



WEEKLY LETTER FROM MONSIGNOR KEN

I wonder how many “How To” books have been written? They are helpful, because it’s one thing to want to do something, but it’s another to know how to do it. For example, I can say I want to be a better golfer, but how do I do that? I can read a book with pointers or even take lessons. Either would probably take me back to the basics, to the mechanics of playing golf.

We constantly hear, or at least we should, the reminder, “Go to Mass!” Yes. As Catholics, we are taught that we must and should go to Mass. However, when was the last time you thought about how to go to Mass? Isn’t it true that we take that for granted? This weekend, we host a Pre-Cana, pre-marriage workshop for couples who have already made the decision to get married. This experience is to help them to know how to be married, how to live out the Sacrament.

For the next few weeks, I’m going to offer a condensed course on how to attend Mass. These points won’t necessarily be something you have never heard, but may be points we have neglected or taken for granted. This will consist mainly of bullet points, with only brief explanations. Obviously, much more could be written or said, but this is only a refresher course. I can guarantee that if these points are followed, you will get more out of Mass and will even look forward to the celebration of Mass. So, here we go...

1. Holy Water: When we enter church, we should bless ourselves with Holy Water. This shouldn’t be done too quickly or without thought. This simple act reminds us of our baptism and that we are entering a sacred space. St. Josephine Bakhita used to kiss the baptismal font when she entered church, and whispered, “Here I became a child of God.”
2. Genuflect: Before entering the pew, we should look at the Tabernacle, because that is where Jesus, literally, is. We should bend on one knee in reverence. If you can’t kneel, you can make a bow of the head. Again, this should not be done quickly or without thought. It should be done with humility and love in the presence of Our Lord. You can think of the repentant tax collector who beat his breast and prayed, “Have mercy on me, a sinner.”
3. Say a prayer: After taking our seat, we should kneel, if you can, and say a prayer to prepare for Mass. Sometimes, this may be difficult for parents with small children, but it is important to focus our minds before the Mass begins. One way to do so is to make a particular intention, or even several, that you wish to bring to the Lord. We can also make a brief act of thanks to prepare to praise God in the Sacrifice of the Mass. As much as possible, take a moment for a quick breath, calm your mind, and focus on being at Mass.
4. Pay attention: This should go without saying, but it’s important to give of yourself as you attend Mass. This means making an effort to think about the words that are being said and what is happening. Everyone gets distracted at Mass a little. The point is not to worry about distractions, but to make a determined effort to be present to the prayer and actions of the Mass. One way this can be done is to choose a different part of the Mass each week to especially focus. Over time, this will bring the entire Mass to life for you.
5. Sing: Yes, sing! This is not just the “job” of the music ministry. They are only leading us. We are invited to join in the Mass by joining in the singing. It doesn’t matter what kind of a voice you have. Think of a birthday party. What do we do? We sing “Happy Birthday.” We don’t worry about what kind of a voice we have. We still join in enthusiastically, even in restaurants with strangers! To offer good wishes. Imagine how a child would feel if everyone sang at his or her party the way we do in Church!
6. Respond: That means, open your mouth and say the responses that are yours at Mass! The priest and deacon have their words to say; the reader has their words to say; the music ministry has their role. So does the assembly. There are certain points in which your participation is required. It expresses that you are part of the Mass. Just as we expect, as we should, that the clergy will say their lines, well, that are clearly and prayerfully, so also there should be an expectation that those present will also respond. “And with your spirit;” “Amen;” “Thanks be to God;” This responsibility to respond also applies to the singing of the parts, such as the Responsorial Psalm and the Holy, Holy, Holy. When those at Mass do not respond or respond very weakly, that proclaims the message, “This is not important and I don’t want to be here.” While we may be responding to the celebrant of the Mass, we are really responding, speaking to God. Our words of response signal our active participation in the Mass. In addition, when we respond, clearly and prayerfully, we also send a message to others at Mass, encouraging them to participate.

Next week, I’ll continue our course. In the meantime, do your homework! Practice these points at Mass and you’ll see that it makes a great difference.

“Come, let us sing joyfully to the Lord; cry out to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before Him with a song of praise, joyfully sing out or psalms.” (Psalm 95: 1-2)