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# Filming God?

*A presentation of the LiveMass apostolate of the FSSP, broadcasting online the traditional liturgy.*

It all started in Hollywood. As it happens, our priest in Los Angeles is based near the world centre for the film industry.

Seldom has there been such a contrast between reality and fiction. Think of it: while Fr James Fryar offers the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, he displays in his hands Christ, the Truth Incarnate. And yet, this supreme reality is visible only to the eyes of faith, enshrined in the symbols and the drama of the liturgy. Non-believers would call it merely staged.

While at the Elevation the little bell is rung at St Victor's Catholic Church in West Hollywood, next door to it, in how many studios do film directors shout 'Action' – for genuine fiction to be filmed? Actually, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is *The Action*. And a sharing in such treasure is now made available to all through our LiveMass channel.

## No substitute

Admittedly, watching Holy Mass is not the same as attending it. The Church teaches that: "Virtual reality is no substitute for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the sacramental reality of the other sacraments, and shared worship in a flesh-and-blood human community. There are no sacraments on the Internet; and even the religious experiences possible there by the grace



of God are insufficient apart from real-world interaction with other persons of faith." (cf *The Church and Internet* # 9, by the Pontifical Council on Social Communications).

Thus, all should be encouraged to physically attend Holy Mass and other liturgical ceremonies. But when great distances or ill health preclude it, watching Holy Mass with devotion is better than being altogether deprived of it. Furthermore, some graces are formally received even when liturgical acts are only watched live on a television or computer screen. So does the *Manual of Indulgences* (#4) affirm: "A Plenary Indulgence is [...] gained by the faithful who, not

present for a reasonable cause at a Papal Blessing, devotedly follows the rites through TV or radio 'dum peraguntur,' i.e., 'while they are being performed'."

Undoubtedly, actual graces can be received also when watching liturgical ceremonies on-demand, just as a holy picture can inspire our meditation. This is particularly relevant for Catholic homilies and doctrinal conferences. Then, regardless of when the video was recorded, our intellect receives the grace of specific enlightenment about God's timeless revelation.



## Reverence needed

Needless to say, given the sacred nature of the action broadcasted, one should use LiveMass only with recollection. Whether at home in one's study or sitting-room, or on a train or a bus, users should give LiveMass or iMass their full attention. Watching LiveMass with one's pyjamas still on, or iMass sitting on one's train seat with legs crossed while sipping one's coffee would not do. Lack of respect for the sacred actions displayed on the screen could become culpable, so that one should only connect when one's heart and soul are available, with matching bodily posture.

This condition applies also to work colleagues or fellow passengers, who should be allowed to watch with us only if they respect what they see, even though they may not as yet understand it. Remote viewing of the holiest action on earth must not lead to exposing its splendour. As we make use of modern technologies to nourish our faith and evangelise, let us not forget the 'Discipline of the Arcane' – whereby our forefathers in early Christianity protected the Holy Mysteries from profane curiosity or irreverence. In those days, even the catechumens were asked to leave before the Offertory. For the same reason, LiveMass equipment is installed in our churches unobtrusively. Our modern cameras are small and silent, and their powerful zooms allow the devices to be located far enough from the altars to be no distraction to worshippers – or sacred ministers.

## Going global

For years, Fr James Fryar has spurred efforts to use technology for evangelisation. He originally set up LiveMass in his former church in Florida. On a totally different time zone, daily broadcast of Holy Mass in Switzerland was added when the beautiful Basilique Notre-Dame was entrusted to our Fraternity in French-speaking Fribourg. Soon after, our church in Guadalajara – Nuestra Señora del Pilar, glittering with gold, after the Spanish style – was also equipped with LiveMass. Last but not least, St Mary's Shrine Church in Warrington, England, was added to the network less than a year ago.



Pictures clockwise: LiveMass logo;  
*Rorate* Mass at Basilique Notre-Dame, Switzerland;  
 Mel Gibson filming *The Passion of the Christ*;  
 Fr James Fryar, FSSP offering Holy Mass.

Thus in four parts of the world, daily Mass is filmed live and can be 'attended' live, or watched later on demand. The Mass is read or sung in Latin, but the homilies (daily in Warrington, apart from Wednesdays) are delivered in the local language, i.e. English, Spanish or French. A growing number of faithful are using this service. While all would of course travel to actual Mass locations on Sundays, some live too far away to attend on weekdays. They draw inspiration from televised Masses, especially since the special reverence of the traditional Latin Mass is still not widely accessible. They also appreciate the homilies, an almost daily opportunity to understand better



the Catholic faith and spirituality.

In Warrington, the great architectural merit of the building, added to the skill of the polyphonic choir, has led the Archdiocese of Detroit (USA) to broadcast this Mass every Sunday on their official network. Their programming manager emailed us: “I had a viewer call about the Mass from England. She said the church was so beautiful and wondered which one it was. What church is it recorded at? I will give her a call back and let her know. Thanks!”



