



## What's wrong with teen Masses?

It seems to me that we have become confused as to what Christianity is really all about. It seems as though some Catholics have chosen the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which is the sacrifice of calvary perpetuated in our presence, as the primary tool to teach the youth their faith. This is extremely dangerous and could be the force behind the movement to entice the young to attend Mass with the carrot on the stick approach that is using teen Masses as the carrot.

When Catholics lose the reasoning behind what Christianity is all about, it is very easy for even good people to resort to sometimes silly and, in many instances, detrimental practices. If we want to change the drastic abandonment of the practice of attending Holy Mass, we must reexamine what Catholic Christianity is all about. This is what I hope this little pamphlet will do.

### What is the Mass?

The Catechism states: The Sacrament is called the Eucharistic assembly because the Eucharist is celebrated amid the assembly of the faithful, the visible expression of the Church (1329). Thus it can be said that the Mass is an expression of the people's faith. So, for this to take place one must have the faith to truly participate in this public expression. If one does not have the faith, this expression becomes a farce at best, a mockery at worst. Neither should be acceptable for thinking people. The Catechism also states: The Eucharist is a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, a blessing by which the Church expresses her gratitude to God for all his benefits, for all that he has accomplished through creation, redemption, and sanctification. Eucharist means first of all thanksgiving (1360).

The question I would like to pose to the reader here is: How can people who have to be lured by music truly understand this statement in the Catechism? The answer is obvious. They cannot. So more and more people are coming to understand that we must educate the young, as well as the old, if they are to ever be able to appreciate the gift God has given them in this most wonderful sacrament.

### We are not Protestants

Too many in the Church have forgotten the fact that we are Catholics and not Protestants. What may be perfectly acceptable in a Protestant church may be disastrous in a Catholic church. Protestant churches, in large part, tend to be gathering places for praise, worship, and fellowship. In the mind of the average Protestant the church building itself is never considered to be the "house of God" as it is in the mind of the faithful Catholic. So what is appropriate in a Protestant church may be quite inappropriate in a Catholic church.

An illustration we can use is the way Protestants minister to and evangelize the youth. For the most part, Protestants tend to have great youth programs, lively Bible programs, as well as social activity for the youth. They do a good job of making the youth feel part of the church community. How the youth dress or act, as long as it is decent, makes little difference. Catholics, however, have been taught that their churches are truly the houses of God, for Christ is truly present in the tabernacle. This real presence of Christ is something that will keep Catholics Catholic, and bring non-Catholics into the Church, that is, if this belief can be truly fixed in their mind and heart.

The problem with most youth Masses is that they, like Protestant youth functions, focus on entertaining the youth and providing them with a good time. You might have heard the statement, "We have to do something to get them in if we are to teach them." This mentality is valid, but I feel that it is being applied in a way that has, and still is, causing the Catholic youth to have a contempt for the Church. I could find nowhere in Sacred Scripture that Christ strummed a guitar like a piper to get the youth to follow Him. However He did talk about picking up one's cross and following Him.

Another thing that I noticed in reading Scripture is that Christ talked primarily to the adults. It seemed as though He might have wanted the adults to change their lives (repent) and start living a life that would be in the world but would certainly not be of the world. Christ may have thought that if the adults understood and practiced His unworldly teachings, the youth would see the results of a life lived for Christ and be drawn to it. The problem today is that many children are turned off by the example of their parent's worldly and watered down version of Catholicism. I truly believe that many of our clergy feel that it is a lot easier to entertain the children than to try and get the adults to repent and follow Christ.

If we want to entertain the youth that is one thing. If we want to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass that is quite another. There are times and places for everything, and the church is never the place for entertaining the youth. There are other places for such things which are much more suitable.

This whole idea of youth Masses started long ago; it is certainly not something new that is going to bring the youth back. In fact this sort of silliness has, to some degree, contributed to the loss of our youth's faith. I can remember back some twenty years ago talking to a young man from up north. He told me how when he was in high school, back in his hometown, they entertained in the parish church. He meant that he played in a band at Mass. Notice the word he used was entertained. He told me how it made him feel good to entertain a whole church full of people. I asked the young man which type of music he

thought was most appropriate for Mass. Would you believe it, he felt that the traditional type was most appropriate? By the way, he was no longer attending Mass.

This was back when we had about 70% Mass attendance. This 70% Mass attendance was not good enough for our liberal activists; they had to do more for the youth. And what is the fruit of their loving and concerned labor? They have gotten us down to 29% Mass attendance, and they are still flying the same old flag: "We have to do something to get the youth back." Some of the clergy still have the same old response, "Yea, man, yea, we must do something to get our youth back." Holiness, I feel, on the part of both clergy and parents, would be more in line with what Christ taught than this foolishness at Holy Mass.

It is important to keep in mind that everyone has a right to his opinion. Wise people check to see the fruits of those opinions and are careful not to adopt the practices of those whose opinion bears bad fruits. It is naive to think that because one is nice and sincere, this in itself makes it all right to follow them. Nice and sincere people are often nice and sincerely wrong. Sometimes nice and sincere people just don't or won't see their error. The result of these errors is a church without its young people.

## **FUN**

"Fun" is a word that I am coming to disdain. Not that having fun is something bad, but because the pursuit of fun is causing havoc in both family and church. Just as dessert may be fine after a meal but completely out of place if served as the main course. So the pursuit of fun may be perfectly fine as a break in an ordered life, yet quite unacceptable when it takes the place of the thing that we, as Catholics, have been put on earth to accomplish. This is the problem with teen Masses.

This is a quote from a Teen Life brochure: If the Mass is presented in a manner that is dull, lifeless, and lacks energy, the message of Christ is sure to get lost assuming it gets heard at all. It is statements such as this that makes one wonder what the Teen Life people think of the way Christ celebrated the Last Supper. By their standards Christ would have had a dull, lifeless meal, and His message would have gotten lost if it got heard at all. Come to think of it, Teen Life might just be right. Did not Judas leave? It is a pity that Teen Life was not there to inform Christ of His dull and lifeless first Mass. The strumming of a guitar might have changed the course of history. Who knows?

## **Naive**

It has been more than thirty years since the Council, and every sort of foolishness has been tried to make the Mass more entertaining, often under the guise of the spirit of Vatican II. What we have ended up with is empty pews and empty lives. Yet the pursuit goes on. It seems that they just cannot admit that this foolishness is the reason we have virtually no young people in our churches. They just cannot or will not see it. (Those who have eyes and can't see.) So they continue doing the very thing that for the past thirty years has caused our problem. They just change the names to make it look like something new.

In conclusion, it might be beneficial to our youth if the clergy were to take a good look at the adults who are involved in or promoting youth movements. Are they people whose children go to Mass on Sunday? Do their children share the faith with their peers? Are their children getting other people to come into the Church, and most importantly of all, do their children honor their father and mother? Sad to say, you will find, in most cases, they do not.

## **Holiness is the answer**

Striving to be holy is something that is not often mentioned in today's secular and materialistic society. Yet, it is something that is absolutely needed if our youth are to truly embrace the faith. I am not speaking of a false holiness, one in which a person goes around with hands folded and halo proudly exhibited. The holiness that I am speaking of is that holiness that God grants to those who are truly seeking His Will rather than their own. Our problem today is that many parents in the home, as well as many leaders in the Church, have become much too worldly and lack the maturity that is needed to discipline their lives to more fully follow the Gospel message. As a result, our youth are turned off by the watered down versions of a faith that demands little more than the ability to be entertained. Only a faith that can be seen lived out on a consistent daily basis will ever be able to attract our youth in a permanent and meaningful way.