

That Wonderful SUNDAY MASS

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LET'S start this off with contradictions - a sort of inside-the-family spat:

Said my eminently wise Catholic friend years ago: "I'm going to be sure all my life to practise the Devotion of the 52 Sundays - regular Sunday Mass." I called him wise, and indeed he was. Any man or woman who keeps up that lifelong practice is well on the way to being pretty sure of eternal salvation.

Said a cynical Catholic friend not so long ago: "Let's suppose, ridiculously enough, that next week the Pope sent out this new decree: 'Sunday Mass has been made optional. You may go or not go as you please. It will not, from this time on, be a mortal sin if you miss Mass on Sunday.' How many Catholics do you think would be at Mass the next Sunday?" I asked him how many he thought would be there. "Very considerably less than what we usually see," he answered and left me puzzling about how right or wrong he might be.

"YOU GOTTA GO"

Sunday Mass is one of those simple obligations which Catholics know they have to fulfil. Most of them practise the Devotion of the 52 Sundays, which is the reason why, thank God, our parish Masses are comfortably filled. With "abstaining from meat on Fridays," Sunday Mass is a kind of test of faith and practice. [Regrettably, since Vatican II, whilst the obligation to do some act of penance on a Friday is still mandatory, it no longer takes the form of all Catholics abstaining from meat.] A Catholic who gives that up [Sunday Mass-going] is hardly a Catholic any more - not a practical Catholic, we say. The Catholic who doesn't go to Sunday Mass is the kind frequently written up in the scandal story as the "devout Catholic," oftentimes one who has just married his fourth wife, has been indicted for robbing the city of a million in a phoney contract, got himself investigated by the FBI for labour racketeering. or gets top billing for her off-colour songs at the night spots.

Catholics are aware that Mass is a basic obligation.

Once a week they are expected to give to God at least half an hour or so of their time. Children start going when they are approaching the age of reason. Old people, unable to face the journey to church on a Sunday morning, bemoan the fact that they are "missing Mass." Holiday planners look forward with one important question: Will they be able to hear Mass? If they are travelling by car, they plan to hit a town where they can "catch the ten o'clock." On a ship that will be crossing the sea on Sunday, they hear with relief that there is a priest aboard who will "say Mass for the Catholic passengers, and all others who care to attend." A Catholic involved in what he knows is a "bad marriage," marriage after divorce and outside the Church, still realizes that he must attend Mass even if he cannot go to the sacraments. City parishes manage "printers Masses" at the witching hour so that men and women coming home from night jobs can catch the early Sunday Mass. Men and women in uniform know that Sunday Mass remains a primary obligation and are relieved when they

find that a Catholic priest has been attached to their outfit or that Mass will be offered at some convenient time and spot.

COMPARISONS?

Some years back, I gave a talk to a ministerial alliance in a large city. Some mismanagement on the part of the hotel housed us in an enormous hall though we had an attendance of perhaps 40 people. So when the minister chairman rose to introduce me, the ministers in attendance formed a thin fringe of people around an enormous bald spot of empty chairs. Said the chairman, "I must apologize to Father Lord. If he were a minister, he'd not be unaccustomed to rising on a Sunday morning to look out at a few familiar faces and rows of empty pews. But to a Catholic priest, accustomed to the jammed ten o'clock Mass, this gathering must look sparse indeed."

I recall a cartoon. I think in the New Yorker, of the minister standing at the door of his church on Christmas morning and saying to his parishioners, "Delighted that you came for the Christmas services; I shall be seeing you at Easter."

Comparisons are always galling and usually unkind; yet Catholic parishes take for granted that of a Sunday there will be early risers at the six o'clock Mass, a good crowd of communicants at the seven, a well-filled Church at the eight, and probably a packed (standing room only) attendance at the nine and ten. And if the diocese permits a noon Mass or one at half past twelve, the crowd will probably overflow into the street, with a number of young men (whose highest religious ambition seems to be to squeeze through the gates of heaven at the last possible moment) fidgeting out on the footpath, but still attached to the fringes of the congregation. They are "physically present," so they have "fulfilled their obligation." [This was written in 1958, and since then Catholic discipline now permits afternoon and evening Masses, as well as a Saturday evening 'vigil' Mass in anticipation of the Sunday.]

