

# CLIFF NOTES

by Fr. Clifford Smith

## Mass Intention Guidelines

The **1983 Code of Canon Law** (canon 946) states: "The Christian faithful who make an offering so that the Mass may be applied for their intention contribute to the good of the Church, and by their offering take part in the concern of the Church for the support of its ministers and works."

Any Catholic may personally offer up any Mass in which he or she participates for any good intention. Certainly, graces will accrue in accordance with the intensity of that person's participation and sincerity. However, the custom of requesting a priest to offer a Mass for a specific intention, even when one cannot be physically present at the Mass, is a longstanding tradition in the Church. Masses may be offered for any good purpose: anniversaries, birthdays, times of illness, dates of serious surgery, in thanksgiving and for private intentions, and most commonly, for the repose of the soul of someone who has died. This is because the Church considers the Mass as the greatest possible prayer of intercession insofar as it is the perfect offering of Christ to the Father by making present the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection.

The faithful generally make a financial offering, called a stipend, to the priest in order to apply the Mass to a specific intention. By making this offering, the faithful, by parting with something that is their own, associate themselves more intimately with Christ who offers himself in the sacred Host, and obtain thereby more abundant fruits.

This Sacrifice of the Mass has an infinite value and there is no objective limitation to the number of intentions that can be offered at any Mass, but the Church normally allows only one intention with financial stipend or offering united to each Mass. However, the Holy See has authorized bishops to allow the celebration of Masses with several intentions. An example is when a special Novena (*nine Masses over nine days*) is offered for multiple purposes, such as All Souls Day, Mother's Day and Father's Day. But these "cumulative" Masses are not to be a daily practice.

The offering of a stipend is also meant to contribute to the upkeep of the clergy, and the Church in general. In normal circumstances, a priest may only accept one stipend for any one Mass in a given day even though he may offer up a single Mass for several intentions. The person who has offered the stipend has not "*bought a Mass*," a thing which is clearly impossible. The priest may retain only one stipend per day regardless of the number of Masses he may celebrate. The usual amount for the stipend offering is determined by the bishops either nationally or locally. In the Diocese of Dallas the suggested donation is \$5.00. More may be given, but less may be accepted from those who are poor. Generally these Masses are arranged through the Parish Office and not through an individual priest.

A priest may have his own personal and separate intentions at any Mass he celebrates in addition to that intention for which the Mass is specifically intended. Any intention is essentially a spiritual and internal act through which the priest commends the intention to God in a particular way, and he is free to offer up any number of personal intentions, but may not receive any stipend for such additional intentions.

There is no official Church requirement that Mass intentions must be announced during Mass, nor does it need to be published in the bulletin, for the Mass intention to be validly offered. Many different people and intentions may be remembered in the Prayers of the Faithful, which may or may not include the primary intention for which the Mass is offered. God, who reads hearts and knows all things, will always know the intention of any Mass.

All parishes are required to offer one Mass (*pro populo* ... "*for the people*") on Sunday for the intentions of the living and deceased members of a parish.