

## Going to Mass

The practise of taking my mother to Mass on Saturday night was necessitated by the fact that it suited her to go then because of the difficulty she had with walking and getting out at the weekend. Her popular choice of Church for worship was always the Lough Church because there was plenty of car park space and Mass didn't take too long to celebrate. This Saturday was typical. The weather was dull as usual for a June evening. As we entered the Church we grabbed a couple of missalettes and found our seat near the front. Because we were early for Mass we observed the crowd of people gather around us. As each one entered the Church the door was opened wide and a howling gale of wind sat down beside us as well. There was lots of shuffling and settling down which did little to help us prepare for worship. Suddenly the lights were turned on and the priest entered from the side. The chief celebrant for the Mass was the retired Canon Shinkwin. This was your old style priest, aloof and distant. I have never seen him smile, ever! In a very gruff manner he began the Mass. I am not impressed by mumbling and this man was a stunner. I am amazed at the number of priests who celebrate with the people of God and in effect they are saying Mass by themselves. Gestures become obsolete, greetings are grunted, people are referred to and tolerated by the celebrant. Very quickly I became distracted by the distractions around me. I did not feel lifted up and edified. The sermon was a mumbling dialogue with the self. Its content lent itself more to a philosophical debate than to an invitation to contemplation. The sermon was something to get over with and move on to the main course which we were all hungry for.

I am amazed that people continue to come to Mass week in week out when there is so little on the menu. They will grasp at any scraps in order to be fed. There is an eternal hope that this time it might be different, and yet we all go home undernourished hoping that the next time it might be better. People will do anything to make the scraps go a little bit further. Many were saying rosaries and little prayers to themselves. A man to my right was saying the Eucharistic prayer along with the priest. To make it more annoying he was reciting the prayer about three words ahead of Father which was an irritation. A young child joined in the chorus by singing and shrieking aloud. The stupid father merely endured. The rest of us endured it as well. Communion came and went. A few notices and off home with ye.

As a priest I am fed in all kinds of ways which are nourishing for the soul. The priest as the celebrant is always at the top table and always get the best bits. His knowledge about the peasants at the end of the hall is limited because they are so far away. He is busy dining and having a good time. When the priest enters the crowd and dines at their table he gets an insight which is frightening. These people ask for so little. They expect so much which they are not given. Their faith is strong but it is not possible to be so. They come to the church every week and are given scraps from the rich man's table. Sadly the rich man is always the priest. He is selfish with his food and shares it so badly. When I hear people lamenting because there is a shortage of priests I wonder why that is

such a bad thing. Left to themselves the people of God will nourish each other and be satisfied.