

# HOW DO I BENEFIT FROM HOLY MASS

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## How Do I Benefit From Holy Mass?

Holy mass is the essence of group prayer and worship in our Orthodox Church. The church, where mass is celebrated, is the house of God and the door to heaven. It is the home of the angels and the meeting place of the saints.

While mass is being celebrated, the angels, archangels, the seraphim and the cherubim, all come to attend in heavenly arrays of great glory around the altar. At the awesome moment when the priest invites the Holy Spirit, He comes in power amidst the joy of the angels and transforms the bread and wine into the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, in an unfathomable mystery that the human mind cannot penetrate.

That is why the time we spend in church during mass is a moment of heaven on earth. This glory that surrounds us is hidden from our eyes at that time because we are still of human flesh. However, many have been found worthy of looking upon this glory; they saw it and witnessed to it, and their witness is true.

In spite of all these glories that we experience, many say that they do not benefit from attending the divine mass. In their efforts to benefit from attending mass, they repeat this perplexed question:

**“How do I benefit from attending mass?”**

Before we can explain how we can benefit from attending divine mass, we have to discuss what hinders our deriving advantages from the prayers of mass.

We can summarize the reasons why we do not feel that we benefit from mass as follows:

### 1. Arriving late to Church

The one who comes late to church spends only one hour or part of an hour at the end of mass. He leaves having deprived himself of Holy Communion because he came late. He also deprived himself of enjoying the readings, hymns, and the profound spiritual prayers of mass

which lift the soul to heaven and give it rest from its problems and its preoccupations. The brief time he spends in church does not allow him to get rid of his worldly concerns and is, therefore, insufficient for his spirit to become calm and to concentrate on the liturgy, for this requires some time. That is why the Lord advises us to come to church early to attend prayers, for He says: **“and those who seek Me diligently will find Me.” (Pr. 8: 17).**

## 2. Not Participating in the Responses:

A person may come early to church but stand there as a spectator; he does not serve as a deacon, and neither does he share in the congregation's many and profound responses. The result is that, by the end of mass, he does not experience any consolation or spiritual benefit.

We have to remember always the truth that the person who comes to church is in reality one of the important servants of mass. This is confirmed by the absolution for servants which the priest administers at the beginning of mass: **“Your slaves, Lord, today's servants, the priests, the deacons, the clerics, all the congregation, and my weakness.”**

The congregation is, therefore, one of the three important components necessary for mass to be said. These are: the priest, the deacons, and the congregation. If one of these is absent, it is impossible to say mass.

Would that every individual of the congregation who is present at church participate in the responses of the congregation, and that he may respond to them with his heart and soul, and all his emotions, so that he may experience overflowing consolation and great benefit. The phrase, **“the congregation says”** is written before these responses, and not **“the chanter or teacher”** only.

## 3. Lack of Concentration or Meditation on the Responses

Frequently the responses and hymns are repeated in a mechanical routine fashion because they have been learned and repeated often while the mind is somewhere else and is occupied with other matters, either in the church or out of it. This does not lead to any significant benefit.

That is why everyone who is in church, whether he is a priest, a deacon, or an ordinary believer, a member of the congregation, has to say the prayers with understanding, self controlled meditation and with concentration on what he hears and what he says so that what the apostle says can apply to him: **“I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray**

**with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.” (1Cor. 14: 15).**

Thus, he will benefit greatly and will experience a not inconsiderable consolation.

#### 4. Preoccupation with Administration Rather than with

Some people pay great attention during mass to administrative matters such as selling the bread or collecting the offering or donations, or organizing those praying and making sure they are quiet. During these occupations, they do not give themselves the opportunity of enjoying mass and of participating in its responses and hymns, and they do not gain any benefit from attending mass.

We address to these the advice of Christ: “These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.” (Lk. 11: 43).

To this we add the advice of the Preacher who says: “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.” (Ecc. 3: 1). They can therefore carry out their administrative work in church in accordance with the advice of the apostle: “he who leads, with diligence” (Rom. 12: 8) and at the same time, they can share in the prayer and worship in accordance to the advice of the apostle in the same chapter: “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord ..... continuing steadfastly in prayer.” (Rom. 12: 11, 12).

#### 5. Saying all Mass in Coptic:

If all mass is said in the Coptic language, there are many complaints and people object (we didn't understand anything and we didn't benefit at all) and that is because many do not know the Coptic language.

The ideal situation is to say part of the mass in Arabic and another part in Coptic because it is our original language and our cultural heritage which we cannot dispense with totally now that it is restricted to the church only. We have to be careful to vary the parts that are said in the two languages. For example, the prayer of reconciliation can be said in Coptic one time and in Arabic the following time; the section pertaining to the saints could be said in Coptic once and in Arabic another time..... and so on.

The congregation should try to learn this ancient language which is the last development of the old Egyptian language spoken by our ancestors. Those who want to learn will find all the necessary facilities with no appreciable difficulties.

## 6. Not Partaking of Holy Communion:

Some people attend mass as a habit and do not partake of this holy sacrament for a period that may extend to months or years, and maybe a whole lifetime. The church stipulates that all those who attend the mass for the faithful, or the mass for the sanctification of the sacrament, have all to be prepared to take holy communion at the end of mass in accordance to the commandment of our Righteous Savior: "Take, eat this, all of you; take drink this, all of you."

The one who has confessed and is prepared and who does not partake of this divine sacrament, deprives himself of sharing with the faithful and loses a great opportunity that may not come his way again.

## 7. Taking Communion without Confession:

A person might take holy Communion when he has a sin or sins that he has not confessed, and so his conscience continues to trouble and rebuke him, which deprives him of the consolation and spiritual benefits which he can obtain if he attends mass and takes holy communion with repentance, purity, and preparedness.