

# How to Survive being Married to a Catholic



Michael Henesy, CSsR, and Rosemary Gallagher

*Nihil Obstat:* Rev. Dr. Brendan Killeen, BSc, STB, MA, JCL, MCL, PhD  
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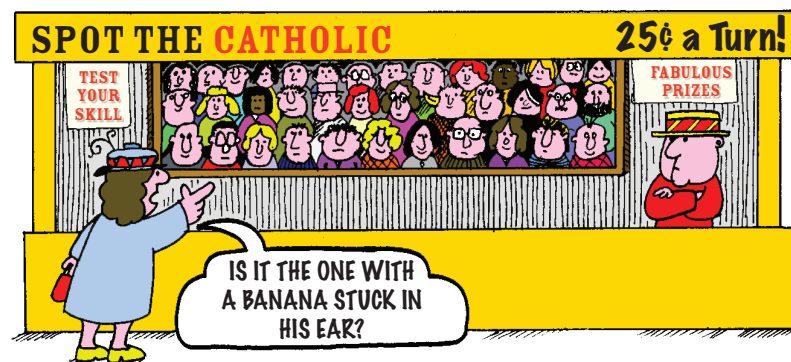
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Remaining text by Rosemary Gallagher and Michael Henesy, CSsR.  
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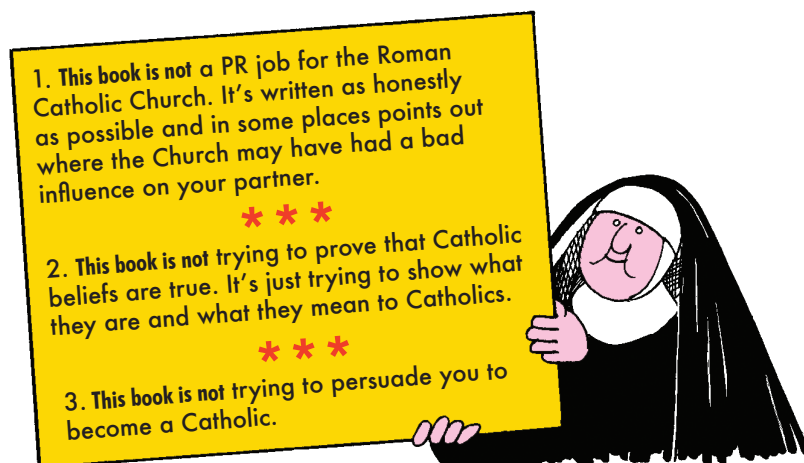
This book is primarily for anyone who's thinking of getting married to a Catholic or who's already married to one. Its aim is to help you understand what makes Catholics tick. Not that Catholics are a different breed of human being from everyone else. You probably wouldn't be able to pick one out in a crowd...



But Catholics do hold certain beliefs that affect the way they think about themselves, other people, and the world around them. Their faith has a very strong influence on the way they lead their lives. It has helped to shape their character, their ideals, and their values—even if they no longer bother much with religion.



This book is designed to increase your understanding of something that has played a big part in making your partner the sort of person he or she is—and something that will continue to have a big influence. The following pages will try to explain the meaning of the central beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church and show why they are important to your partner. But there are three things this book is **not** trying to do.



We hope that by the end you will understand your partner better and that you'll have had a few laughs along the way.

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# 1 CATHOLICS AND RELIGION

Some people have strange ideas about religion. Some think it's about keeping God happy:



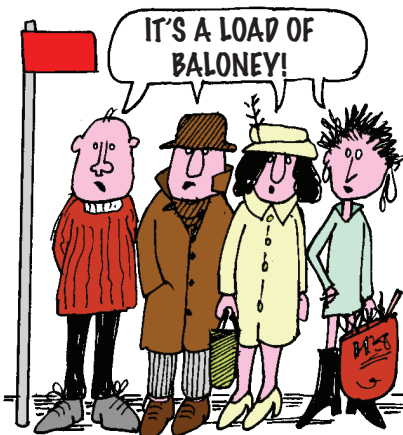
Others think it's just something human beings cling to in order to make life more bearable:



