or your fridge.

Before you set out for Mass think about who or what you want to pray for this week. You could even write these down and bring the list with you. If it is exactly the same as last week, that doesn't matter.

When you arrive at the church (and I realise that if you have a small child with you this may all be much more difficult) there is something to be done before Mass begins. Sit quietly for a few moments, enter a place of stillness, and leave behind all the worries and concerns of daily life. Remind yourself of something very important: what you are doing here at Mass is totally different from everything else you do, nothing is even slightly like it, it is not just one weekly activity among many, it is far above all the rest. *'Come to my heart Lord, and make this time of worship a fruitful one'.*

When Mass begins and the priest greets you, this is not just a 'hello', it is a prayer: he prays that the Lord may be with you, and you pray that God may be with him, too. Make this a moment of prayer for the priest who is celebrating, pray that he may be recollected, attentive and inspired in his celebration of this Holy Mass.

As the words of the penitential rite trip off your tongue, resolve to leave sin behind and to enter this Mass with all the purity and wholeness you can muster, and pray, too for the people around you, that we may all do the same.

In the Gloria we sing that God is good, and it is good for us to be here. Listen to the opening Prayer: what is the priest praying for? In what way can you help to make it happen?

Now listen carefully to the readings. As the scripture is read, God speaks. It is a great responsibility to read the sacred scriptures. The reader must be well-prepared and must make sure they do not get in

the way of you hearing the word of God. The aim is not to get this read, it is to allow God to speak. Did you hear those key sentences you had picked up on?

During the homily, try and stay attentive. It is not always easy! Imagine that you have to summarise it to someone afterwards. What does the preacher want you to know? What does he want you to do?

It is easy to lose concentration as we recite the Creed. These words are our way of saying we want to believe in God as he really is, not as we might want to make him. We choose to accept him even in all the ways that he is demanding, challenging or even hard to understand. We make a choice, a choice for God as he really is, not as I might want to create him if I were inventing my own religion!

It is hard to think through the Bidding Prayers – you are still thinking about one as the next comes along. Don't worry too much about that, but perhaps pick up on one or two phrases and in your mind call on God to make these happen.

As the altar is prepared, think what you want to offer to God this week: that difficult meeting on Tuesday; the visit to a difficult neighbour, the family problem, the piece of work you hope to finish that you are so pleased with, the decision that you don't quite know how to make, the friend who is so unwell. Offer it all on the altar with the bread and the wine.

'Lift up your hearts' – 'Hearts up, lets go higher, lets join the angels for a while!' Lets leave the things of earth behind and travel to the gates of heaven, peering in to see what is going on. The words of the Preface show we are grateful for God's activity. Then 'Holy, holy holy' – this is a sort of fanfare, now we have arrived, we are at the gates of heaven, we are looking in. And inside Christ the Son, in the person of the priest, reminds the Father of all that he has done. You don't have to listen to every word – the priest is talking to God, not to you, but just put yourself there with him and when the bell rings and the sacred host, the precious chalice, are lifted up look on, this is the high point, this is the moment, God has done it once again, has come to join us in our ordinariness, and it is wonderful to see. As the priest continues, perhaps offer up your prayers for the living and the dead. Listen for the Pope's name, and the Bishop's, and pray for them, and when the great 'Amen' comes it sums up every prayer of every person in the church today.

Standing for the Lord's Prayer, we might remember that this is prayed by every Christian throughout the world. Make a choice to stand with them, especially the persecuted or the hungry or the lonely or the doubtful. We are brothers and sisters together.

Behold! Look, here he is, calling to you summoning you, drawing you with his love like a magnet. He has chosen you. Like the apostles who he called to follow him, he summons you to get up and leave your seat and follow him.

Walking up to holy communion is one of the most precious moments of the week. It may be just a few paces, but you are following him. *'Lord, let me be ready to receive you, let me not take you for granted, clear away everything in me that stands in your way, I am yours.'* And after communion it is just thank you, thank you, thank you.

Back in your seat it is *'May this holy food transform me, may it help me to be more like you'*. And a prayer for this church, for the community that worships here, for the priest celebrating this Mass. And, just before leaving, what will I take away from this Mass today? What have I learned? What will I try and do in the week ahead? One last lingering look at the tabernacle, a genuflection of farewell, and the messiness of everyday life calls us again, but we are not quite the same as when we arrived....