

ONLINE

MASS 101:



Junior Tim McIntyre distributes Communion.



Father Sam D'Angelo shows the Lectionary, which contains the daily Scripture readings, to Junior George Lever during a "teaching Mass" at Rochester's Bishop Kearney High School Feb. 28.



Father D'Angelo explains a point to the students.

A refresher course in liturgy

If you had a choice of going to church on a Saturday evening or to the mall with your friends, which would you choose?

Precious Blood Father Sam D'Angelo recently posed this question to a group of 40 Bishop Kearney High School freshmen. For most, the response was immediate: The mall — "because it's more fun," as one student said.

While this sentiment might disappoint many adults, Father D'Angelo considers it very typical for teens.

"They tend to associate Mass with being bored. It's not relevant in their lives," said Father D'Angelo, who serves with the Missionaries of the Precious Blood order in Toronto.

But rather than agree with the BK students, Father D'Angelo implored them to rethink their attitudes.

"You seriously should ask yourselves why you'd pick something over your relationship with God. When you pick something over God, you're choosing that as your god," Father D'Angelo told them.

In an effort to convey the significance of the Mass — and the obligation that goes along with it — Father D'Angelo spent Feb.

26-28 at Bishop Kearney conducting a series of nine "teaching Masses" for freshmen, sophomores and juniors. (He also held a retreat for seniors on March 1 at Borromeo Prayer Center in Greece.) The Masses took place in a third-floor chapel, in the former sisters' residence.

Ordained in 1999, Father D'Angelo is vocations director for his order and has done numerous teaching Masses in Canada. He also is the son of Louis D'Angelo, Bishop Kearney's principal.

The elder D'Angelo said he arranged for his son to hold the teaching Masses because he felt there wasn't enough participation and enthusiasm at the school's regularly scheduled liturgies. Approximately 80 percent of BK's student body is Catholic.

"Students really didn't know what Mass was all about — the non-Catholics and the Catholics who attend Mass. They'd sit, stand up, say some prayers and walk out," Louis D'Angelo remarked.

Father D'Angelo began his teaching Masses by encouraging students to sing an opening hymn. He then explained the arrangement of items in the sanctuary, noting, for example, that the altar was moved

from the rear of the sanctuary to its center after the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s. Other changes from Vatican II, he noted, were the removal of rails separating the sanctuary from the pews, and the recital of Mass in English rather than Latin.

"There was no longer this division between people who are ordained, and those who weren't," he said.

Father D'Angelo stopped numerous times during the Mass to explain what he was doing and why. Among the actions he highlighted were:

- That the priest kisses the altar at the beginning of Mass because the bones of deceased saints were traditionally put inside altars.

- That we cross ourselves three times before the Gospel reading to remind ourselves that the word of God is in our mind, on our lips and in our heart.

- That the square cardboard over the chalice is meant to keep insects away from the wine.

- That the host held aloft by a priest is usually quite large, so that people sitting in distant pews can see it.

Father D'Angelo involved several students in the Masses, getting them to volunteer as lectors, eucharistic ministers, altar servers and gift-bearers. Getting them to participate is an ideal way to spark

teens' interest, he remarked.

"I find a way to include them, not to just have them sit in the pews and be quiet," he said.

Freshman Erica Ryan, 14, noted that such teaching Masses could enlighten students who attend Mass but don't pay close attention to it.

"Maybe they didn't learn about Mass before," said Erica, who is an altar server and musician at St. Andrew/St. Philip Neri Parish in Rochester.

Jeff Cookinham liked the fact that Father D'Angelo taught in a visual way. "In religion classes you learn about the general reasons. It's a good idea that you can see everything happening; it was more like you can see what's going on instead of just reading about it," said Jeff, 17, a BK junior who attends Rochester's St. John the Evangelist Parish (Humboldt Street).

"The Mass was basically like an intro to church — how to behave, why there's certain rituals — and kind of a history lesson at the same time," Jeff added.

Meanwhile, Father D'Angelo's dad was surprised that he, too, learned quite a bit: "I had thought I was a pretty good Catholic and knew the Mass pretty well," Louis D'Angelo remarked.

Story by Mike Latona • Photos by Andrea Dixon

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