YET I WONDER

Yet it would be interesting to make a statistical study of attendance at Sunday Mass. I have made some guesses based on simple mathematics: I have taken the number of families in the parish, multiplied each family by four, counted the pews in the church, then checked the actual number of people present at all the Sunday Masses, and reached what everyone who studies the matter must know: that even here, in a Catholic-education Country, there are a great many who ought to be at Sunday Mass and just aren't present.

My friend who thought that a repeal of the obligation of Sunday Mass would be prelude to largely empty churches is of the school that goes to Mass... but goes grudgingly. These go to Mass simply in preference to going to hell. They don't get any joy out of Mass, but they don't want to experience the pain of eternal punishment for failing in their duty. So if they didn't have to go, they'd stay away with pleasure, with not another thought to what they might be missing, and with real relief.

They are the kind of Catholics who, late Saturday night, will say, "Oh, you lucky non-Catholics! You don't have to get up in the morning. Me, I'll be piling out of bed and going to Mass while you are still hitting the hay. Gosh, it must be nice to be a non-Catholic on a Sunday morning." They groan that they have to get up on New Year's Day for the Holy Day of obligation of Our Lord's Naming [now the Feast of Mary the Mother of God], fuss over the fact that they have to get up earlier on All Saints' Day, another Holy Day of obligation, to rush to Mass before work, or have to cut their lunch hour short to slip in that fast 20-minute Mass at the nearest city church. They look on

Sunday Mass as a burden laid on their unwilling shoulders, and they protest even if they don't shrug it off.

WITH EMPTY HANDS

Then there are the Sunday Mass Catholics who are full of the Devotion of St. Apathia. They come to church out of habit or because the family all go or just through a sense of duty, accepted without too much discussion one way or other but they arrive with empty hands. They have no missal, no prayer book, no rosary. They sink into a pew and their minds sink into a spiritual vacuum. They drape themselves in the most comfortable fashion possible, blessing the pastor who installed the cushions on the kneeling bench, move when the congregation moves, gaze up at the preacher with faces washed free of all expression, and at the end respond heartily to the only part of the Mass that touches their consciousness:

"Ite Missa Est!" - "You may go now; Mass is ended." [This is generally now translated: "The Mass is ended, go in peace to love and serve the Lord."]

To which from the depth of their soul they respond with the one fervent prayer of the morning, "Oh, thanks be to God!" - "Deo Gratias!"

When non-Catholics ask them what they did in church, they fumble with words and reach for ideas and realize that they are not one bit clear what they do at Mass. "Well, we sit... and stand... and kneel... we, er, pray... we hear the priest read the announcements...we, ah, well, we go to Mass, you know... and that's important... yes, that's important."

"Why?" asks their non-Catholic friend with understandable curiosity. "Why is it important?"

And the answer gets lost somewhere back of their soft palate. They've been doing for a good many years something the value of which has quite missed them. What a loss! And what a strange attitude for supposedly intelligent people to take! [Thank God, that with the reforms set in place by Vatican II, even the most inarticulate Catholic can now answer with more enlightenment about what they do at Mass. They could talk prayers said in common, about listening to the Word of God in the Scriptures and having the possibility of receiving Our Lord in Holy Communion.]

THE INTELLIGENT

Then there are the intelligent Catholics who know why they must go to Mass on Sunday, who understand the meaning of the Mass, its infinite value, its place in their obligations to God their Creator, to Christ their Saviour, to the Holy Spirit their Sanctifier.

Thank the gracious providence which in our age placed the missal, one of the Church's official prayer books, in the hands of anyone able to read! [Thanks to the same Gracious Providence that has permitted the official Liturgy to be prayed and heard in the vernacular.]

Thank that same providence for the liturgical movement which has made the Mass so much more vital to millions of Catholic lives! [Again, thanks to the same Providence which has seen the liturgical movement flower into Vatican II's Document on the Liturgy.]

Thank God for the participation of Catholics in the royal priesthood of the Saviour which functions most effectively when priest and people together offer up to God on a Sunday morning, the Sacrifice of Our Salvation, the Last Supper repeated in beautiful form, Calvary renewed in the current years of grace and salvation and strength and divine aid which Christ died to win.

WHY SUNDAY MASS?

Why are Catholics obliged to go to Sunday Mass?

Why can't they join that majority of the public which spends Sunday on the golf course or buried under the avalanche of the Sunday paper?

