



Episode 10: Who Says the Mass Is Boring?

SUMMARY

One often hears that Mass is boring. I like to say that if you find it boring, you're looking at the wrong thing. You are probably focused on its structure. Ritual requires structure.

And so there is a sense in which Mass is the same: it's supposed to be repetitive! Repetition is absolutely essential in any ritual; and so it is with the Mass. At Mass we should know what to expect. On the other hand, irregularity in ritual means distraction. Distraction calls attention to itself, and thus away from God.

But let repetition not mean "boring". Rather let us try to see the structure of the Mass as regular and familiar. Let the ritual provide a comfortable place for prayer to happen. Structure in the Mass is like the skeleton of our bodies: it provides a stable place for the "muscle" of meaning to be attached. The regular structure helps us to focus on prayer.

When you are at Mass, consider the uniqueness of the texts, the prayers, the readings, the liturgical season and the community there.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

Finally, there must be no innovations unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires them; and care must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing. (n°. 23)

Holy Mother Church is conscious that she must celebrate the saving work of her divine Spouse by devoutly recalling it... Recalling thus the mysteries of redemption, the Church opens to the faithful the riches of her Lord's powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present for all time, and the faithful are enabled to lay hold upon them and become filled with saving grace. (n°. 102)

General Instruction of the Roman Missal

The Mass consists in some sense of two parts, namely the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, these being so interconnected that they form but one single act of worship. (n°. 28)

G.K. Chesterton

"The Mass is very long and tiresome unless one loves God."

IN THE TRADITION

Take to heart these words which I command you today. Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them on your arm as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9

“Lord, who can comprehend even one of your words? We lose more of it than we grasp, like those who drink from a living spring. For God’s word offers different facets according to the capacity of the listener, and the Lord has portrayed his message in many colors, so that whoever gazes upon it can see in it what suits him. Within it he has buried manifold treasures, so that each of us might grow rich in seeking them out. [...] And so whenever anyone discovers some part of the treasure, he should not think that he has exhausted God’s word. Instead he should feel that this is all that he was able to find of the wealth contained in it. Nor should he say that the word is weak and sterile or look down on it simply because this portion was all that he happened to find. But precisely because he could not capture it all he should give thanks for its riches.”

Commentary on the Diatessaron,
Saint Ephrem

“By these words, the tongue has done its best; now we must apply the meditation of the heart. [...] Let us turn to this source of knowledge, and because at present you cannot see, make it your business to desire the divine vision.”

Tractates on the first letter of John,
Saint Augustine

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

✠ “This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it. [...] Through Tradition, ‘the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes.’”

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 78

✠ “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God’ (DV 10) in which, as in a mirror, the pilgrim Church contemplates God, the source of all her riches..”

CCC, n°. 97

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Let us listen with quiet hearts to the Word of God. Let us meditate on how God in times past saved his people and in these, the last days, has sent us his Son as our Redeemer.

Instruction, Easter Vigil

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does the regular structure of the Mass provide an environment conducive to prayer?
2. What can repetition in Mass or in the liturgical cycle teach us about our faith?
3. How do authentic prayer and meditation on the mysteries of our salvation help us to be engaged in Mass?

FOR FURTHER READING

G.K. Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross*, (New York: John Lane Company, 1909).