

Last weekend Fr. Justin Ryan covered for me while I was away for the annual Oakland family vacation. There were about thirty of us for the week, with a few comings and goings due to work. My dad and his two brothers were not raised with faith, though all three married Catholics, and two became Catholic themselves. So I celebrated Sunday Mass last weekend with the eleven practicing Catholic members of the family, plus a few of my cousin's younger kids who like going to church, though normally of the protestant variety. As we heard last week in the Gospel, there is one treasure we should hold above all else – and it is the Lord. While our lives are usually filled with many good things, many treasures and blessings, God must come before all else. So the most important thing we do every week is to celebrate Mass, even when we are on vacation. We should never take a break from the Lord. Below is a picture of our family Sunday Mass from a few years ago.

At Mass, the transition to the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the Offertory Rite, where the people offer to the priest, and to God, the gifts of bread and wine – fruits of the earth and works of human hands, for consecration – to make holy (the gifts, and the people who will receive them back once they have been made new). On solemnities we also take up a collection, an offering to the Lord of our earthly treasure to continue the work of Christ and his Church. After the priest blesses the bread and the wine, we say: “Pray brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours, may be acceptable to God the almighty Father.”

As the rubrics state, the people stand after the priest says these words (not during). The people are responding to the command of the priest, first with their bodies, and next in their souls. In the Mass, we celebrate the one perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ to the Father – of himself. The priest, *in persona Christi*, offers this sacrifice on behalf of the Church, and those present. But everyone is called to truly participate in the priest's sacrifice, and offer their own as well.

Last Sunday, I offered the *pro populo* Mass Intention, despite the fact that I was far away. As a pastor, I am required to celebrate Mass on each Holy Day *for the people* entrusted to my care – all who live within the parish boundaries. The Mass is one great big prayer, consisting of many other prayers. Some are the same each day, such as for the pope and the bishop, while others can change, as we hear in the General Intercessions with prayers for various needs, or particular people who are sick or who have died.

But the Mass Intention is not a prayer intention. We each bring prayer intentions to every Mass, things we place on the altar, people we bring to the Lord. The Mass Intention is something much greater. Each Mass is celebrated generally for the Church. It is also celebrated for those present, who can benefit from the fruits of the Mass depending on how faithfully and well they have participated. But the priest can bring a special intention as well, for someone who has died or for the intentions of someone who is living. These are normally requested by parishioners, and so listed on the altar for the priest to remember during the consecration. The Mass Intention is a prayer that the grace of this particular Mass, and the offering of Christ to the Father for our salvation, flow to this individual in

particular. The sacrifice is offered for them. That is far more powerful than bringing someone to the Lord in prayer.

The chief purpose of the Mass is to enter into the sacrifice of Christ. Those who complain about not getting anything out of Mass are missing this. We come first and foremost not to receive, but to offer – in faith. And thankfully, in God’s goodness, an abundance is poured forth. Besides the host of prayer intentions that you may bring to Mass, you can also offer your Mass intention for a particular person – that this grace be theirs (or yours). There is power in the Mass. Never forget this grace, or take it for granted, or fail to put it to work.

