

# Understanding the Mass

## Part 2 in a series

### Preparing for the Mass – “the basics”

When does the Mass start? The Mass should start for us prior to coming to the church! Preparing for the Mass opens our hearts to meet Jesus and experience His presence and gifts at Mass. Ideally we should take the time to preview the scripture readings for the day prior to arrival and meditate on what they mean. What is God trying to say to us in these texts? A good resource for the daily readings is the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ web-site at [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org). There you will find a calendar where you can just click on the day of the month and it will display all of the readings for the day. It will take no more than 5 minutes for you to review the readings and start to think of God’s message.

We have arrived at the doors of the church; now what? Upon entering the *Narthex* (the gathering place just as you enter the main doors), we start to prepare ourselves mentally for entering the *Nave* (the main seating area in the church). We greet our friends in Christ as we arrive but we also start to calm our minds. As we enter the doors into the *Nave*, our first step is to dip our fingers in the holy water found in the *stoups* (the small fonts found on either side of the doors as you enter) and bless ourselves, making the sign of the cross. This is a reminder of our baptism which forever has marked us as belonging to Christ. Thinking of this, we should do it with reverence and gratitude!

As we approach our pew we first genuflect, again making the sign of the cross. We are facing the tabernacle (located on the wall behind the altar or in some cases, in a side chapel) which contains the Blessed Sacrament – the Real Presence of Jesus Christ – and so we honor Him before entering the row where we will sit. This is an act of penance and adoration and helps us to be mindful that we are in the presence of God.