

the entrance rite into heaven.

One day, you will attend your last Mass and receive your last Holy Communion. How do you want Jesus to remember that moment?

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Our Last Mass

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In 1917 the Mexican constitution arrogated to the state all authority in religious matters, denied all legal character to dioceses and parishes, ordered all religious goods to be seized, and deprived candidates to the priesthood the right to vote. Under the dictatorship of President Plutarco Elias Calles, priests could not exercise their ministry without legal authorization, and churches were abandoned or transformed into museums, prisons, or garages. All public religious services ceased.

This situation lasted until 1936. Just as in all previous periods of persecution of Christ, God raised up saints and heroes in order to continue the work of His Church. The world in general has come to understand how genuine and vibrant, behind the camouflage of unrepresentative liberal governments, is the Catholicism of Mexico. For to defend the faith and the traditions of their fathers, and with the space of only three years, thousands of Mexicans died fighting in the sun-bleached mountains of Jalisco, Michoacán and Guanajuato; 147 priests were murdered and 160 youths of the Catholic Young Men's Association were slaughtered in the valleys of Anáhuac, reminiscent of the most glorious martyrdoms of the Roman amphitheater.

During this period of the Church's terrible persecution in Mexico, a number of priests went underground in order to bring the sacraments of the Church to the populace. These men risked their lives every day in the service of Christ.

One Sunday morning, as a priest was about to begin the celebration of Holy Mass, in what was supposed to be a safe and secret location in the jungle, a horde of hostile federal soldiers swooped down on the group with the intention of putting the entire congregation to death. The priest begged the leader to allow them to finish the Mass. Reluctantly, the officer consented.

The Mass went on, with the priest and the people praying as they never prayed before. As the Holy Sacrifice ended the helpless little group was unmercifully put to death.

How that priest must have offered that Mass. How those people must have followed every prayer and gesture. How closely they must have united themselves with the crucified Christ. It was to be their last Mass.

Suppose you knew that your next Mass and Communion would be your last. Suppose you knew that after that Mass you would die or be killed. How devoutly, and attentively would you spend that last hour? Mass lasts such a short while. During Mass we come face to face with the living God. After Mass we will not see Him again until our next Mass or when we stand before Him on our day of judgment. May our joy at Mass be the

joy of which our Lord speaks of in John's Gospel: "I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (16:22).

That joy will be ours if we enter into the Mass with the proper attention. It is incumbent upon us, as Catholics, to understand each and every aspect of the celebration. The best method of attending Mass is with a missal, which will enable you to follow the prayers of the priest at the altar. An educated Catholic knows what is being said and being done. The prayers in the missal have come down to us from saints and scholars and from the Apostles themselves.

Unite yourself with Christ in the Mass. Offer your Mass for the desires of His Sacred Heart. Just as the priest has a special intention for each Mass, so you should have some special intention each time you attend. Make the intention thoughtfully and clearly. Offer the Mass for something definite: your family, friends, the conversion of sinners, peace in the world, the end of abortion. There are thousands of possible intentions.

Remember, that the purpose of the Mass is to come together for the four purposes of sacrifice, namely, to adore God, to ask favors of God, to thank God, and to beg God's pardon. To adore God means to tell Him everything in thought, word, and action that He is the absolute center of your life, that He is above every thing and every one. To thank God means to express your

gratitude for all the countless blessings that He has bestowed upon you, the blessing of body and soul, and especially for the gift of His Divine Presence in the Eucharist. The best time to adore and thank God is during the Mass. It is also the best time to ask for special favors or intentions, and to beg God for His pardon. We offer the gift most pleasing to Him, His own Divine Son, asking Him for material and spiritual blessings, and begging His pardon for failing to use His gifts properly in the past.

Many find it inspiring to follow every action of the priest. Understanding the ceremonies of the Mass will require study, but such a study will be a labor of love.

We should understand that the Mass is our participation in the sacrifice of Christ at Calvary. When the priest says the words of consecration, in that sublime moment, the Holy Spirit makes present on the altar the one same sacrifice of Jesus. We are there, transported, as it were, back in time to the foot of the Cross and are kneeling with Mary, the Blessed Mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and John, the disciple Jesus loved. The Mass is Calvary made present.

When we receive Jesus in the Eucharist in a worthy manner, He will cleanse our souls and live within us. He will sanctify us and enable us to live holy lives. No person can love to the degree required by God unless Jesus dwells within his soul. When we worship God in the manner He prescribed we will enter into eternal life. The Mass is