

A NEW MASS TO LEARN - SACRED TIME

When I came to St. Bride as pastor in 1992, one of the first things I noticed when I celebrated my first Mass there was the clock hanging from the front of the church choir loft. I'm not quite sure why it was there since the parishioners had their backs to it and only the priest and the altar servers could see it easily. Was there a time in the past when the priests were supposed to check it to ensure that they weren't preaching too long? What I do know is that I made sure it never went back up when we renovated the church a few years later.

I've seen clocks in other churches; I seem to recall that St. Bernadette in Evergreen Park had one hanging from their choir loft when I was there back in the 70's. But I've never understood the reason for having a clock **inside** a church. Outside is fine; clocks are quite common on church steeples, going all the way back to the Middle Ages when that was the only way most people could learn the exact time. But when we enter into the presence of God, we enter **God's time**, *sacred time*, and clocks have no place in that world.

When the New Roman Missal was introduced over five years ago, one of the questions I remember people asking was "will it make the Mass longer?" The short answer I gave was "yes" – possibly by about one or two minutes, and I think that's probably been the case. That slightly longer duration is due to the more poetic language of the texts as well as to the sentence structure of the Eucharistic prayers which requires priests to pray more slowly and deliberately. So, is it a bad thing for Mass to be a few minutes longer? I certainly hope not.

There's no question that modern life is busier and more complicated than ever before. But why? In most cases, the busyness of life is a product of the choices **we** make. Our society clearly values *doing over being* and so there's a subtle pressure on us all to fill our lives with activities that we think will make life richer or more meaningful. But if we're honest with ourselves, isn't it true that the busyness often tends to diminish rather than enhance the quality of life? Although we certainly **do** many things in liturgy – pray in word and song, listen, sit, stand, kneel, process – the Mass is really more about *being* than doing. Our weekly time of worship challenges us to forget about the **passing** of time and be present to each and every moment in which our God encounters us through the liturgies of Word and Eucharist.

The new words we began to pray five years ago have hopefully provided us with an opportunity to take another look at the way we approach our **time** together at Mass. But there might still be a few questions that some need to ask and answer honestly. Is it possible to make a greater effort to **arrive** on time, if not a few minutes early? Is there really **any** reason – other than getting to work or back home to take care of a sick family member – to not stay until the **real** end of Mass, which is either the last verse of the recessional song or the exit of the Presider? It never ceases to amaze me that, whether Mass is over in 35 minutes or one hour, the same people leave at the same time – during or right after communion. Is that just a bad habit or is it a matter of claiming a few extra minutes to get on with the "busyness" of life? Or are some folks still in pre-Vatican II mode, thinking that the old "Offertory/Consecration/Communion" thing still applies when we could supposedly say we had fulfilled our "Sunday obligation" by simply being present for those three parts of the Mass? That ridiculous minimalism died a long-overdue death with Vatican II.

Finally, consider this: someday we all hope to enter into eternal life with the God who will call us home. A good way to become comfortable with our *sacred time* at Mass might be to reflect on that *eternal* dimension of life in God's Kingdom. Once we enter into eternity, time will cease – no more minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, centuries, millennia – just endless **being** in the embrace of our loving God. The **time** we spend together in prayer each Saturday or Sunday is, in a way, meant to be a rehearsal for eternity. For those who can't handle one hour a week of *sacred time* in this world, I'm afraid that eternity is going to be a real challenge!

Fr. Bob