

It's easy to size up the good guy and the bad guy in this parable. The good guy is the one who prays sincerely. The bad guy is the one who criticizes the good guy. Fact is, most worshippers have a little of each inside us. We want to pray as best we can, but we catch ourselves complaining about the way someone dresses, the place they sit, their hair, their behavior. Because of how we think, we can distract ourselves at church. Because of how we act, we can distract someone else.

So, how do we enter the Mass more prayerfully? Here are some tips: First, before Sunday gets here, it's good to prepare ourselves at home with the readings we'll hear at Mass. Although we expect our readers to prepare, it helps if we listeners prepare too, just as we prepare for communion with a one hour fast.

On our way in, it's good to say hello to people, to start building the community we form here. When Mass begins we act together--we stand, we sit, we pray, we sing. Our one voice lifts our one faith to God and supports one another. It's important to pick up the hymnal when the song is announced and to do our best to sing. Doing less hurts our sense of community and weakens the voice with which we all praise God.

Communion remains the highlight of the Mass. It makes us one with each other, and one with God. We try to avoid serving communion from the tabernacle during Mass. At eucharist we bring bread and wine forward to this altar of sacrifice, we pray that God will transform these gifts and through them this community into the Body and Blood of Christ, and we eat and drink the sacrifice of this altar. We strive to form a community, not simply to nurture individual faith.

The dismissal is also important. Just as we say the prayers together, sing the songs together, and share the eucharist together, so do we go forth together from the Mass. The dismissal is not about leaving someplace; it's about going someplace as a body. Those who leave Mass early signal their independence from the community. The deacon's dismissal at the end of Mass sends us forth as one into the world. We don't go face our struggles alone, we go as a community of faith.

Still, if we judge the behaviors of others at worship, we simply imitate the pharisee in Jesus' parable. When we pray with sincere interior devotion, aware of our sinfulness, dependent on God, we bear less prejudice toward others.