"One thing only I ask you, that you remember me at the altar of the Lord."

A Worthy Tradition Requiring Vigilance in Our Fulfillment

A longstanding part of our Catholic culture is the custom of offering Mass intentions. When a priest celebrates Mass each day, he *offers* each celebration of the Eucharist for a particular person, or intention. By doing so he applies special graces from God upon that person or intention. Similar to how we are able to intercede for others by our personal prayers, the Church is able to intercede for us through the celebration of the Mass. However, since the Eucharist is the "source and summit of the Christian life" the Sacrifice of the Mass possesses a power that our personal prayers do not.

The practice of offering Mass for particular intentions is an ancient one, dating back to the early Church. "Inscriptions discovered on tombs in Roman catacombs of the second century [give] evidence [for] this practice: for example, the epitaph on the tomb of Abercius (d. 180), Bishop of Hieropolis in Phrygia, begs for prayers for the repose of his soul. Tertullian (c. 200) attested to observing the anniversary of a spouse with prayers and sacrifices, i.e. the Mass."

This tradition is also seen in St. Augustine's *Confessions* (c. 397), where Monica asks Augustine, "One thing only I ask you, that you remember me at the altar of the Lord."

Canon Law confirms this practice and states, "In accord with the approved practice of the Church, any priest celebrating or concelebrating is permitted to receive an offering to apply the Mass for a specific intention" (Canon 945 §1). Furthermore, it continues by saying, "The Christian faithful who give an offering to apply the Mass for their intention contribute to the good of the Church and by that offering share its concern to support its ministers and works" (Canon 946).

Offering a Mass for a specific intention requested by the faithful has been a long and venerable tradition in the Church. The faithful request that a Mass be offered for a person who is living or deceased, for a special occasion like a wedding anniversary or for a special intention. They frequently give an offering to the priest to apply that intention to the Mass. It is important to properly understand the Church's discipline concerning the intention for which a Mass is offered and the monetary offering received by the priest from the faithful. The Mass, and indeed all sacraments, do not cost money. If a person is indigent and unable to afford the normal offering, the intention should not be refused (Canon 945 §2). The impression of charging for a Mass or trafficking in multiple Masses is an abuse which must be scrupulously avoided.

Pro Populo Mass

Each pastor, parochial administrator (Canon 534 §1), and bishop (Canon 388 §1) must offer a Mass for the people of the parish every Sunday and holy day of obligation. This Mass is frequently called the "Pro Populo" Mass and carries NO stipend. A pastor who has care of more than one parish is only bound to apply one Pro Populo Mass for the entire people entrusted to him (Canon 534 §2). If he offers a Pro Populo Mass on Sunday, he can still offer another Mass on Sunday and keep the stipend for the second one since no stipend is offered for the Pro Populo Mass; but he may NOT add a second intention to the Pro Populo Mass to obtain a stipend.

One Stipend per Day

With the exception of Christmas Day, a priest may only keep ONE stipend from all of the Masses offered each day (Canon 951 §1). In determining whether a Sunday anticipation Mass counts for Saturday or Sunday with respect to Mass stipends, Canon 202 §1 defines a "day" as a block of time starting at midnight and continuing for 24 hours. Therefore:

If a priest offers the Vigil Mass (Saturday evening) and a Mass on Sunday [if a pastor, not including the Pro Populo obligation], he may keep both Mass stipends, as the Vigil Mass was offered on Saturday, provided that he has not accepted any other Mass offerings for that Saturday. If he offers the Mass of the day on Saturday morning, and the Vigil Mass on Saturday evening, he cannot apply the Vigil Mass to Sunday and must decline one of the Saturday stipends.

On Christmas and Easter, the Vigil Masses will count for the day in which they begin. Midnight Masses (that actually start at Midnight) will count for the feast day, not the day before. Earlier "Midnight Masses" should be treated as Vigil Masses on the day that they begin.

The date of the Mass is the date that it is offered or celebrated. If a Mass is recorded for broadcast or streaming on a later date, the date of the Mass is the date of the recording, not of any playback, even if the readings are selected for the anticipated playback date.

The requirement in this Diocese remains that any additional Mass Stipends—excluding the one allowed by law for the priest—are to be sent to the Chancellor's Office. The funds submitted go towards the education of our future priests.