Why can't they, on a bright Sunday morning, wander "out into the woods to find God"? (Personally, I have found myself much more likely to locate ticks and ants in the woods than God. But maybe I am not too spiritually perceptive).

Why are Catholics dragooned to Mass when their non-Catholic friends are playing lie-a-bed or dawdling over a leisurely Sunday breakfast as the radio or TV brings in the plaintive voices of those ministers of God who, since they haven't got their congregations in the churches, come seeking them in their homes? I know, as a priest, I have been glad to reach the absent-from-church via air. But I always have had a wistful feeling of "This is a poor substitute." [The Church does, of course, provide Mass via the television or radio for the benefit of those too ill to leave their beds, (who, naturally, are exempt from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass, but who which to participate in the spiritual communion with their fellow Catholics via the Mass Media.]

Why can't the Catholic say all his prayers at home? Why does he have to mill with the crowds at the late Masses and be distracted by the squirming children and the old lady rattling her beads, and the asthmatic man who prays in a wheeze, and the teen-agers who cannot control their nerves or their jumps?

BACK A BIT

Well, to answer that, let's go back a bit.

God set an example Himself which from the very beginning He hoped His human sons and daughters would wisely imitate: He worked for the six days of His glorious creation, and then on the seventh He rested. One day out of the seven He decreed was to be different from the rest. For six days a man might build and bake and plan and plead and harvest his crops and fashion his houses and earn the living for himself and his family. For one day, he must think of his God and of his own soul and of the care and peace and quiet which mean so much to a full and normal life.

Time was when it was the fashion of non-Catholic writers (notably travellers or economists) to scoff at the Catholic lands with their constant interruption of holy days. Years ago I read one such scoffer: While American, English and Australian workers were putting in their 10- to 12-hour days on a 6- or 7-day week, these backward Catholic countries were pulling their workmen off the job to celebrate some saint's day by running off to church or laying aside their tools and doing nothing for 24 hours. That was before our English-speaking workmen got up on their hind legs and demanded that they be treated like human beings and not like pack mules. That was in the sad days before legislative enactments regulated our present 40-hour, 5-working-day week.

We have come to realize that when God wanted one full day of holiday in seven, He was better aware of our needs than we were. And if humanly and humanely we have recently added that second weekly day off, we were simply acting like decent people instead of slave drivers and task-masters and the whip-cracking bosun standing over the human machines at the galley's oars.

EARTHBOUND CREATURES

Quite aside from our need for rest, we realize what earthbound creatures we are. Bounded by the soil under our feet and the blue of the atmosphere above us, we can, like prisoners of time and space, concentrate on the narrow house of our temporary exile. We are tied to our work. We are beset with financial problems. We are always tackling heavy jobs: the first cherry pie, the new wing necessary because the family unexpectedly had twins, the launching of a new cigarette, or the substitution of jet power for propellers.

We speak of our bent backs and downcast eyes and limitation of vision. So once a week, God and His representative, the Church, insist that we look up.

Sunday is a day for looking up... for looking up at the sky to see if the day will be fair or rainy as we head for Mass (and sun and rain are equally God's blessings)... for looking up and seeing the priest entering the sanctuary to stand before the tabernacle to which we must look up to find the Heavenly-King-in-Earthly-Exile who has been waiting for us all through the long working week... for looking up and watching the priest as he stands, the representative of the people, offering sacrifice for mankind... for looking up at the Host lifted in blessing and a downpour of graces above the kneeling congregation... for looking up at the Lamb of God who had been the expectation of the ages, the fulfilment of the Baptist's mission, and the joy of the heavenly citizens, as He comes to His beloved in Holy Communion.

Looking up is an exercise in which human beings engage much too infrequently. God and the Church hope that at least once in a week all Catholics will look up to see the God who comes from heaven and the Saviour Who has not left His needy earth.

GOD'S COMMAND

Actually Sunday Mass is the fulfilment of God's Third Commandment: "Remember to keep holy the Sabbath Day!"

Out of the week, God asked for one day for Himself and the souls of His beloved children.

Christ, during His days upon earth, was regular at the synagogue on the Sabbath. Yet to those Jews who, led by the Pharisees, had turned the lovely day of holiness and rest into a sort of spiritual straitjacket, He cried in warning, "The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

So it was. For Christ it was a day begun in the peaceful, prayerful atmosphere of the village synagogue. There He sat with His Apostles listening to the Holy Scriptures. He took His turn, with the others of lesser learning, explaining what had been read. He united with those prayers which are today repeated in Holy Mass. He looked up to God His Father. He begged the Creator of the world to come close to His creatures. And if the rest of the day was spent dining with His Apostles and friends who invited Him in, in pleasant conversation with His disciples, in those lovely acts of healing and kindness which so shocked the formalists around Him, He had begun the day within the four walls of the little village sanctuary, forerunner of parish churches.

He certainly could climb a hill, as so often He did at night, "and find God." He could deliberately turn inside Himself and contemplate the glory of the Trinity whose unfailing presence was always His. But He chose attendance with the faithful of His day in the congregation that in united prayer voiced gratitude to God for creation and the rest of His blessings, called upon God for mercy, sanctified the working week, and gained strength to continue the life that lay ahead.

HOLY THROUGH THE MASS

When Christ blended the elements that were to make up the glorious religion which is Christianity, He took all that was best in the Old Law, the foreshadowing of the New. Into His faith and His service of God, He united the best of the past: "I came not to destroy but to fulfil." So He placed His seal upon the Old Testament by using it continuously. He taught with new eloquence to open to mankind an understanding of the Gospel, the "good news." He ordered His disciples to teach all mankind. He blended the best elements of the approved sacrifices of the temple into the Sacrifice of Sacrifices which was Himself - offered bloodily upon the altar-cross of Calvary, offered unbloodily at the table of the Last Supper.

He would make a holy people by the outpouring of His Blood. And to make that Blood available, He would provide them with the Mass. There in the Mass, His Body, once broken for them upon the cross, would be their food for the life of the world. There, His Blood, drained on Calvary, would be available for the forgiveness of sinners and the strength of saints.

So when the Church considered the Commandment: "Keep holy the Sabbath," and when Christians asked, "How can that best be done?" the answer was amazingly simple and logical:

To make holy the Sabbath Day:

Go to Mass - for it is the official and collective act of worship of the Church, Christ's Mystical Body.

Repeat with Christ His saving sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, of petition and reparation.

Be present with the Saviour and His Apostles at the repetition of the Last Supper.

Offer to the Trinity the most glorious representative of our race, Christ Jesus, the Lord, in unbloody sacrifice.

Fill your souls with the fruits of the Redemption.

Draw near to the Lord and be glad while the Lord comes very near to you.

Receive Holy Communion and, since Communion is part of the Mass, of the Sacrificial Banquet, of the Love Feast of the Last Supper, take Christ into your life.

Nothing a man could possibly do could make the day as holy as the Mass. For the Mass is not a mere series of prayers and pious exhortations. It is not just one way of honouring God and bringing the Author of Grace to the world and the world to its Creator and King. It is Christ's own way. It is the method by which He honoured the Trinity. It is the way in which He gave Himself to His disciples that night before He died. It is His lovely method of remaining with us until the end of time.

THE WONDER OF THE MASS

We live surrounded today with churches.

Sometimes a single cross-roads in a small village will have a church on each corner.

Of a Sunday, each will "conduct services." Someone will stand in the pulpit and talk of God and justice and the evil of sin and the life of the Saviour. Songs will float out from the opened windows, which may perhaps be stained with the bright and radiant story of God's dealings with His beloved sons and daughters.

In one of them, however, Mass is being said.

And that makes the difference.

Those who kneel in that church, though it may be the poorest of the four structures and the least beautiful (not likely, since church architecture in Christian times became the wonderfully beautiful thing it is simply because the buildings were erected to be the setting for Mass and the dwelling place of God living on earth in the Eucharist), still those worshippers know they do something unique.

Like those in the other churches, they will listen to the readings from the Old and New Testaments. They will begin the Mass with a selection from the Psalms of David, the Introit or Entrance Antiphon, the most renowned of which is: "I will go unto the altar of God, to God Who gives joy to my youth." They will hear the Epistles or New Testament portion read and a section of the Gospel. They may sing, or hear singing coming from the choir, and the Kyrie or 'Lord, have mercy', will be a cry for God's mercy, and the Gloria will repeat the triumphant song of the angels of Christmas. They may chant together or say quietly the great act of faith which is the Christian Creed [it is now chanted or said out loud], formulated in an age when there was only the Catholic Church or bodies of heretics for the most part long since gone from living history and remembered faintly by strangely obsolete names.

