

# *A letter from Fr. Behrend*

A question I have been getting often is what “active participation” means (in not so many words), and how it is still possible to be a participant in Mass during a pandemic. Pope Saint Pius X thought active participation was the assimilation of the divine mysteries, particularly the Blessed Sacrament itself, so that the faithful could be more and more configured to Jesus Christ in their lives outside of Mass. Saint Pius’ ideas were expanded upon and developed during the Second Vatican Council. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy emphasized that participation should increase the vigor of the Christian life, and was more than just either external or internal participation.

Participation must be both because we are both body and soul. The constitution gave examples of participation, including songs, responses, gestures, and, interestingly enough, “sacred silence.” The Mass is meant to cultivate silence during the celebration so that the very mysteries we celebrate can be pondered and prayed. Participation, while being manifested in the exterior sense, should “flow from an interior disposition to be attentive to the sacred mysteries that are celebrated and to receive the graces that God wills to impart.”

By virtue of baptism, participation in Mass is the primary objective for Catholics. It is rooted in our baptism and in our continued life in Christ. Of course when we separate ourselves from Christ and the Church through serious sin, it is by means of sacramental Confession that we resume that participation.

In the first place we should reclaim that essential link between baptismal identity and participation in the liturgy. However, people cannot always receive the Eucharist because Mass is unavailable, the pandemic dispensation, or they have not had access to Confession. What must they do then? We first of all participate in the liturgy by our attendance at the Mass. This is why the Sunday obligation is about attendance, not about receiving Holy Communion. Although the reception of Communion is “essential” for a person’s spiritual life, I encourage those who cannot receive to make an Act of Spiritual Communion, but to strive for actual reception if at all possible.

While there is no substitute for attending and participating in Mass from the start of the opening song to the end of the closing song in person. live-streaming is not a waste of time. It can offer a chance to join ourselves in some way to the action occurring and unite us as a community through prayer.

Lenten blessings! Be encouraged, we are all journeying with you. I pray our Lord richly blesses you. Always remember that I love you, there is no way I will ever love you less, and I will continue to pray for you every day. ~ Fr. Behrend