



Mass Intentions

What Are Mass Intentions All About?

Since the eleventh century, it has been the widespread practice in the Church for Masses to be celebrated for particular intentions. Usually these particular intentions are for loved ones who have died, the Masses offered for them being our prayer that God, in his Divine Providence, will receive them into his heavenly kingdom. Mass intentions also can be identified as “special intentions” of living persons, praying in a specific way for the wants and needs of those persons. Of course our prayer in the celebration of the Eucharist is not limited to the particular intentions for which Masses are offered: The Eucharistic Prayer includes petitions for all who have died and for all the living. But particular Mass intentions do provide a special way for us to pray for our deceased loved ones or for other special intentions.

The celebration of the Eucharist consists primarily of thanksgiving and prayer to God rather than prayer to saints (exceptions being the occasional use of the Litany of Saints and other intercessory prayers in the Mass). For this reason, it is our practice at St. Joseph that when a Mass intention is requested “in thanksgiving to” or “in honor of” Mary or another saint or blessed, that intention is published and offered as the “special intention” of the person requesting the Mass intention.

Occasionally a Mass intention is requested “for” a saint or a blessed. Since part of the Church’s canonization process is the determination that God has already admitted these saints and blessed into the heavenly kingdom, saints and blessed no longer need our prayers (although we certainly benefit from their prayers for us before the heavenly throne). For this reason, a Mass intention requested “for” a saint or blessed is published and offered as the “special intention” of the person requesting the Mass intention.

Offerings for Mass Intentions

The faithful requesting Mass intentions give a small offering for each Mass celebrated for their particular intention. The current suggested offering for a Mass intention here at St. Joseph is \$10 (although some choose to give more as they are able).

Offerings for Mass intentions are given in the way of almsgiving. In this way, the faithful participate in the prayer for their particular Mass intentions not only by praying and singing at the Masses offered for these intentions but also by making a material contribution to the Church out of their financial resources.

Offerings for Mass intentions traditionally have been given as stipends to the priests who celebrated those Masses, as part of their financial support. That is no longer the case in many places, though, including in the Diocese of Orange. Here in the Diocese of Orange, offerings for Mass intentions typically are deposited in a general parish account (out of which are paid general parish expenses, including financial support for the parish priests).

It is important to understand that one does not “buy” a Mass through one’s donation – the sacraments are not for sale. Nor does one “buy” having a deceased loved one’s name or one’s

SAINT JOSEPH CHURCH

special intention mentioned during the Prayer of the Faithful or at any other time during the Mass. A Mass offered for a particular loved one who has died or for a special intention is indeed offered for that purpose whether the particular intention is mentioned or not during the Mass. Here at St. Joseph, it is our practice to mention the particular Mass intention during the Prayer of the Faithful, but such specific mention during the Mass is not required to fulfill the Mass intention. Thus, if the person reading the petitions during the Prayer of the Faithful mistakenly does not read the particular Mass intention, the offering for that Mass intention is not “refunded.” It is understandable that people are disappointed when their particular Mass intention is not mentioned during the Prayer of the Faithful, but lack of charity in response to such a mistake is inconsistent with authentic Christian behavior.

Masses with “Community Intentions”

We have been blessed at St. Joseph with many parishioners who wish to participate in the Church’s tradition of offering Masses for particular intentions. Indeed, at times, we receive far more requests for Mass intentions than there are Masses here at St. Joseph, which has resulted in frustration for many who have not been able to have as many Masses offered for their intentions as they would like. The Congregation for the Clergy at the Vatican has offered a remedy to this situation, allowing that in limited circumstances, up to two Masses per week can be offered in a parish for multiple intentions (Congregation for the Clergy, *Mos iugiter* (1991)).

Thus, one English Mass and one Spanish Mass is offered each Sunday as a “Community Intentions” Mass, with multiple intentions from those who have chosen to submit intentions for these Masses. The suggested offering for each intention submitted for these Community Intentions Masses is the same \$10 offering as for Masses with individual intentions. All offerings for these Community Intentions Masses are placed in a special reserve fund (rather than in the general parish accounts, as are offerings for individual Mass intentions), out of which tuition assistance and scholarships for our parish school and faith formation program will be given to those who otherwise would be financially precluded from participating in the school or faith formation program.