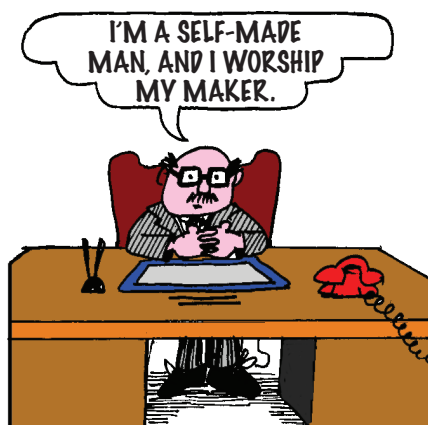
Others think it's harmless:



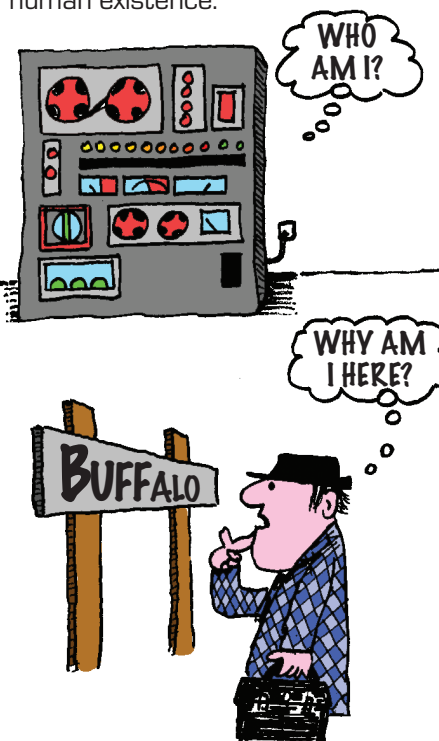
Still others think it's a load of baloney:



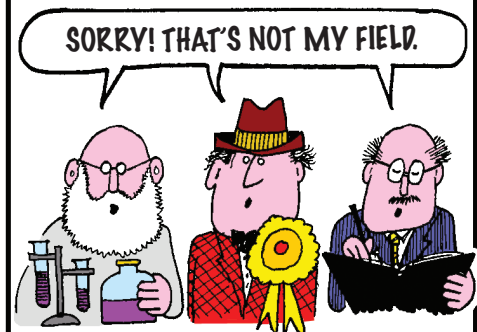
Most think they can get along perfectly well without it:



Catholics don't look at religion in any of these ways. They think religion is important because it's concerned with the deepest questions about human existence:



Questions like these can't be answered by scientists, politicians, or economists.



Yet at the heart of human existence there lies a...

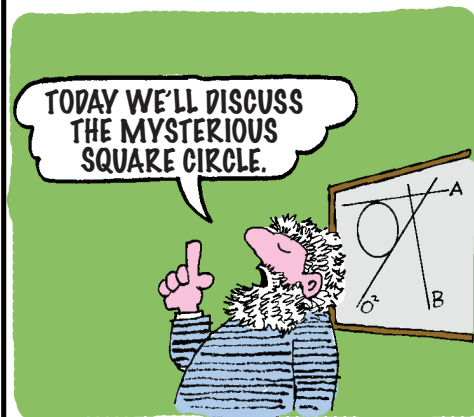


Catholics aren't afraid of the word "mystery." They're at home with it, but they DON'T mean "something puzzling."

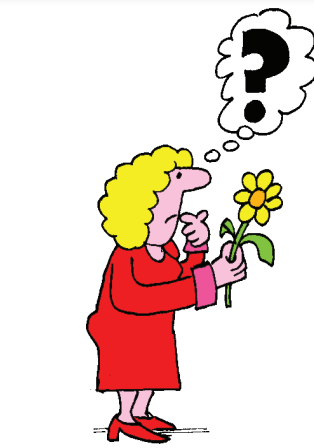




And they **DON'T** mean "something unintelligible."



What they **DO** mean is something that's real but with a meaning so deep that it can never be fathomed fully. That may sound vague, but it isn't. It's something people experience all the time. We're surrounded by mystery, whether we realize it or not. Take the natural world, for example. The more we investigate and analyze it, the more we realize our ignorance about it. If we ask enough questions about anything, we always arrive at a question that **can't** be answered.



