

Mass Intentions

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According to an old tradition, Catholics may offer a contribution to a priest and request an intention for a particular Mass (canon 945-946). This custom invites the faithful into a deeper celebration of the Eucharist by uniting their sacrifice with that of Christ. It also helps compensate the church's minister for his work. Because of this latter reason, the contribution is called a "stipend". In affluent countries the stipend is inadequate and the priest receives a salary. In poor countries priests cannot support themselves without the Mass stipend.

For a while, the custom sustained the belief that a Mass could hold a primary intention and that the priest could control the blessings of a Mass in a specific way. Recent statements from Rome have not reinforced that thinking, however. Rather, the priest accepts the offerings for Mass "according to particular intentions." God directs the fruits of the Mass, which are infinite and universal, according to the devotion of the faithful.

In the past, the priest could accept only one intention per Mass. Now he may accept several intentions for the same Mass once or twice a week if the donors are aware and agree (Congregation for the Clergy, *Mos iugitur*, 1991).

Because the custom promotes the active participation of the faithful, the Mass intention makes more sense if the donor is actually present for the Mass.

Most parishes keep a record of Mass intentions in the office or sacristy and they are commonly published in the bulletin and announced at the Masses. When doing so, it is more accurate to say, "We remember this person in a special way at this Mass," than to say in a restrictive sense, "This Mass is offered for this person." The Mass is offered for all.