

Intentions Invite Remembrance and Prayer for Those in Need

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When Catholics participate in the Eucharist, they may see a special intention for that Mass published in the bulletin or hear the intention mentioned at the beginning or during Mass. Parishioners typically make a donation to the church and ask that Masses be celebrated for a myriad of intentions, for healing or peace, in thanksgiving to mark the event of a birthday or anniversary, or most often in remembrance of a deceased loved one and for their eternal rest.

Offering a Mass for a particular intention is now commonplace, but it was not part of early Church practice. In the early years of the Church, there was no such thing as offering a Mass for an individual in a way that was exclusive or preferential. The priest presider prayed on behalf of all who were present and who took part in the sacrifice. But this would change centuries later in the context of the medieval liturgy.

In the Middle Ages, Mass offerings became a primary way for the people to participate in the liturgy. The offerings were given by a single donor motivated by a spiritual return, as priests were expected to pray exclusively for a donor's intention. No longer were the people of God, whose collective prayers and offerings had been aimed toward building up the community, engaged in a communal act of worship. Rather, the offering from an individual was given for a personal access to God's grace. In many areas, Mass became more of a private affair for the privileged, and the spiritual fruits of the Mass became something that could be bought and sold. While this practice had its critics and led to abuses, it continued for centuries.

The Second Vatican Council renewed the Church's theology of worship, and the entire people of God were restored to their rightful role as the primary participants in the Mass.

The purpose of Mass intentions is to invite awareness, prayers, and remembrances for both the living and the dead.

Even though a Mass is offered for a particular person or intention, the community also prays for many others in need, such as in the petitions of the universal prayer and in the Eucharistic Prayer.

Since Vatican II, several documents, including the new *Code of Canon Law* and in 1991, the decree from the Congregation for the Clergy *Mos iugiter*, express the desire to preserve the practice of Mass offerings while protecting them from abuse.

Today, the faithful may request that a Mass be offered for a special intention and may donate a financial gift. Most of the time, only one intention and one stipend are permitted, but under certain circumstances, collective intentions are allowed to be combined into one Mass. In this case, the donors must be informed and must consent to the combining of their offerings before the Mass, the intentions must be announced, and these collective Masses may take place not more than twice a week. The priest may only receive the amount offered for one intention, and the rest of the contributions may go to a special fund set up by the local diocese or to a local religious community.

While it is customary to offer a Mass for a person, the faithful may also offer a Mass for a broader intention, for cities that have suffered natural disasters, or for countries at war, for example.

While these and other similar prayers are often included in the general intercessions, when they are offered as the intention of a Mass, they offer the faithful a broader perspective. They prompt the community to pray for people beyond their borders, they help the community to stand in solidarity with those in need, and they show the community that the power of their prayer reaches the ends of the earth.



An intention may be prayed for at Mass, but all the faithful bring the offering of their lives and their prayers to the celebration of the paschal mystery.