



Question/Answer: On Mass Intentions & Does the priest “say” or “offer” the Mass?

Q: What is the correct verbiage or terminology: the priest “says” the Mass or “offers” the [sacrifice of the] Mass?

A: The term “offer Mass” is used in numerous Vatican documents and this terminology has been used in the Catholic Encyclopedia since circa 1910. The priest offers the sacrifice. We, the gathered people, unite ourselves [with the priest leading the liturgy] to that sacrifice.

Q: I seldom ask my parish priest to offer up Masses for a particular need such as a sick person or someone that has just died. Usually I offer up myself the Masses I attend for these needs, but a friend told me this was not valid. My friend said that for the graces to be received by the person in need, a priest had to offer up the Mass. So, my question is, may we offer up our Masses for departed souls or those in need without specifically asking the priest to say these Masses? — A.K., Sacramento, California

A: Actually, it is not a question of either/or but, of and/and. Any Catholic may offer up the Mass in which he or she participates for any good intention. Certainly, graces will accrue in accordance with the intensity of that person's participation and sincerity. This is a genuine exercise of the royal or common priesthood of the faithful.

However, the custom of requesting a priest to offer the Mass (for a specific intention), even when one cannot be physically present at the Mass, is a longstanding tradition and practice in the Catholic Church. This is because the Church considers the Mass as the greatest possible Prayer of Intercession; insofar as it is the perfect offering of Christ to the Father by making present the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection.

Because of the particular role of the priest as mediator between God and man, acting "*in persona Christi*" when offering the holy sacrifice of the Mass, it is believed that special graces are obtained when he applies the Mass to a particular intention.

Before continuing, I must reiterate the essential point that the Mass has the same value as Christ's sacrifice on Calvary, hence infinite and so objectively speaking the number of intentions that may be offered is not limited. However, normally allows only one intention with a small stipend united to each Mass.

In order to grasp the issues involved, it may help to realize what happens when a priest, or his representative, accepts a stipend to have a Mass said for a specific person or intention. The person who has offered the stipend has not "bought a Mass," a thing which is patently impossible. What has happened is that the priest has committed himself to celebrate a Mass according to the intentions of the person making the offering. Once he has accepted the commitment the priest is bound in justice to fulfill it and may not normally accept or substitute other intentions for the same Mass.

(NB: The usual amount for the stipend offering is determined by the bishops either nationally or locally. Here it is generally \$10.00. The faithful are free to offer more if they desire, and priests are encouraged to celebrate Mass for the intentions of their faithful even if they are too poor to offer a stipend.)

This intention is most often to pray for the repose of the soul of a deceased person, but may also be for the personal intentions of the living (e.g., health, welfare, anniversary, birthday, etc.).

There is usually no difficulty in making some form of announcement regarding the intention. But there are few official rules regarding this aspect. Some parishes are content with posting a notice on a bulletin board or in its weekly broadsheet. Others prefer to announce the intention before Mass begins or insert the intention of the Mass during the General Intercessions (also called the Prayer of the Faithful).

In accord with the Roman Catholic Church's Code of Canon Law (945ff) (which provides stable norms for the governance of the Holy Church) any and every offered Mass is to have an intention.

- At least one (1) scheduled, weekend Sabbath Mass at every parish church around the world, must be celebrated with the intention of "*pro populo*" (Latin: for the people of his assigned parish church).
- In the absence of an assigned or requested specific intention, the priest is required to offer the Mass "*pro populo*" (Latin: for the people of his assigned parish church).
- Likewise, if the Pastor is away from the parish on vacation or something, he should continue to offer a daily Mass during his absence and the Mass intention is also prescribed to be: "*pro populo*".

(SR: <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/mass-intentions-4936>)