

## PAUL ROTHERMICH

Why do I come and participate in Mass? When I was young, it was the least I could do. I was raised in a Catholic family in which Mass attendance was the focus of the family. However, I seldom remember it being a family experience. Much of it was due to time and circumstances. My parents, at their core, were grateful people who attended at different Mass times. Of course I was told I had to attend Mass under the pain of mortal sin, and of course I didn't understand the Latin words that came from the priest who's back was seen more than his face; and of course I was not permitted to even have a drop of water cross my lips after midnight but hearing Mass was the least I could do. My father ushered 7:00 am Mass. My mother heard a later Mass. We children went to what ever Mass started fifteen minutes after we woke up. What came from this though, early on, it was my responsibility to get to Mass and to bring back a bulletin as proof.

Throughout my formative years I was reminded, mostly by my mother, how grateful we, children of the 1950's, should be for all that we had. Hearing Mass was our way of saying thanks so it was the least I could do. Attending Mass in Latin was made easier by the suggestion of one of the grade school sisters who suggested to our class that we listen carefully to the sermon. There is a message in every sermon for each of us, she told us. We had lots sermons in those days. Besides priest, our parents, teachers, and neighbors delivered them too. Sermons were a fact of life. Over time I found her point to be true, even though sometimes I had to struggle to find the message. That idea helped me become more attentive to the whole of the Mass. In my teen years occasionally I would oversleep for the 11 a.m. Mass. No problem. St. Gabriel's, a mile and a half away, had a noon Mass. I was reminded I could walk that. It was the least I could do for all the extra sleep I got. As I recall though, I never overslept in the winter.

That mind-set stayed with me after leaving home for military service and later college. At the same time it became easier. Mass became more of a community prayer, available now both mornings and nights, fasting was no longer an issue. Most significantly the Mass was not just said, it was celebrated. It was pronounced in a language I understood by an enthusiastic priest. Ok, not all of them expressed enthusiasm. Still, my mother words, "You can never outdo the generosity of God," resonated with me even more. The distant God of my youth became much closer and approachable. More than a few times I was there in the basement of the College Church for the Masses when the young St Louis U. Jesuit scholastics began formulating those hymns we now have in our Glory and Praise book. It was an exciting time of discovery and renewal. The veil was lifted. Like drops of water wearing down on a hard stone, Sunday after Sunday my openness to a relationship with Jesus grew. Over time, not unlike what occurs over a long marriage, the excitement can subside and one can settle into a routine. Thankfully life provides opportunities that shake us awake. More than ever for me the Mass has become an intimate part of celebrating not just Sundays but all kinds of life events. Holidays of course, but also birthdays and anniversaries, weddings and adoptions, graduations and employment, finally we celebrate lives that are completed. Mass is no more just the least I could do. It is what I want to do: to hear the Word, share in the Eucharist, to ask for what I think I needed and say thanks what God has provided.



## ST. PATRICK OF HEATHERDOWNS

TOLEDO OHIO

## "REDISCOVERING SUNDAY"



## II

*"TIME GIVEN TO CHRIST IS NEVER TIME LOST, BUT IS RATHER TIME GAINED, SO THAT OUR RELATIONSHIPS AND INDEED OUR WHOLE LIFE MAY BECOME MORE PROFOUNDLY HUMAN" — POPE JOHN PAUL II*

## FR. DENNIS WALSH

In a previous parish, a woman was sharing with me what led her to return to the practice of her Catholic faith. When she was a young mother, her attendance at Mass and her participation in the sacraments was very sporadic. When I met her she was attending Mass several times a week. She was a single mother who was very focused on the activities of her son. She spent thirteen years shuttling her son from one sporting practice to another, getting him to every sports camp, and attending every game. She confessed that they rarely had time for Mass or anything else for the matter. After her son graduated from high school, he no longer participated in athletics. It all stopped very suddenly. He did not go on to college. On the first day after there was no game, practice, or sporting activity, she started thinking: "What was all of that about?" She described her life as if she were running on a treadmill. She was expending great effort, but felt like that she really wasn't getting anywhere.

We have been blessed by God with a day that is used to rest, but more importantly a day to remember. There is a danger that exists in our culture to occupy our Sunday with meaningless activities. The Lord's Day does not look any different from any other day of the week. We use the day to catch up on work, some entertainment, shopping or whatever. It is precisely because we have failed to observe Sunday as a day to remember and celebrate our salvation that our lives feel as though we are running on a treadmill that doesn't stop.