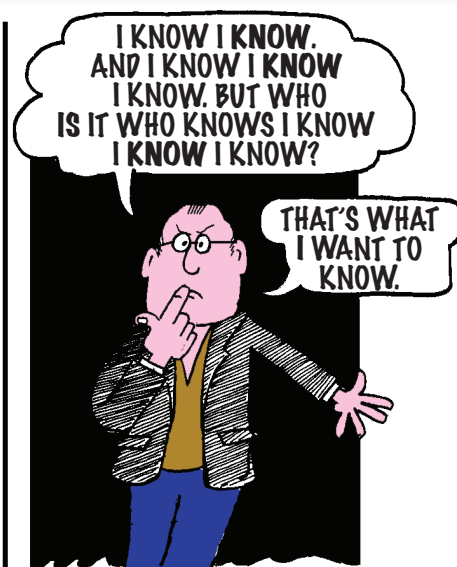
This is especially true of the mystery that's closest to us: the mystery of the human person.



You only have to think of people you love to realize you can never know them completely. If you try to analyze or describe them, you soon discover there's much more to them than you can put into words. Statistics, no matter how vital, just aren't enough:

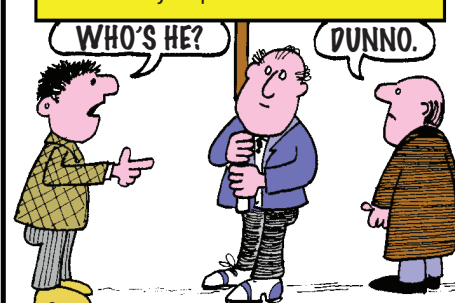


Even when you think about **yourself**, you realize there's a part of your being you can't reach. You know it's there, but it's hidden from you. It is a mystery.



To sum up what we've said about religion, the main thing to remember is that **religion** is concerned with **reality**. This is because:

- 1** RELIGION recognizes that there's more to reality than things that can be seen and heard or weighed and measured.
- 2** RELIGION recognizes there's an unseen world as well as a visible one—a world of mystery that can be found at the heart of all things.
- 3** RELIGION recognizes that this mystery isn't something vague but something we constantly encounter in our everyday experience.



Religion is concerned with exploring this mysterious and hidden side of human existence. Religion doesn't try to **explain** it. The religious quest is an attempt to **enter into** the mystery and **participate** in it. That's true of all religions, including the Catholic faith. And it helps to explain why Catholics think religion is so important.

# 8 CATHOLICS AND SUNDAY MASS

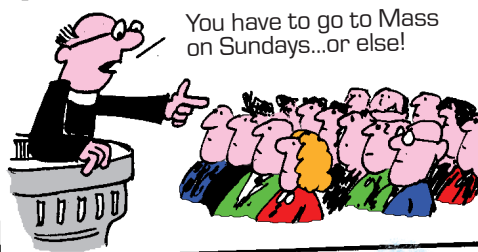
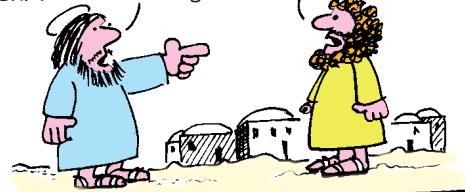
People who know next to nothing about the Catholic Church do know one thing, and that is that Catholics have to go to Mass on Sundays. When you're married to a Catholic, your Sunday routine is inevitably going to be affected by your partner's weekly visit to Mass.

In this chapter, we'll try to explain **why** Sunday Mass is so important to Catholics. But explaining it isn't as straightforward as it seems.

Catholics themselves have various reasons for going to Mass—some good, some not so good. Let's start with a picture...



Peter, you're the first pope. Hand my message on. Tell them straight. Yes, Lord. Leave it to me and my successors.



A job well done.



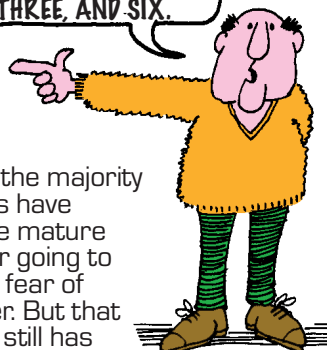
Until fairly recently, this was the sort of picture many Catholics carried around in the back of their minds. They saw the Church as a link in a chain of command between God and humanity.

