

A MEETING NOT TO BE MISSED... I have a good priest friend by the name of Msgr. James McDonald. Msgr. McDonald is the pastor of St. Aidan's Church in Williston Park, New York which is in the Rockville Center Diocese. Well, the Msgr. turns 75 today which is the usual retirement age for priests. When I asked him if he was going to retire he said, "Absolutely not! I am filled with fervor for the faith!" He is a priest that I admire and consult very often because even at the age of 75 he is still so enthusiastic about the church and his priesthood. Something rare! Some years back, Msgr. McDonald's mother died at the ripe old age of 94. Of course, he celebrated the funeral mass for his mom. In his remarks, Msgr. spoke about his mother's wishes for the funeral homily. She had said to him, "Jimmy-first don't canonize me and above all don't embarrass me!" Well, of course he did a great job at a very difficult occasion. In his remarks at the church, Msgr. McDonald mentioned that his mom had been at the parish (St. Joseph's in Garden City, NY) for over 60 years. In those sixty years, he said, she had attended maybe only two parish meetings. But he continued, "There was one meeting that she absolutely never missed and that was the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. She was always here on Sundays!" What a beautiful testament to his mother's faith and belief in the Holy Eucharist. The Mass is one meeting that we should never miss either. Unfortunately, unlike previous generations, many people today skip Sunday Mass. Statistics, if they are correct, tell that only about 25% of Catholics attend Mass on Sunday and that is a very sad reality. There is no greater meeting than the Sacrifice of the Mass. It is at the Mass that we are fed with the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. But some in our time don't care about that. For many people today, material things are much more important than the spiritual. Giving an hour to God seems burdensome in our computerized, hi-tech, fast moving society. The Saints however, recognized the great value of the Mass. They had faith and they truly believed that at Mass we receive Jesus himself in Holy communion. That is a priceless treasure and something that should not be missed. You might have not heard of a bishop by the name of Francis X. Ford. Bishop Ford was a Maryknoll bishop in China in the 1930's and the 1940's. He was arrested by the Chinese Communists in 1949 and then thrown into jail. Ford was brutally tortured. But by a strange coincidence, the bishop was the only prisoner in that jail that was given bread and wine. Quietly, he offered the Sacrifice of the Mass in his cell each day. One of the other prisoners reported that no Mass celebrated in a majestic cathedral was as beautiful as Bishop Ford's Mass-with a prison smock for a vestment and a tin cup for a chalice. So let us appreciate what we have in the Mass we so often take for granted. A sign that hung in a church sacristy reminded the priest: "Father say this Mass like your first Mass. like your last Mass; like your only Mass." That's a good reminder for us as well never miss our meeting with Jesus each Sunday because it is Christ himself who comes to us!

Sincerely in the Lord,

Father Jerome