But then the Mass goes on to its wonderful, divine, God-given, Christ-ordained uniqueness.

The priest and the people together offer up the Sacrifice. Together they give to God the bread and wine which are apt symbols of our self-donation. Since the body can be sustained by bread, the "staff of life," and since wine was for generations the ordinary drink of the poor, as priest and people together offer up these symbolic gifts of self-oblation to the Blessed Trinity, they really offer themselves - their bodies and their souls, their total devotedness and complete self-surrender - "in a spirit of humility and with a contrite heart."

BEAUTIFUL GIFTS

A well-instructed Catholic, as he offers Mass together with the priest, feels a unity with the whole of mankind and the long ages of history, a feeling which is most important in this age that aims at a united world. The prayers which he says in some instances go back into hardly recorded history.

He prays in the Memento for the Living, during the Canon or Eucharistic Prayer, for the whole world. He knows that, as he prays, the Mass is being offered across the world. "From the rising of the sun to the going down thereof," as the Prophet Malachy foretold, "My Name is great among the Gentiles," and the prophet went on to speak of that clean sacrifice and spotless offering that would continue across the world from the rising of the sun in the east to its setting in the western sky.

A sense of great human solidarity (so much talked of by the leftists, so sincerely and effectively sought by the followers of the world's Redeemer) comes with the realization that the Mass is the climax of the sacrifices which were offered since the dawn of time, and the religious rite which is, or has been, the common religious experience of the Christian nations of mankind.

RITUAL INSTITUTED

Into a world sadly in need of God, the Catholic knows that the Mass will bring the living presence of the Incarnate God.

"This is My Body.... This is My Blood." With these words spoken simply and clearly at the Last Supper, the Saviour gave to His Church the core and essence of the Mass.

"Do this in commemoration of Me." By this subsequent command to His Apostles present, He intended unmistakably that the re-enactment of this Last Supper was to be the official act of worship of all of His followers to the end of time.

Christ is with us.

That precious Sunday Mass has brought the God-man in love and obedience back among His beloved people.

The Divine Saviour whose delight is to be with the children of men is not exiled in the glory of heaven or beautifully embalmed in the pages of sacred history. He is living among His people. He has come down to fill their lives, to share their earthly existence, to give them His strength and wisdom and light and grace.

What a wonderful way to start the Sunday!

What a wonderful Sunday to start a man's or a woman's week!

What a magnificent contribution to world peace, the bringing of the Prince of Peace to the confused and struggling world! The Mass is the very Sacrifice of Peace, and the around-the-clock prayer for the peace of the world.

What a contribution to civilization - for the Mass is also the Sacrifice of Unity, participated in by all the faithful, who are one in Jesus Christ.

THE GIFT OF GOD TO GOD

But the Mass, that wonderful Sunday Mass, continues.

"What shall I render to the Lord for all that He has given to me?" In the Mass the Church echoes that cry of the Psalmist David. Now the adorer, the worshipper in the Catholic pew, knows the answer. God has filled every human life with benefits beyond cataloguing or measuring. From the sun that warms and vitalizes the earth to the law of gravity, from food and clothing to mother love and the powers of the creative human mind, from the personal gift of individual life to the freedom and opportunity our country affords to all, God has blessed us with limitless favours. What shall we give Him in return for His gifts?

The Mass makes the answer very simple.

Watch, now, as the priest raises on high over his own head and the lifted heads of the congregation, the sacred Host. Priest and people are giving to the Blessed Trinity, Jesus Christ, true God and true man, His love and His obedience. We human beings can give, Him to God because He is our representative, the noblest member of our race, that utterly obedient and sinless Son of Whom the Father cried: "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased." We can offer to God, to the Trinity, the human body of our Saviour and the Blood which was shed for the remission of our sins. The Sacrifice of Calvary is not a remote and historic event in the past, but something that in that wonderful Sunday Mass is repeated for us and by us, with its benefits and graces in easy reach of our hands.

We often hear it said: "The Mass is less a prayer than an action. It is not a sermon but a sacrifice, a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, of petition and reparation." This is precisely true. A sacrifice is a gift presented by the worshippers to their God in sign of their gratitude, love, obedience, needs,

complete acceptance of His law, and willingness to make reparation for offences in the past. And here is the perfect sacrifice.

