

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The first commandment is "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." This is how it is stated in the New Testament. In the Ten Commandments it is stated, "I am the LORD your God. You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve." Notice how the commandment is re-phrased in the New Testament to emphasize the relationship of love between us and God.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, that the ten commandments, "must be understood in relation to the 'law of love': Love of God and love of neighbor summarize all of Catholic morality. The law of love is also the first principle and source of the moral law. It contains "all the law and the prophets"

The first commandment therefore is to love God, but how do we love God? First and foremost, by a life of worship. The commandment to love God is the first in the list of the ten commandments because it should be the very first priority in our lives. The Catholic Church teaches that it is every Catholic's obligation to attend Mass every week and on every holy day of obligation. This is the way we put God first in our lives; our experience of worship therefore is not just something we do for an hour on Sunday. It is the priority of our lives and the first obligation before all else.

This also helps us decide what our experience at Mass should be like. Mass is first and foremost about the worship of God. It is not primarily a place to meet our friends. It is not primarily a time to hear an encouraging talk about being a better person. It is not primarily a time to sing happy songs and think about how we are going to make the world a better place. All these things may be elements or results of the celebration of Mass, but they are not the primary goal. The primary reason and goal for Mass is simply to offer worship to God.

Have you ever thought of Mass as playtime? One liturgist has observed that worship, like music, laughter and playtime, is a perfectly useless human past time. No one questions the practicality of music or the usefulness of games or the practical uses of laughter. These are "useless" aspects of life, but they are the aspects of life which make us most human. And so it is with worship. When we come with minds and hearts that are truly open to God, our humanity is lifted to a new dimension, and we are then most truly human.

As we come in true and sincere worship, we are fulfilling the first commandment to love God and serve Him only. Making Mass a priority is our way of not serving the other gods in our lives--the gods of money, pleasure and our own selfish desires.

Therefore, when you come to Mass see yourself as actively fulfilling the first commandment. Here you learn to love God and serve Him above all else.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker