**Why is Mass boring?**

 **Question:** Why is Mass so boring? Many Protestant services, especially among Evangelicals, are filled with upbeat music that is fun to listen to, dynamic sermons featuring slide-show/PowerPoint presentations and even skits acted out on stage. These services are more entertaining and engaging than the Mass. Why doesn’t the Catholic Church offer a more exuberant, lively service comparable to what is found among these other churches?

It would seem that the Bible calls for this kind of cheerful, high-spirited worship in passages such as Psalm 66 where we read: *“Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious!”* – In light of passages like this, why does the Catholic Church’s Liturgy seem so subdued? Where is the “glorious” praise?

**Answer:**
Obviously the Catholic Church has an “image problem” on this issue. But I would begin by saying, that our public “image” is not really the motivation in presenting the Liturgy. We are not trying to “give the people what they want” or create an entertaining feast-for-the-eyes-and-ears. We are not engaged in a marketing campaign for Catholicism, trying to “sell” the church to the general public with the Mass as a promotional tool. Nor should we use the Mass merely as a “stage” for our best talent so that they can soak up the applause and the audience feels like they got their “money’s worth” as the collection basket is passed around.

We must remember that the congregation is not an *audience* watching performers do their tricks. Rather the Church is filled with *worshipers* (which includes the priest and the people, the choir and the ministers), ALL of us focused on GOD…not on one another and the talents we possess.

Now I would agree that Psalm 66 definitely has something to say about right worship of God. We should *“Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious!”* (Ps 66:2) And if there is any criticism I might have of Catholics it is that we don’t sing very enthusiastically – we could certainly try a little harder on that point, and perhaps some Evangelical converts would go a long way to boost our singing abilities. But I think singing alone is not the problem.

There is a certain style and structure to the Mass that is not the same as an Evangelical service no matter how well Catholics might belt out their songs. We need to focus on the bigger picture of how music and ritual fit together and for that I would point to a later verse in Psalm 66…

*“I will come to your temple with burnt offerings and fulfill my vows to you- vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble. I will sacrifice fat animals to you and an offering of rams; I will offer bulls and goats.”* (Psalm 66:13-15)

Keep in mind that the Psalms are a Jewish text, and while the Jews certainly believed that God should be praised with a “joyful noise,” they also had specific rituals they performed such as animal sacrifice, the burning of incense, ritual prayers, ceremonial washings, and so on. In Scripture God gave specific details on how the Jewish people were to carry out these rituals. He told them the proper way to sacrifice lambs or goats, and on which day and by whom these things should be done. He told them how to bake their ceremonial bread and how they should eat it. He told them the words they should say and who should speak them and when. The Jews followed God’s Law and it told them how to worship God as *He* wants to be worshipped. We should definitely bring our joy and enthusiasm, as the Psalm says, but God also expects certain things from us in the way we worship Him.

Now you may argue against this idea for Christians by saying that Jesus rejected this ritual form of prayer. You may point out that Jesus condemned the Pharisees for following all of these rules and for pushing the details of the Law onto the people. But notice what Jesus actually said about this:

*“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.”* (Matthew 23:1-3)

Jesus was not opposed to laws and rituals in worship. (In fact He condemned the Pharisees for *not* following the law correctly – they were hypocrites who did not practice what they preached.) Remember too that Jesus Himself followed the rituals of Jewish worship: He went to Jerusalem for holy days and fulfilled His obligation to sacrifice as a Jew; He celebrated the Passover and other Jewish feasts; His parents presented Him at the Temple when He was a child just as the law required. Jesus accepted ritual and the laws that governed worship. He was not opposed to ritual and He submitted Himself to God’s Law even from His birth.

Jesus did not do away with the Law or ritual worship, but He did *transform* it and gave to it new meaning and purpose. We see this clearly in the Passover meal He celebrated with His disciples on the night before He died. He gave to the unleavened bread and the wine a new meaning and gave it a new ritual context. No longer would it refer back to the Exodus of Moses’ day, now it refers to His death and our exodus from sin. The lamb that is sacrificed and eaten is now His Flesh. The cup of blessing is now His Blood. And we are commanded to repeat the ritual. We are not instructed to invent our own formula or experiment with variations on what Jesus did. We must mimic Jesus’ own actions, and *“Do this in memory of me.”*

Still we must agree with Psalm 66, that we should enter into this Sacrifice of the Mass with joy and song. And Catholics do have beautiful songs (we could just work on the singing). But we cannot separate this idea of “glorious praise” from the “ritual sacrifice” that is mentioned later in the same Psalm. God has given us a wonderful gift in showing us how to praise and worship Him; we must not assume that we can invent our own forms when God’s way is so clearly laid out before us in the image of Christ.

Now more to the point, sometimes we go to Mass and just can’t seem to concentrate, it is boring, or maybe the singing is bad, or the sermon is not so great, or some other problem with the sloppiness of the service. And while all of these things can be important, they are not nearly as important as the Real Presence of Christ as we approach the altar to receive Communion. We should certainly bring with us joy and song, but we also have an obligation to perform the ritual that Jesus commanded us to do in His memory. Humans are imperfect and sometimes our singing is weak or we get lazy or we are just untalented. The Mass can be done poorly…but it is still *the Mass*. God still meets us there and comes down to us under the appearance of bread and wine if we follow what He commands us.

Protestant/Evangelical Christians may not understand how Catholics can attend a Mass that seems “boring” or “ritualistic” or just “un-fun.” They may not grasp why Catholics would keep going to a service that lacks the up-beat and exciting drama of Evangelical-style worship. The answer is that Catholics are seeking something other than an emotional high or the excitement of being entertained. The belief in the Real Presence is what makes the Mass a “glorious praise” to God. Sure we would like to have the best possible preacher, and music that is well performed and well sung. But I can do without those things (or put up with less) if I know that Jesus’ Body and Blood are there for me to worship and receive as food.