We, the priest and the people, give to God the most perfect gift, His own divine Son, the greatest of men, the finest flower of our race.

The gift is made directly to the Trinity. Even the gesture by which the priest lifts Host and Chalice in the air represents that presentation to God.

The gift is infinitely adequate. We have nothing of ourselves to give to God. Whatever we have, He first gave to us. But Christ is ours, one of us, the Head of our Mystical Body; and now we give Him to the Trinity, and in Him we give ourselves.

The gift is a sign of our gratitude: our gift for the gifts God has given us. It is a sign of love: the gift of the Saviour Who loved and obeyed His heavenly Father to the very end. We offer the obedient Saviour; we offer Him in fulfilment of His law.

WHAT MORE IS POSSIBLE?

The Mass proceeds. Priest and people pray. They gather round the living presence of their Saviour upon the altar. They, in union with the whole Church, call upon heaven and earth and the holy souls in purgatory to join them in the great act of worship. They move forward towards the Divine Banquet which repeats the Last Supper. For the Mass moves on steadily towards Communion.

Christ is not content with His presence among men on their altars and in their tabernacles. He wants to be present in their hearts. He wants to share their lives, to supply what they need in strength and purity to make happy their days and safe their nights. He longs for union, communion, the "joining with." And so it is that in that precious Sunday Mass the Lord of heaven and earth gives Himself to the priest in the priest's Communion, and then to those who will permit Him to come in the Communion of the people. This is His return gift to us, the sign that our sacrifice is accepted.

SUNDAY - NOT SATURDAY

Someone on the bus pressed into my hand a little leaflet headed "By What Authority?" One of the many sects into which the Baptists have split observes Saturday and not Sunday as their day of worship. They demand in the tract to know by whose authority Christians changed the Lord's Day from the seventh day of the Old Law to the first day of the New.

That is a question that should trouble those Protestants who believe, as they say, "only what is in the Bible." For in the Bible there is no clear mention of a change from the seventh to the first day. There is an indication that even in the Acts of the Apostles the Christians had begun to observe the first day as their day. But it is only the authority of the Church, granted to it by Christ, that made the changeover a simple and uncontroverted fact. The Jews retain the seventh day. All Christians, except a few, like the publishers of the little tract, observe the first. It was the Church that made the switch and for excellent reasons. Sunday was the day of Easter and the beginning of our complete hope. It was the birthday of the Church, Pentecost. It clearly differentiated the believers in the New Law from the believers in the Old.

And it began the week with the worship of God.

THE START OF SO MUCH

While in the Old Testament, the Jews rounded off their week with an act of solemn worship, the Christians in the New began their week by honouring God, bringing Christ down upon their altars, and thus sanctifying all the days ahead.

So when a man and a woman go to Mass on Sunday morning, they are starting the week exactly right. They acknowledge publicly that God is their Creator and that they are His creatures. They begin the week with the most important act of their lives, the perfect worship of God. They invite Christ, Who comes down to share with them the very start of the incoming week. They begin, as well they may need to, with a fresh flow of grace into their souls. They start with an act of gratitude to God for which they well may merit new benefits. They begin with faith, the foundation of all virtues. They ask God to partner the days that are beginning.

All this comes close to being a perfect beginning. How could there be a better?

YET SO SIMPLE

For all its importance and depth of meaning, Mass is such a simple, brief, and convenient form of worship.

When I hear people grumble at the thought of Sunday Mass, I am more than a little amused. Actually, the normal Sunday Mass, announcements and all, runs hardly more than 45 minutes or so. A cigarette smoker spends that much time during the course of the week just lighting his smokes. Isn't it strange that a complete lack of proportion makes people object to giving three-quarters of an hour or so out of the week to God? More incredibly still, they will not for 45 minutes expose their souls with their needs to the God Who can fill those souls with grace, guarantee their real success, protect them from danger, and bring them safely through the week. Any man who shaves daily spends about twice as much time on his face as he does in Sunday Mass on his soul. I am not an authority on the time it takes a woman to do her hair, but I should venture an inexpert guess that on her hair and the facade which is her complexion, she spends about four times the duration of the Sunday Mass.

Anyone who would not have 45 minutes for God and His own soul, has no sense of who God is and what God can do for him and no appreciation at all of the needs of his own soul.