John Paul II, in his encyclical *Dies Domini (The Day of the Lord)* expresses the dilemma we Christians face in keeping Sunday as a day to remember. He states that "Christians today must face the enticements of a culture which has accepted the benefits of rest and free time, but which often uses them frivolously and is at times attracted by morally questionable forms of entertainment. Certainly Christians are no different from other people in enjoying the weekly day of rest; but at the same time they are keenly aware of the uniqueness and originality of Sunday, the day on which they are called to celebrate their salvation and the salvation of all humanity."

We define ourselves and our values by what we celebrate. In essence we are what we celebrate. If my life is about sports, then I will celebrate that with my friends and family by watching sports, gathering with friends during major sports holidays. If my life is about my family then I celebrate that regularly by gathering the family for dinner and other events. If my life is about being a child of God, then I will celebrate that by gathering with my brothers and sisters in Christ at Mass. We remember the wonderful things that God has done for us, we give thanks and we celebrate. We are what we celebrate.

### THE WITNESS OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

As early as the second century we have the witness of St. Justin Martyr for the basic lines of the order of the Eucharistic celebration. They have stayed the same until our own day for all the great liturgical families. St. Justin wrote to the pagan emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161) around the year 155, explaining what Christians did:

On the day we call the day of the sun, all who dwell in the city or country gather in the same place. The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits. When the reader has finished, he who presides over those gathered admonishes and challenges them to imitate these beautiful things. Then we all rise together and offer prayers for ourselves . . . and for all others, wherever they may be, so that we may be found righteous by our life and actions, and faithful to the commandments, so as to obtain eternal salvation.

*Continued, right*

## AMANDA TUCKER

For me, Mass has many meanings, but for today I will only discuss two main ones. First, to me Mass is an opportunity to join in a community of faith. This journey that we are on is not an easy one. Being a Catholic is challenging even on the best of days. I am a Catholic in a Protestant family, so the fact that I can come somewhere and feel like I am at "home" is extremely important to me. It makes me feel not so alone on my journey. Mass makes me feel welcome and safe when I can practice my faith without having to explain why I am different from the rest of my family. The fact that we can come together as a community and worship the one who loves us more than our parents, spouses, and even children is one of the greatest feelings in the world. God has given us so much, and to be able to give thanks to Him in one resounding voice throws my fears and problems out the window. God tells us that wherever two or three are gathered, He is there, and that is so present in the Mass. From the opening songs all the way to the closing ones, we worship as a community. We put aside ourselves and become one. To come together in the midst of hectic and trying weeks and give thanks to God with each other, helping each other along the way, is a gift from God. Remember that when Christ first celebrated the Eucharist during the Last Supper, he did not do it alone. He was with his disciples, a community of faith. This proves to us that we should stand together as one and worship God in a community context. Personal relationships with God are extremely important, I am not trying to discount them, but Christ gives us a community in order to help us worship more ardently.

We also celebrate Mass because it is one of our main ways of saying "yes" to God. How many times have we ignored God? How many times have we known that we should not do something and do it anyway? Have we not listened to him when we should? Sure we have. We are human and flawed. Sometimes when we should cleave to Christ, we run from him with our independent, flawed human selves. Remember when I said that being Catholic wasn't easy? I wasn't kidding. Saying Yes to God is an amazing feeling, one that is not always easy to do, but is always worth it. Mass is the one main time where we can come together and say as one voice "YES" to God. This is apparent in the Eucharist. When the host is before us, Christ himself, do not say "Amen" because it is habitual, do not say it because it is what you are supposed to say, say Amen with the full understanding of saying "Yes" to God. This is the time where God comes to us and we can say "YES" to him. We acknowledge our sins and strive to do better. We make a promise to God when we celebrate Mass as a community, to help each other strive to be better disciples. Mass is the most important part of my life because it is the opportunity to say "Yes" and "Thank you" to the one who loves me the most and who has given me everything. I urge you all to say "Yes" to God as often as you can, including within the context of the Mass, where we say "Yes" not in silence, but with one shouting voice.

### THE WITNESS OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

*(Cont'd)* When the prayers are concluded we exchange the kiss. Then someone brings bread and a cup of water and wine mixed together to him who presides over the brethren. He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and for a considerable time he gives thanks (in Greek: *eucharistian*) that we have been judged worthy of these gifts. When he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all present give voice to an acclamation by saying: 'Amen.'

When he who presides has given thanks and the people have responded, those whom we call deacons give to those present the "eucharisted" bread, wine and water and take them to those who are absent.