

Gathering right

A checklist for starting Sunday on the right foot

I have a recurring nightmare. I dream I'm at Mass for the Umpteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, and the assembly is "Amening" in reply to the Opening Prayer. As the presider closes the book, he bends to whisper something to the six-year-old server. The cherub disappears into the sacristy as the lector mounts the ambo. Shortly after "A reading from the prophet Isaiah," the kid reappears holding a brass candle lighter with so much wick aflame the smoke detector is in danger of sirening.

He jabs the flame upward at the

BONUS TIP

Almost all of these tasks can be delegated to parishioners. Sure, some of the preparation will fall through the cracks once in a while, but investing the community with responsibility for preparing for Mass increases their participation in the liturgy and in the parish.

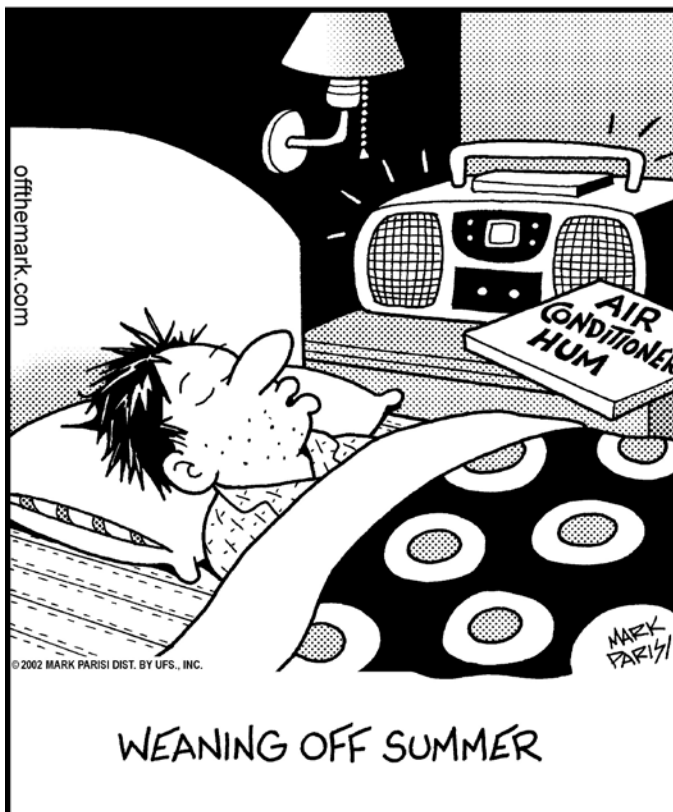
altar candle closest to him, which is about three feet taller than he is. It takes half a dozen attempts to ignite. Then he walks to the other side of the altar to light the second candle. He finally completes the task, as the assembly sings "The Lord is my light and my salvation" in response to the reading. The server extinguishes his torch, and

his parents deem it unnecessary to finish punching 911 into the cell phone.

every parish I've worshiped in is rushing to set up right up to the minute Mass begins.

My difficulty with such scurrying is it misses the point of the gathering. The goal is not to get Father to the altar. The goal is to welcome the stranger. If we are distracted by the details, we're in danger of missing Christ among us. So here's a quick checklist of tasks to be completed before Mass begins. Ideally, these should be done before the first worshiper walks through the door, which is usually 20-30 minutes before the scheduled Mass time.

Off the mark BY MARK PARISI



Minimize distractions

Only it's not a dream. Well, not all of it anyway. I'm sure it's happened to you. Sometime after Mass starts, you notice something that should have been turned on, put away, set out, marked up, or moved over. Even if you mostly get it right, almost

- Turn on and test all microphones
- Set out the Communion ware
- Mark and set out the lectionary, sacramentary, and intercessions book
- Turn on all lights
- Light all candles
- Move the cross (and candles) to the church entrance for the procession
- Prepare incense if necessary
- Presider is vested and greeting people as they gather
- Musicians' rehearsal is completed

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