Every normal person spends around twice as much time every day at his meals as is required for Sunday Mass.

One golf game would probably take more time than all the Sunday Masses of a five-Sunday month.

The ordinary programme at a picture theatre is three hours or so (two hours if only one movie is showing). In a large city a man usually spends more time daily going to work than he does hearing Mass. It takes longer to read the average daily newspaper than to follow in a missal all the prayers of the Mass.

Actually there is something funny about the worker on the 40-hour, 5-day week who just can't find time for Sunday Mass. Clearly he loves 45 or so minutes of time more than he loves the endless reaches of eternity.

PUBLIC PROFESSION OF FAITH

With the violent attacks which the Communists and others are making on God, we owe it to our faith publicly to profess it. {Don't forget the sufferings of Christians in China, Korea, Vietnam, and

such Moslem areas such as the Sudan!} I have no idea whether or not you say your prayers in your bedroom at night. Nor does your neighbour know. He and I may never think to ask you if you say the Family Rosary. You may be too humble to brag of the fact that your family never misses. I do not know the quantity and quality of your personal virtue or the depth and vigour of your faith.

But when you go to Mass on Sunday, you are making a magnificent public profession of faith.

Your simple gesture of attending Mass says a lot of significant things. (Before I list them, let us say a quick prayer that all Catholics would truly mean these declarations that they are making before God and before the world by their attendance at Sunday Mass.) It says:

You believe in God and worship Him as your Beginning and Last End.

You accept Christ and His teachings and try to follow them. (You aren't just there for show, are you?)

You admit that you need divine grace and must ask for it.

You are a member of the Church of Christ and follow its laws.

You regard as important the Commandment, "Remember to keep holy the Sabbath Day."

You believe that when Christ said, "This is My Body" and "This is My Blood," He meant exactly what He said. You accept the wonder and blessing of the Eucharist.

You admit your union with those Christians across the world and through the length of history who have knelt at Mass and offered to the Blessed Trinity the Sacrifice of Unity and of Peace. You are a Christian who is trying to live up to the truths and principles of the Saviour.

ALL HISTORY

There isn't space here for a lengthy explanation of this, but actually, the Mass is a kind of splendid synopsis of the life and deeds of Christ.

Each Mass re-enacts the Nativity, the Public Life, the Passion, the Last Supper, the Resurrection and triumph of Jesus Christ.

In the Mass, Christ comes in the humble disguise of the host as He did at Christmas in the humble disguise of infancy.

In the Mass, His Gospel is preached and His example held up for our imitation.

At the Consecration, His Passion - without pain and loss of blood - is graphically re-enacted.

In Holy Communion, the Last Supper is repeated.

And in the adoration and oblation of the living Christ, incapable now of death and reigning triumphantly in heaven, we recall the Resurrection and we take part in the triumph of the Saviour, the triumphant Victim of our Sacrifice.

ROUND THE YEAR

Then in the cycle of the ecclesiastical year we re-live the story of the Saviour. In Advent we dream of His coming. At Christmastime we are present for His mystic rebirth. On Epiphany we come with the Magi to find and adore Him.

Special Sundays with their Gospels commemorate the Flight Into Egypt, the Hidden Life, the miracles and parables of the Public Life. Lent and Passiontide makes the sufferings and death of the Saviour vivid for us. During Easter we are present at His Resurrection, and the Mass of the Ascension recalls His glorious ascent into heaven even as the Consecration brings Him happily back to earth. We are present with the Apostles when the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost.

The Mass moves with the Saviour each year in the complete orbit of His life upon earth. No wonder anyone who loves and understands the Mass comes to love and understand Christ with a gleaming clarity.

WHY FORCE US THEN?

I think I can hear a voice of protest rising as I write.

"If the Mass is so wonderful and such a perfect way to start our week and honour God and keep holy His day, why does the Church need to force us? Why not leave us free to go? Surely if we knew the wonders of the Mass, we would run to it of our own accord."

Now just a moment. The commonest experience of us human beings is the way we have to be forced to do the things which are good for us. We are like children who have to be forced even to eat delicious, wholesome food. We are like students who refuse to go to school and must be dragged along by the truant officer to that education which means for them success and happiness in life.

We humans are queer, perverse creatures.

