

Introduction

The Origin of the Idea

Many years ago, I was speaking to a group of young people and I encouraged them to get a small journal, take it to Mass with them, and ask God to show them one way they could become a-better-version-of-themselves in the coming week. A couple of weeks later, I received a journal in the mail from one of the students who had heard me share the idea . . . and I started to use it. That small journal changed my whole experience of the Mass.

Each Sunday, when I walk into Mass I pray, *God, Show me one way in this Mass I can become the-best-version-of-myself this week!* God never fails to respond to this prayer. So, each week I write down the one way I sense God is challenging me to grow, change, and become all he created me to be.

Today, I can look back at several Mass Journals. If you name a month and a year, I can tell you what I was struggling with in my life at that time by picking up the Mass Journal for that year. I can also tell you how God brought me through that period in my life. This knowledge of where we have come from, this spiritual continuity, is very powerful. It gives us hope in times of discouragement, and joy in times of sorrow.

This Mass Journal has also become a very powerful aid in my daily prayer. Often I take it to daily prayer and reflect on several of the short entries, one at a time, slowly and thoughtfully. They become a starting point for my conversation with God in prayer.

Our Lives Change When Our Habits Change

A Mass Journal is a life-changing habit for an individual, a marriage, a family, a parish, and the whole Church.

As an individual, take it to Mass, write down the one thing you sense God is saying to you that week, and date your entry. Then use your Mass Journal in daily prayer and allow it to stimulate your conversation with God.

In your marriage, take a few minutes on Sunday night to discuss what you each heard God saying to you and what you are working on during

the coming week. Then pray for each other, keeping these intentions specifically in mind.

In your family, on the way home from church, ask your children, "What did God say to you at church today?" Make it a habit—simply by asking the question you are teaching them to listen to the voice of God in their lives.

To test the idea I asked a friend who is a Catholic school teacher to ask her second-grade students, first thing each Monday morning, what God said to them at church on Sunday. She said she couldn't do that, explaining that most of the children don't go to church on Sunday. I encouraged her not to worry about that and to ask the question anyway. Three months later, at the parent-teacher conferences, eight parents talked about how they had stopped going to Mass some time ago, but this year their children had started asking them to take them to church. They wanted to hear what God was going to say to them, they told their parents.

In your parish, get everyone a Mass Journal. Perhaps after the homily, your priest could encourage everyone to take a quiet moment and write down the one thing God said to them in the Mass so far. We could then spend the rest of the Mass praying about how you can begin to live that one thing in the coming week.

Listening to the Voice of God

It seems to me that our lives change for the better only when we listen to the voice of God and respond to what we hear with courage and generosity.

Imagine every person in your parish coming to church on Sunday with a Mass Journal, listening to the voice of God in their lives, looking for the one way they could become the-best-version-of-themselves in the coming week.

Imagine the conversations you would have with your children, your spouse, your friends, and your pastor about the one thing you are each working on. Imagine the energy. Imagine the renewal. Imagine the possibilities.

Now take it a step further: Imagine every Catholic in America coming to church on Sunday with a Mass Journal, actively seeking the one way they could become a-better-version-of-themselves this week.

We do have problems as a Church—we are hypnotized by complexity—but I believe that one simple habit like this can turn the tide for the Catholic Church in America. Get people listening to the voice of God in their lives and something incredible will happen.

Many will say that this idea is too simple. Others will say we need to focus on catechesis and the sacraments. These are important, but until people

are listening to the voice of God in their lives they are simply incapable of absorbing the Scriptures, the Sunday homily, CCD class, adult education courses, great Catholic books, and the phenomenal beauty of the sacraments.

But once people are listening to the voice of God in their lives, they become sponges for everything else the Church has to offer. Teaching people to listen to the voice of God in their lives is a game changer for the Church. The Mass Journal is a simple and practical tool to teach Catholics how to listen to the voice of God and become continuous learners in their spiritual lives.

Could one simple habit transform the Catholic Church in the United States? Could it also transform your life, marriage, parish, career, spiritual life, school, business, and your appreciation of Catholicism?

Yes. As disarmingly simple as it may seem, you could be holding the key to transforming the Catholic Church in America. I wonder if we are humble enough as a Church to embrace such a simple strategy as a way forward?

When seventy percent of American Catholics don't come to church on Sunday, isn't it time someone did something? We think it is, and we hope you will join us in our efforts.

I invite you to take this small journal to Mass with you each Sunday. On your way to church join me in this simple prayer, *God, Show me one*

way in this Mass I can become a better-version-of-myself this week! Avoid the temptation to write copious notes. Just write down that one way you sense God is calling you to grow, and date your entry.

After a year, you will be able to flick through the pages of this journal and see how you have grown. Ten years from now, you will have ten of these small journals and together they will tell the story of your spiritual journey throughout those years.

There is genius in Catholicism. Let's rediscover it together.

Matthew Kelly