This picture led some Catholics to go to Mass on Sundays largely out of a sense of obligation and fear of God's wrath. Today most Catholics would agree that the above picture is grossly misleading. It's misleading for three reasons:

1. It makes God out to be a tyrant who is out to get you unless you kowtow to him.
2. It makes Jesus out to be God's henchman who came to tell us what to do.
3. It makes the Church out to be an organization set up by Jesus to make sure we do it.

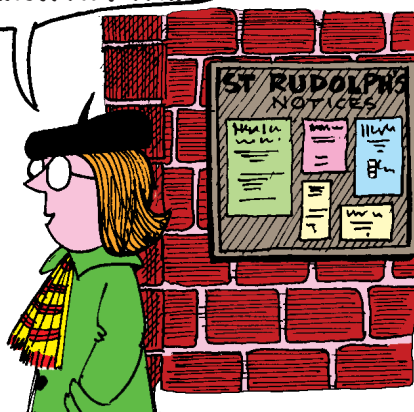
If you've followed the earlier chapters of this book, you'll realize that none of these three statements is true. And none of them accurately represents the belief of Catholics today.

SEE ESPECIALLY CHAPTERS TWO, THREE, AND SIX.



Nowadays the majority of Catholics have much more mature reasons for going to Mass than fear of God's anger. But that old picture still has **some** influence, and occasionally you **will** come across Catholics who go to Mass just to "keep their slate clean."

WELL, I'M IN THE CLEAR FOR ANOTHER WEEK.



You'll also come across Catholics who go to Mass out of a sense of fear and foreboding. They think something terrible will happen to them during the week if they miss Mass on Sunday.



Much more frequently you'll come across Catholics who go to Mass because it would be awkward not to go. This is especially true of some family members who go because the rest of the family goes.



But the majority of Catholics go to Mass on Sunday because they believe it's central to their lives as Christians. So let's look at what Catholics believe is happening when they go to Mass.

The first thing is that Catholics don't think of the Mass as a church service that they attend. The Mass is an **action**. It's something Catholics **do** together. They're not spectators **at** it; they're deeply involved **in** it.

At Mass they reenact what Jesus did at the supper he had with his disciples on the night before he was crucified.



Here's how the Gospel of Luke describes it:

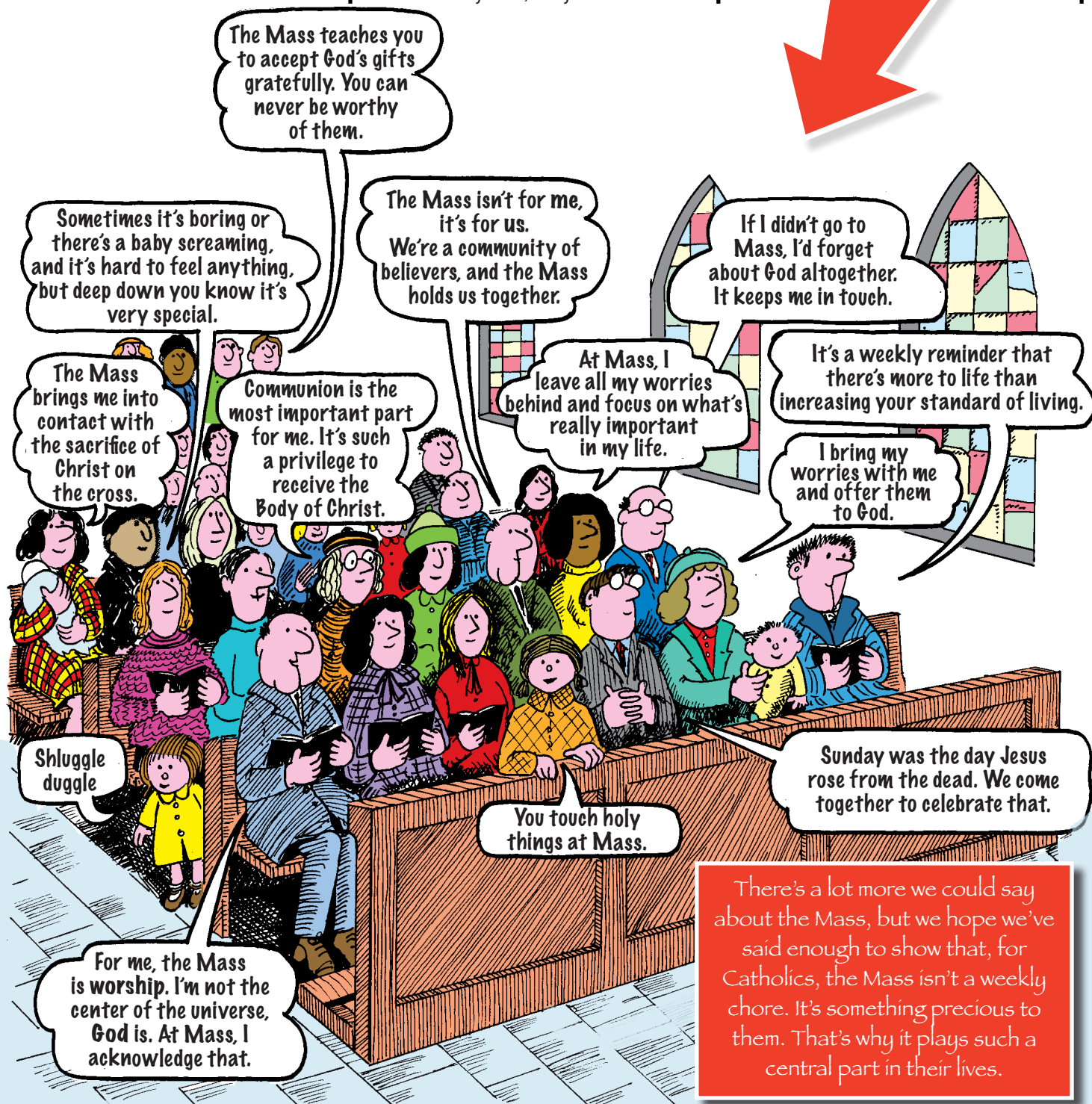
He took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after supper, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood..."