Who wants to pay taxes? In fact, how many would pay them if the government didn't put heavy penalties down for those who failed? Yet taxes mean good government, a protecting army and navy, pure water, lighted streets, the safety afforded by police and fire departments, actually our freedom and liberty under law. Yet if it were left to the citizens to pay their taxes or not as they wished -... !

Do we need to think of the chaos that would follow?

There are, thank heaven, many who do the right and decent and wholesome thing even when they are not forced to do so.

They would have adequate sanitary arrangements for their family. They would build their houses to make them safe against collapse and fires. They would send their children to school even if no compulsory education were the law. They would not hunt in such a fashion as to wipe out game birds and wild-life. They would not exploit their fellow men but would pay adequate salaries and give decent working conditions with fair working hours. Were there no armies that they feared, some nations would still not wage aggressive war.

Unfortunately for the human race, these people are not universal. All men are not sufficiently fond even of their own health and happiness to avoid opium and cocaine and morphine without supervision from the Federal Narcotics' Bureau. Some men would throw away their money in any crooked gambling scheme that the police permitted to operate. Some would not dispose of their own garbage. The traffic laws, and the police who struggle to enforce them, are proof of the strange fact that people will not take care of themselves unless the motive of fear and force threaten a surprisingly large percentage of them.

So God gave us His laws and meant for them to be enforced.

It would be a wonderful world in which no one fought or murdered, each man was pure and every woman was modest, no one lied and the goods of all were held without fear of the thief. It would be a marvellous world in which creatures loved and served their Creator, used His name respectfully, and gave Him the generous measure of their love and loyalty.

Do they?

The Church cannot actually force anyone to accept the wonderful benefits of Sunday Mass: If people want to stay away, they can stay away.

Blessedly there are thousands who go to daily Mass, Mass on week-days, simply because they know and admit that they need God. Nothing impels them but their gratitude to God for His benefits, their desire to make reparation for the misuse of His gifts in the past, and the conviction that God can best help them to make a success now and in eternity. They would go to Sunday Mass out of noble or unselfish motives. No law would need to compel them. Their own love of their Saviour and sheer spiritual self-interest would carry them along.

But others -

Well, we know human nature; and the Church, eager to see God honoured and human beings happy, lays down the minimum law:

Out of your long and blessed week, you must take at least 30 minutes to three-quarters of an hour or so and give them to God and your own soul. (Some services may even last an hour, yes one out of the 168 god gives you every week!)

Is it much to ask?

Just think of the consequences to yourself!

SO SUNDAY MASS IS WONDERFUL

So it is our wonderful Sunday Mass.

We Catholics may go, like stubborn or stupid children, reluctantly and protestingly. Like the spoiled brats of wealthy and indulgent parents, we can complain of the very benefits God offers us. We can stay away, but not without serious failure in our duty to God and to ourselves, as well as serious sin. We can go listlessly, apathetically, like dumb animals or inert lumps of dumpling dough.

Or we can go to Sunday Mass because:

We love God and want to honour Him.

We want to bring Jesus Christ into His world and into our own.

Knowing how many gifts God has given us, we want to give Him the gift which is the Sacrifice of the Mass - bread and wine, the Body and Blood of the Son of God.

We should like to play a part in the Sacrifice of Calvary, a happy and blessed part.

We should like to be one of those who enjoyed the Banquet of the Last Supper.

We do not think 30 to 45 (or even 60) minutes are too much to give to God.

We want to start our week with the blessings of God upon it.

We should like to invite Jesus Christ to be with us for seven days.

We know our need of God's strength and help, His grace and His light, all of which come to us through Mass.

In an age that attacks God and faith, we want to make a public act of faith in God and His cause.

We should like to be united with heaven and earth and purgatory in the great brotherhood of Christ's Kingdom.

We want to bring the Prince of Peace to a warring world.

We believe that holiness and happiness are close together, and after a holy beginning for our week, we may know a happy seven days.

When God invites us to His feast, we should be rude indeed to refuse.

To miss Mass is to turn our back on incredible riches, as much of God's grace as we care to take away with us. That is sheerest folly.

THIS THE MINIMUM

Anyone who understands Mass will say, "Do you think I could be satisfied going to Mass only once a week?"

But God and the Church are moderate in their demands.

"Remember to keep holy my day," says the Lord. We could hardly get a more modest request.

"For that," adds the Church, "Sunday Mass is an easy and simple minimum."

Who could possibly disagree?
