



Relationship with GOD

More than Just SUNDAY

Practice makes (almost) Perfect!

I had heard that Sunday Mass is the highest form of prayer. Frankly, years ago that statement did not mean a lot to me as week after week I found myself distracted during Mass with various things. Without recognizing that I was becoming more and more preoccupied, one Sunday, as I was leaving at the end of Mass, I realized that I had not heard one word.

How is it possible to be completely distracted for a full hour? During that Sunday Mass, in which I was present physically but not mentally, I played an entire tennis match in my mind! However, what happened next is the interesting part. As I was walking up the aisle to leave Church, in mid-step, I realized what had just happened. To become aware of the situation was a grace from God because who knows how long it had been going on. The good news was that I was truly convicted that I had to do something about it.

Thankfully, as I drove home and thought about it, I knew that I would not be able to pay attention during the whole Mass. As I had learned in my tennis training, I needed to start with a short amount of time in order to develop a habit. If I tried to commit to too much in the beginning, I would fail and then just give up. I also decided to choose a specific part of the Mass that I would work really hard in which to give my full attention. I probably didn't even know the different parts of the Mass at that time, but it occurred to me to listen to the priest's explanation of Jesus' words in the Bible readings.

One week later, I showed up for Mass a few minutes early so that I could ask God to help me listen attentively to the homily. It took effort but it worked, and after Mass, I was even able to remember what the priest said. It was a good start.

After a couple of months of repeating this each week, I decided to add a few more minutes to my goal of listening at Mass. The time was expanded to include the third reading, when the congregation stood up. As I got better at

paying attention each Sunday to the description of the life and words of Jesus, I felt like I was coming to know Him. As time went on, hearing the readings and the explanation in the homily helped prepare me to receive Jesus in Holy Communion. And this led to talking with Him, person to person, after I went back to my pew. Anything possible would still distract me, such as noticing a person's outfit or deciding that I liked the color of someone's tennis shoes. The only way to stay focused in this precious time after Holy Communion was to close my eyes and to practice thinking of nothing else but Jesus, speaking directly with Him as well as listening to Him.

After several years, I expanded the time of listening to the opening and closing prayers that the priest prayed. I figured if the priest was praying this on behalf of me to God, I wanted to know what he was saying. What a treasure – these prayers are always beautiful and powerful and I want to receive their fruits.

Is everything smooth sailing now? No, but I have learned ways to avoid distractions, such as not "chasing" them. When I realize that I am distracted, I don't beat myself up for my weakness, nor do I continue with the distraction, but simply return my focus to the Lord in prayer. Practice, along with the help of God, makes perfect. This effort to listen and participate actively at Mass is so important because now I have a much fuller understanding that Holy Mass is the highest form of prayer.

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