

**15<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – A (July 10, 2011)**  
**Fr. Jerry Kopacek**

Now that we have returned to the Sundays of Ordinary Time after the Easter season and special feasts like Trinity Sunday, I would like to direct some particular attention to what we are about when we come together for Mass—a bit of a refresher course on the Eucharist. Two reasons for this: first, we are joining the other Waterloo parishes in celebrating a special Year of the Eucharist during which we want to deepen our love and appreciation for the great gift that the Eucharist is to us. Like anything else that we know and experience often, it is way too easy to take the Eucharist, the Mass for granted—and that is something we do not want to have happen.

In addition, and as you know, we will begin using the new translation of the Roman Missal in less than five months with the season of Advent in late November. As that time approaches, our musicians will be learning some musical settings involving those new translations of Mass parts like the Gloria and the Lamb of God. They will then be teaching us those parts as well, and I will be spending a lot more homily time between now and November on those new translations that will be more prominent and involving all of us. As I have said before, there is no reason at all to panic or get nervous. It is certainly going to be a learning process for all of us, but one that can and will be very helpful, interesting and fruitful. After all, we should always be in the learning mode; we will never know it all on this side of eternity. If we do not continue to learn and grow in our faith, then our faith and prayer life, our relationship with God can all too easily become stagnant and lifeless. My hope and prayer is that through this learning process, we will all come to a more profound understanding, appreciation and love for the Eucharist which is, as Vatican II reminds us, the source and summit of our life of faith and our hope for eternal life.

Today, to help set the stage for what is coming in the next few months, I want you to ask yourself: what do I think the Mass is about? Why am I here? Why does the Church make such a big deal about it? We often hear about different reasons for Catholics complaining about Mass or even not going any more—they don't like the music; it's boring and the same old thing Sunday after Sunday, the homilies are dull (heaven forbid that would ever happen)...all of which can be summed up in the overall complaint: "I don't get anything out of it!"

Now, please do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that things like music, homilies and other elements of the Mass are unimportant. We all need to prepare well—whether we are priest, musician, liturgical minister, or member of the congregation. But I still cringe when I hear: "I don't get anything out of Mass." What is the attitude behind a complaint like that? It seems to be: "what's in it for me?" If we come to Mass with the expectation that we can just sit back as a mere spectator and expect or demand to be entertained as if we were watching a movie or TV program or a ball game, then you are definitely going to be disappointed sometimes—maybe more often than not.

But I have news for you, and I hope this does not hurt your self-esteem when I tell you this: the Mass is not about you, it is not about me. The Mass is all about God—first and foremost. It is all about what God has done for us by creating us and redeeming us through the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ, and how he makes that very same sacrifice present and available to us in every Eucharist. Our human role is important, to be sure, but it is entirely and only in grateful response to what God has first and already done for us. We come to Mass not to sit back passively like bumps on a log, not to be disappointed if we do not experience a spiritual high. Instead, we come to offer God the worship and grateful love and praise we owe him as the One Who has created, redeemed and sanctified each one of us.

In the current issue of Our Sunday Visitor there is a great article by a fellow named Eric Sammons; it is titled "Liturgical Attitude Adjustment". He grew up in a Protestant church and became Catholic about 20 years ago during his young adulthood. He writes about how he used to think it was of the utmost

importance to “get something out of” church services and that, if he did not, then it must have been someone else’s fault. He then goes on to say: “Before, I saw a worship service as something that was direct at me: Its purpose was to uplift and encourage and inspire me. Today, however, I see that I had it completely backward: the liturgy is directed to God, not me. I am to be a participant in the Church’s worship, not a consumer of it.” That is a great way to put it, especially for us who are surrounded by a consumer culture that tells us we should get what we want, when we want, and as we want it—a culture, in other words, that tells us: “it’s all about me”.

Instead of focusing on what I get out of Mass, the better question—the first question—should be: “what am I giving?” Mr. Sammons puts it this way: “Whenever we gather for Mass, we are entering into the eternal worship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What we ‘get out of’ Mass is directly related to our focus—is it on the worship of God or on self-entertainment?” That’s it—that’s precisely it. One of the reasons that I am especially looking forward to the new Missal is that the new English translation we will have for many of the prayers and parts of the Mass (especially those offered by the priest) will be a more faithful and literal translation of the official Latin text. The language of that text makes it clear that we are here to worship God—to offer God the sacrifice of our prayer and our lives, and to encounter and receive the priceless gift of Jesus Christ whose sacrifice on the Cross is made present to us on our altar and who offers his Body and Blood as our spiritual food and drink. The new translation will therefore make more clear and obvious what we are here for when we come to Mass—and that can only help us to enter more deeply and more personally into the thankful worship and praise we offer to God.

In the gospel today we heard the familiar parable of the sower and the seed and how the fruitfulness of the seed depends on the kind of ground it falls on. The seed, of course, is the word of God—including his revealed word on the Eucharist and its meaning as our most important encounter with Jesus. How receptive are we to the Eucharistic word? Are we like the path—the one who hears the word without understanding it? Do we know and therefore truly appreciate the priceless gift that the Mass is, or do we not want to bother ourselves to grow in our knowledge and understanding? Or perhaps we are more like the rocky ground or that ground covered with thorns—we have some basic awareness of what the Mass is, but we let so many other things, other distractions get in the way...and so the Eucharistic words does not take deep root or gets choked by our inattention or spiritual laziness. God grant us the grace to be instead like that rich soil. May we may know and believe in what the Mass is really all about; may we may be truly receptive to that Eucharistic word so that, through our active and grateful participation—the offering of our worship and praise—we may be transformed to be ever more like the Christ whose Word we hear and whose Body and Blood we receive.

