



Diocese of Joliet

Religious Education Office

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Dear Parents,

Last year at this time I wrote a letter wishing you a Happy New Year that pointed out that on our Christian calendar the Advent Season starts the year. The theme of my message to you last year was on Eucharist. It highlighted how rich and wonderful is the gift of Eucharist, how central it is to our lives as Catholic people. Indeed, the Sacrament of Eucharist is *Bread of Life* and *Cup of Salvation*...made possible through Jesus surrendering his life for us on the Cross.

Sunday Mass connects us in Word and Sacrament to the Cross and to the Last Supper at which Jesus first offers humanity his Body and Blood. Eucharist also connects us more spiritually to one another. We gather as one people around one table to share in the one meal that can offer eternal life. In Christ we are made one.

My message to you this year extends beyond appealing for families to faithfully attend Mass each weekend. Of course, I reiterate last year's urging that families make Sunday Eucharist *the* priority around which we properly build the activities of our week. But just physically being there at church is not all there is to it.

Sunday Mass, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, is the great communal prayer of Catholics, literally, the *work of the people*. The priest leads us at Mass. We call him the *presider* and his role is unique and essential. But from beginning to end, it is the prayer of all of us. Together, we lift up our lives to God, who accepts our brokenness and hunger and acts to heal and feed us.

Obviously, Mass is a *participation* prayer. We stand, we kneel, we sing, we sign ourselves, we offer peace, we speak various responses and prayers, we process forward for Holy Communion. These actions which engage our physical bodies are meant to help draw us, mentally and spiritually, more deeply into our liturgy.

The Church asks us to engage in the Mass with full, active and conscious participation. It is our rightful role to do so, giving our minds, hearts and bodies to the Lord. And if you, as parents, give yourself fully and attentively to the great prayer that is the Mass, you will be providing a powerful model for your children who are learning from you how to attend Mass.

As just one example, I know that many don't feel comfortable singing at church. Certainly this is the case for many men. (I still remember the principal at my all-boys Catholic high school saying, "It's the voice God gave you. Give it back to him!") Try to enter into the singing parts (this is prayer) at Mass, even if it seems awkward. Don't feel self-conscious, but rather focus on contributing to our great prayer with generosity and joy. Do it for yourself, do it for the sake of the community you are gathered in...and please do it to model and encourage participation from your children. Remember, you set the tone!

Regarding your children, I know that going to Sunday Mass as a family can be challenging. You are to be greatly commended for facing those challenges for the sake of your children's faith lives...as well as your own. My encouragement is that, from early on, you do what you can to continually invite your children to focus on and participate in the elements of Sunday liturgy. Training children to experience Mass as sacred worship and *not* a time for entertainment can be difficult. But doing so will bless your children as they grow in age and understanding.

This is an exciting time in the Diocese of Joliet. Bishop Sartain has declared a *Year of the Eucharist*, which is to begin on Holy Thursday (April 1st) next year. Let us use this Advent Season as a time of preparation for the coming of our Savior at Christmas. And may these approaching winter months be a time of readying ourselves as a Catholic people, centered in the Eucharist, for the beginning of our diocesan *Year of the Eucharist* in April!

With deep gratitude for your Catholic parenting and in the joy of Christ,

Thomas S. Quinlan
Diocesan Director, Religious Education Office