The words of Jesus, "Do this in remembrance of me," have been obeyed without interruption for some 2,000 years. Every time Catholics gather for Mass they know they are there to do what Jesus did. And they believe that in that action Jesus, who died on the cross and was raised to life three days later, is made present for them.

The Mass is a sacred action that has a depth of meaning impossible to put into words. That's one reason why Catholics never tire of the Mass. As they go to Mass over the weeks and months and years, they enter more

deeply into its mystery and get a bit more insight into its significance and its meaning for their own lives.

So if you asked a number of Catholics what the Mass means to them, you'd probably get a lot of **different** answers. Here are some of the things they might say...



# CATHOLICS AND SUNDAY MASS

## SOME THINGS YOU SEE AT MASS



**1. Scripture readings:**  
Usually three passages from the Scriptures are read at Mass.



**2. Homily:**  
After the Scripture readings, the priest or deacon delivers a homily in which he draws out the meaning of the Scripture readings.



**3. Offertory procession:**  
Members of the congregation bring the bread and wine to the altar.

### TWO ALTERNATIVES

**Why can't Catholics pray at home instead of going to Mass?**

Catholics can and do pray at home. They don't do it as a substitute for going to Mass because it's a different form of prayer and has a different purpose. It's not simply a question of choosing one of two alternatives. Christians are essentially a group of people who believe in Jesus Christ and try to follow his way. They are a community of believers. If the members of any family or community never have any contact with one another, they soon cease to be united and disintegrate into isolation.

Catholics attend Mass because it is the culmination of their lives as Christians. In the Mass, they are united to one another and to Christ in a unique and personal way. But they pray at home as well.

### SUNDAY EXCUSE

**My Catholic husband uses Sunday Mass as an excuse not to visit my family. Surely the Church shouldn't be used to cause trouble in families?**

You're right, the Church shouldn't be used to cause trouble. In fact, the opposite is the truth: Christianity should be the means of healing over differences and divisions. Your husband has an obligation to attend Sunday Mass, but he also has an equally serious obligation to share his life with you and to work toward unity and harmony within your marriage. With your help and support, he must work out how he may best fulfill

all his obligations. If he doesn't like your family and is seeking an excuse not to see them, he's wrong to use the Church as the reason. In doing so, he's betraying the principles of his faith.

### SELF-CONSCIOUS

**When I go to Mass with my husband, I feel left out and self-conscious because I'm unfamiliar with the prayers. I'm also uneasy in case I'll be expected to do something I'm not ready for. I feel everyone's staring at me. Wouldn't it be better if I didn't go at all?**

The feeling of being stared at in unfamiliar surroundings is understandable. But be assured that people are **not** staring at you. Most Catholics aren't a bit concerned about what anyone else is doing during Mass—and many of them have their own idiosyncrasies! Some Catholics don't join in the prayers, for example, so you won't be alone if you remain silent.

Ask your husband to show you the book or leaflet you need to follow the Mass and also where the responses are indicated. Once you get used to the form of the Mass, you'll feel more relaxed.

There are a few days during the year when there are special ceremonies: Holy Thursday and Good Friday, for example. If you attend these, ask your husband to run through the ceremony with you beforehand so you'll know what to expect.

### INSENSITIVE PRIESTS

**I've been to Mass with my husband on a number of occasions, and it never seems to occur to the priest that there might be people in the congregation who aren't Catholics. Why are they so insensitive?**

Most Catholic priests would be delighted to know that people who are not Catholics are present in their congregation, especially if they're the husband or wife of a parishioner. You're probably right when you say, "It doesn't occur to them." It would undoubtedly help if you made yourself known to the parish priest, or perhaps your husband could introduce you.

### FEAST DAYS

**I can understand my wife going to Mass on Sundays, but why does she have to go during the week on, say, a special feast day?**

The days you refer to are called "holy days of obligation." These are days of special solemnity in the Church's calendar that Catholics observe by going to Mass—in much the same way that families celebrate birthdays or anniversaries.

### DILEMMA

**Am I expected to take the children to Mass on Sunday if my wife is ill?**

No, you aren't expected to take them. If they're old enough, they can take themselves; if they're too young to do that, then they have no obligation to





#### 4. Elevation:

After the consecration, the priest lifts the host and then the chalice so they may be venerated by the people.



#### 5. Sign of peace:

The people express their union with one another by exchanging a greeting—usually a handshake.



#### 6. Holy Communion:

The sacrament that is distributed to Catholics who wish to receive it.

attend Sunday Mass. If the problem is one of distance or transportation, then you decide. Certainly you have no obligation in this matter. It would simply be a question of whether you wished to take them on behalf of your wife.

### BORING MASS

**I've been to Mass a few times with my wife and two young children and it has always been boring. Why?**

In some parishes, sadly, the Mass nearly always is boring—even for Catholics. These are usually parishes where not very much care seems to be taken over the Mass by the priest or people. Half-hearted singing, inaudible lectors, and dull, uninspiring homilies are some of the symptoms. Obviously it shouldn't be like that. The Mass is a celebration of Christ's presence among us. In the Mass, Catholics believe they come into contact with Christ and that their prayers are united to his. This happens whether the ceremonies are performed well or not. Nevertheless, the priest and people have a responsibility to see that the meaning of the Mass is conveyed in the way it is celebrated.

In places where the Mass is celebrated in a lifeless and offhand manner, some Catholics look for another parish where the Mass is celebrated with care, dignity, and beauty. That's not ideal because Catholics should worship with their own parish community. But change is sometimes understandable—especially for families with young children.

### LEFT OUT

**Must my wife take our son to Mass every Sunday? I feel left out, and he's beginning to ask: "Why doesn't Daddy come to Mass?"**

If your son has made his first holy Communion, your wife is expected to ensure that he practices his faith and attends Mass regularly. But it's important that she doesn't use your son to bring pressure on you to alter your views or to trick you into attending Mass.

You and your wife should explain to your son, as simply as you can, that you don't share the same faith. The mutual respect you show to each other in this matter will help him to understand your differences of belief.

When your son is old enough, he'll be able to decide whether to go to Mass with your wife, on his own, or with his friends.

### FROM CHURCH TO THE BAR

**Many Catholics go to Mass every Sunday and then straight across to a bar. Doesn't that indicate that the Mass doesn't mean a lot to them?**

No. It could mean the opposite. Perhaps they so enjoyed meeting their friends at Mass that they didn't want to part company right away! There's nothing wrong with social contact after a religious service: coffee and cookies in the hall, some wine at a friend's house, or a glass of beer at the bar. None of these lessens the sincerity of the religious service.

Christ's message is all about loving and caring for one another and the value of friendship. Of course, if we stay too long at such a gathering or neglect our families, causing disharmony at home as a result, then we **do** need to question our behavior. But that would apply to attending the religious service, too.

