

THE MASS

I am the salvation of the people, says the Lord. Should they cry to me in any distress, I will hear them, and I will be their Lord for ever.

For some years, while attending Mass, I sat in the front bench in order to see clearly what was happening on the altar and hear all that was spoken. I was not a member of the choir but I loved to sing along with them in the hope that others around me would also sing. Since the second Vatican council, I have appreciated what a blessing it is to be able to celebrate mass in our own language. A few years ago, I decided to become a member of the choir and I thank God that I still have a voice to sing His praises. So, I no longer sit in the front bench. On Sundays I sit with the choir and at midweek masses I try always to sit in the bench below the stained-glass window depicting Saint John and Mary, the mother of Jesus, after the crucifixion. I sat there because the light was better and I was more able to read the Morning Prayer. I have since come to love that window.

The picture shows Saint John supporting Mary away from Calvary. The saint seems to be holding Mary's hand and his left arm seems to be around Mary's shoulder. How deep would have been her sorrow and how severe the pain she must have suffered. I am an old man with children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren and I cannot imagine the depth of the suffering she endured, not only because he was her only son but she also knew who he really was. Saint John, the brother of James and the youngest of all the apostles, was also the bravest. He did not run away nor did he deny knowing Jesus. He was there to witness Jesus' arrest and trial; his humiliation, torture and eventual crucifixion. He was there at the foot of the cross supporting Mary and the other women, here he was now carrying out the mission that Jesus gave to him from the cross, to look after and be a son to Mary. I love that picture! It helps me to understand and appreciate the mass. I love the mass. I think it is the most wonderful way to commune with God, The Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Recently, I attended two Latin masses. One was a low mass and the other was a high mass. In my early years I was very familiar with these masses and served as an altar boy. I was taught all the responses even though I did not understand what they meant. I remember clearly the 11 o'clock Mass at Saint Annes, Rock Ferry where I was one of about twelve people, priest and servers, on the altar. I am sure it must have been a great spectacle. When I was eighteen, after a retreat held at the church, my mother gave me a missal which of course had all the English translations of the Latin. I still have it and I love to sing the Benediction hymns "O Salutaris" and "Tantum ergo". The second Vatican Council began when I was in my early twenties and I was able to understand and welcome the wonderful changes to our way of worshipping God. I am being critical of those who have chosen to adhere to the Latin rite for we all are free to choose which rite we prefer. When we were able to celebrate mass in the vernacular, it made a great difference to me. I came to understand what the mass really means. During the mass, I try to put aside all distractions and truly participate in the celebration. I have sometimes found myself taking a sharp intake of breath when the priest elevates the consecrated host and wine knowing that a miracle has occurred.

*O Jesus, may I lead a good life,
May I die a happy death.
May I receive you before I die;
May I say when I am dying,
"Jesus, Mary and Joseph
I give you my heart and my soul".*