

From the Director of Liturgy, Tanya Braithwaite Issue 3

Food for Thought:

Here's Why Attending Mass Should Be the Best Part of Your Summer

By [Jeannie Ewing](#), a Catholic spirituality writer, from Catholic Life Digest

My dad planned the best family trips during summer vacation when I was a kid: a two-week adventure into the western part of the United States that included tours of Yellowstone National Park, horseback riding on the Shoshone River, a secluded cabin in the faraway forests of Sault Ste Marie in Canada, and long, lazy beach weeks spent in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

But the part we never forgot? **Attending Mass.** It was a non-issue. We never discussed it. It simply wasn't an option to skip Mass simply because we weren't home. I remember once asking my mom (probably whining), "Why do we have to go to Mass on vacation?" Her answer was straightforward and nonnegotiable: "We don't take vacation from our faith."

Since then, I realized that worshipping with other Catholics around the country (and world) can be part of the adventure or integral to it. Because of the example my parents set for me and my younger brother, I have planned my travels around where a Catholic church is located and what times they offer weekend Mass.

When I graduated college, I rewarded myself with a Caribbean cruise. A good friend of mine decided to join me. I remember sitting in her parents' travel agent's office and the shock on her mother's face when I asked, "Is Mass offered during the cruise, since the dates go from a Sunday to a Sunday?"

Kim's mom jumped in, "Why do you think you need to go to church on vacation? God's not going to punish you if you miss one week!" She rolled her eyes. This especially hurt, since I knew she was raised Catholic. I responded, "The truth is, I want to go to Mass." We didn't find a Catholic option for Sunday services while aboard the ship, so I asked Kim if we could go to a pilgrimage site in the Dominican Republic known as Our Lady of the High Grace or Our Lady of Altagracia. She reluctantly accompanied me, but once we entered the little chapel atop a dusty hill, my soul felt both at home and at ease.

I have worshipped with Catholics in Miami, Florida, at the St. Michael Cathedral (built in the fifteenth century) in Brussels, Belgium, in Canada, and Orange County, California. Each has been a unique experience. Some have reinforced my love of the liturgy; others have opened my eyes and heart to how other cultures love Jesus through song and fellowship. All have influenced my spiritual journey in such a way that I have come to understand the beauty of Catholicism as the universal Church.

There will be times when planning your vacation around Mass times feels like a hassle and inconvenience. You might have to go out of your way to find a church or make sure the times Masses are offered don't conflict with a group excursion you can't miss. Finding transportation can be an obstacle if you fly somewhere and don't have a rental vehicle. In obscure, rugged parts of the world, the location of a church may be hundreds of miles from where you are staying.

No matter, at least *try*. God sees your efforts and will honor them. Extraneous circumstances abound and cannot be listed in a short article as this. Use your judgment to determine how and when you can worship God and participate in your Sunday or Holy Day obligation. This is a prayer in itself – to open the

intentions of your heart and offer them as a token of love for God. In order for love to be love, it must involve some sort of sacrifice or penance. We have to stretch beyond what we're used to or comfortable with when we love someone. And we are naturally desirous of spending time with our beloved. If we consider all of this while planning a fun vacation, Mass doesn't seem like such an outlier to the way we live. Instead, it is central and essential.

When traveling as a family, make attending Mass an adventure. Talk about the history of the church (if you can find it), the culture of the people in the region you're visiting, and the architecture once you arrive. Afterward, note the differences and similarities in music and the flow of the liturgy. These alone can spark powerful conversations and evoke important questions from your children.

Maybe the truth is that Catholicism is not going to be rooted in our lives until we stop seeing it as a separate component rather than a segment of a whole. Complaining about Mass attendance because it isn't part of vacation fun indicates that separateness. Mass is so much more than just going to church. It is a gift we offer to God, a prayer of the heart that avails us to gain strength, courage, hope, and wisdom from receiving Him in the Eucharist.

Attending Mass with my godfather in Brussels, Belgium almost twenty years ago left me feeling renewed in confidence that we could navigate our way through Europe, despite the reality that neither of us was prepared or spoke fluent French. Jesus granted us what we needed each leg of our journey.

My spiritual director frequently reminds me, "If we give Jesus our meager offering, He will multiply it," just as He did the few fishes and loaves to feed the five thousand. Worshipping at Mass while on vacation isn't about perfection, it's about intention and effort. Give what you can, and God will bless you - maybe even surprise you - tenfold.

If you notice something that you like at a parish you attend/visit that you would like to share with me, please feel free to e-mail or speak with me at any Mass. TB

If you missed Issue #2

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