How many intentions may there be for any particular Mass?

Canon 948 states that ordinarily there may be no more than one offering (intention) for one Mass. However, in 1991 the Congregation for the Clergy issued a decree…Collective Intentions…which permitted the practice of taking more than one offering for a single Mass. The principle rules governing this practice are:

- The donors must be informed and agree to combine their offerings with others in a single Mass.
- The time and place for the celebration of the Mass are to be made public.
- Masses for collective intentions may not be celebrated by a priest more than **twice a week**.
- If the total amount of the offerings given for a collective intention exceeds the amount of the usual offering [$5], the excess is to be included with the bination funds forwarded to the diocese which are used for the education of our future priests. The Priest offering the "collective intention" Mass only receives a single offering of $5. Example: If there are three intentions—each of which were given with a $5 offering…and all donors agreed to a "collective intention" Mass…the priest celebrating the Mass receives only $5. The remaining $10 is forwarded to the Chancery with binations.
- If the sum of money is offered for the application of Masses and there is no indication of the number of Masses to be celebrated, the number is computed based on the amount of the offerings established in the place where the donor lives--$5 in our province--unless the donor's intention must be lawfully presumed to have been different (Canon 950).

Limitations, Recording, Fulfilling or Transferring Mass Intentions

Canon law stipulates that no priest or institution is permitted to accept more offerings for Masses than can be satisfied within a year (Canon 953). Mass intentions not satisfied within the year are to be transferred to the Chancellor's Office so that they may be provided to parishes and priests that do not have sufficient intentions for Masses. As Mass Intentions are maintained in a required separate account, there is no parish benefit to building a large depository of the number (and funds) for Masses to be celebrated. If the amount of Masses included surpass the capacity for the priest(s) of the parish to celebrate in a year, these should be remanded to the Chancery for distribution to other parishes and priests without a surplus and who request intentions. Those parish staff members who oversee the assignment of Masses with the faithful should at least annually review the number of Mass Intentions in the Mass Intentions Register. As many parishes schedule directly into the parish calendar "on the spot" when a parishioner requests a Mass, many times the Mass Intention Book remains simply a storage/depository for larger numbers of Masses (from funerals, memorials, etc.) that remain unscheduled until an opening in the actual parish calendar appears at bulletin time. So that the intentions included in the Mass Intention book do not just remain there for years, the account should be reviewed and regularly maintained so the Masses can be said for the intentions by other priests and in other parishes. There are several parishes (and retired priests) in our diocese who do not have a "depository" of extra Mass Intentions—they assist in insuring the Masses are celebrated. Parishes concerned about the desire people have that Masses they are scheduling occur in their home parish, can address the issue by informing individuals when bringing in large numbers of Masses that those may not all be offered in the parish due to calendar limitations—but that the important reality that the Masses will be offered.

Every intention and offering--received and accepted--for celebration by a priest or in a parish must be recorded in the parish Mass record with the date received, the offering given and the date it was satisfied. Notation must also be kept of the intentions from the Mass Intentions Book/Account transferred to the Diocese including the amount of the offering and the date of transfer.

In the Diocese of Victoria, it has been common practice to celebrate Masses--usually a Novena of Masses--for Mother's Day, Father's Day, and All Souls' Day with multiple intentions and free will offerings given by the faithful. On these occasions, the faithful must know that their offerings and the names submitted for Mother's Day, Father's Day and All Souls' Day will be remembered **together** as the intention of the Novena Masses. They must also know the dates, usually in the bulletin, when these Masses will be celebrated. The offerings received on these occasions should be divided among the priests serving in that parish.

Requesting Masses from the Diocese

If the parish does not receive enough requests for Mass intentions locally to provide intentions for all Masses, the pastor may send a request to the Chancellor's Office asking for Mass intentions and stipends to augment the parish's current parishioner requests. The Diocese will generally forward Mass intentions along with their attached stipends to the requesting parish to be scheduled. Please record these new intentions in the parish Mass Intention Book. After these intentions have been offered, the parish may again make a request for additional intentions, if the need persists. If a retired priest or a priest without an assignment accepts Mass intentions from the Diocese, he is bound to offer these Masses in a reasonable time within the constraints of the guidance presented in this document.