

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend, I begin a six part series about the Mass – how to prepare for Mass, what does the Mass mean. Some of the teaching will be done before Mass begins (like this weekend) and other will be part of the homily. My hope for this is that it will help us all to enter more deeply into the great mystery of the Mass.

This weekend, I speak about preparing for Mass. The first reading, I think, is very appropriate for this. Listen again to the words of the prophet Isaiah:

**Seek the LORD while he may be found,  
call him while he is near.** (Isaiah 55:6)

Our Lord invites us to seek Him. Do we seek Him in the Mass? I would hope we all do, but if you don't, maybe that's a good way to begin: ask God to give us the desire to find Him at Mass.

One of the most important things we can do before Mass – either at home, on the way to the Church, or in the pew as we prepare for Mass – is honestly to examine our consciences. This means looking throughout the last week (or since we went to confession last), and recognizing the areas we have disobeyed God, where we have rejected His love. Entering into Mass is about letting God enter us, embrace us in His love, draw us close to Him. Before we can do this, we need to reject those things that reject His love. One way to do this is to examine our lives in the light of the two great commandments: Love God with everything we are, and love our neighbor as ourselves. What are the areas that God called me beyond my selfishness this week... and I rejected that call? Were there times when I felt a gentle tug to prayer, but I rejected it or procrastinated (“I’ll pray later, Jesus”)? Have I been loving to the people around me when they are in need? Have I been merciful? There are many more questions we can ask ourselves, but the point is to see where we need healing. When we have done this, we hand it to God, and humbly ask for forgiveness.

Looking at our brokenness, our sinfulness, can be very hard. We don't like to see it, but remember that God is the Healer, the Forgiver, the Merciful One. Think about the parable in the Gospel this week: there are some people that were standing around all day... and then only at the end of the day (5:00pm) did they go out into the vineyard to work. The master came over and over again, these people did not accept the invitation to his vineyard earlier in the day ... if they had been there earlier, would they not have been asked to work by him?! Our sloth, our choices against God can make us afraid to go to Him. We may think that He will ask too much from us. Maybe we think that He rebuke us, and we just can't handle that.

This is NOT our God, though. No, our God looks at us with love, and says, “Even at this late hour, if you go out into the vineyard, I will give you so much!” And remember, the ones who worked only one hour were given just as much as those who worked all day! The key is not how long we are with our God in this life, but how willing we are to be His, to love Him and receive His love! Remember, it's all about relationship! So, if you are afraid to examine your life in the light of God's loving law, don't be! He only “convicts” us of our sins because He wants to bring us healing! Do not be afraid. Not only will He forgive our sins (not grudgingly, not even only willingly, but *eagerly!*), not only will He heal the deep wound in us caused by our sins, He also pours out such a superabundance of grace to strengthen us so we can conquer these sins ... *even when we come in the last hour!* We can't, of course, trust that we choose God at the last minute (so don't put it off), but wherever we are, whenever we are, if we surrender to God, God will do *incredible things in us!*

As we begin our walk through of the Mass, I encourage you to trust God more and more, even to entrust your sins in to His infinitely merciful Hands!