At St Mary’s Warrington, D.D.-‘M’ found in Fr James Mawdsley, FSSP (not *Bond*) a competent local agent who organised with success the installation of cables, improved our upload speed, managed the funding issues and put together a team of local young cameramen for weekly filming. Proving that proficiency in video games can help spread the gospel, some of our young adults volunteered to hold the joystick and shift the angles in our control room, becoming valued cameramen during our Sung Masses.

**Social media**

Although LiveMass’ main mission is to provide the live and short-term video-on-demand options available through its own services, LiveMass also has a YouTube channel and a Vimeo subscription. We use primarily Vimeo, and decreasingly, YouTube, to make available some of the conferences, sermons, Ordinations, special Masses and other content available long-term. LiveMass has a Twitter account for last-minute notifications of broadcast changes or announcements. We have around 15,000 people using the iMass app and around 65,000 who follow on the website.

Here are a couple of messages left by iMass users (i.e. for phones and tablets): “Wonderful app. Would happily pay for this. In terms of content, it is all you could ask for.

Anyone can access livemass.org for free, without registering. The website is very simple to navigate. One basically clicks on any of our four locations (Florida; Fribourg in Switzerland; Warrington in England or Mexico City). Then one may choose either the Mass of the day which stays on for 24 hours, or the Mass of the previous Sunday, which stays on for seven days. Lastly, one may select the definition of the picture through the ‘HD’ button, to the bottom right of the screen. If a homily was delivered, one would find it about eight minutes from the start for a Low Mass, and about twenty-five minutes from the start for a Sung Mass.

**D.D. Day**

In Warrington, England, an engineer flew from America and stayed one full week in a nearby hotel, spending entire days at our church to install state-of-the-art cameras, microphones and computers. One would have expected a thirty-something male technician to travel such a distance for that kind of job. Instead, ‘D.D.’ appeared at the terminal, looking more like a round-cheeked grandmother coming to babysit.

Despite her congenial outlook (a bit like James Bond’s ‘M’ played by Dame Judi Dench), it was soon obvious that D.D. meant business and was up to the task. Her mission did not end with our installation, though. From her control centre in Florida, D.D. oversees our broadcasts, adjusts the recording times and even shifts the cameras if need be. In a word, she calls the shots. She must have a couch in her studio, for the five-hour time difference does not prevent her from intervening in England while America is still asleep. A woman of faith, D.D. prayed that Hurricane Irma would spare her LiveMass control room. She had all equipment packed away for safety, but in the end her location was not hit.



The latest update to the look of the app is great too, it feels much smoother now. I would probably change the name though – the main reason I got this app was the breviary, the name should be something more encompassing like *Catholic compendium*. iMass would make me think it's just has a missal or a video of a mass."

Pictures clockwise:  
First Mass in Warrington;  
LiveMass screen;  
Our LiveMass church in Mexico.

Another message about our iMass app: "Even without the streaming video this app would be more than worth it for the clear way it aggregates the proper and ordinary texts of the mass in both Latin and English. So far I've only been to one Latin mass, but being able to watch the video streams not only acts as a focus for prayer, but is familiarising me with the extraordinary form rite so that the next one I attend I will be able to focus on my inward participation rather than on the externals of what's being done."

**Souls one click away**

Before we conclude, we share below a couple of messages emailed by unknown online 'attendees' to our daily Masses in Warrington (12.10pm every day, and 11am on Sundays).

"Dear Fathers, I participate in your Holy Mass every morning at 6:10 am (US time). Please know how grateful I am to assist at your Holy Mass. My Guardian Angel joins you each morning. Thank you for your briefs homilies of which I am also nourished. Thank you for allowing us into your parish to adore Our Lord from afar. Thank you for your devotions after Mass... like today with the group praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet. Does it

cost additional money to extend the streaming time? Should I donate through LiveMass? My deepest and humble gratitude!"

"Message: Father and Choir, and all those who support this church, thank you so much for the beautiful masses. I cannot express what they have done for me and my faith. I have only discovered the Traditional Mass in the past year. Your beautiful Traditional Mass has been a rock to grab hold onto. May God bless you and keep you."

"Message: Hello, through the kindness of Catholic TV in America, my husband and I have been able to watch the Mass from the Cathedral. We thank you for allowing us to watch and many blessings always!"

**In conclusion**

At the earliest days of LiveMass, Fr Fryar offered a Lenten Mission for his new parish in Sarasota. They only had a single handcam at the back of the nave then (much like our rear camera placement – except that handcam didn't have remote control and 20x optic zoom like our camera!). After the last evening of the three-day mission, Father received an email from a viewer in Australia. Her husband had been in the final days of this life and they had their computer by his bed to view the mission talks. The topic was Christ's Seven Last Words, based on Fulton J. Sheen's works. But this woman wrote to Fr Fryar that as he concluded the mission, her husband took his last breath. May he rest in peace. The letter was quite moving and a testimony to the spiritual benefits from LiveMass.

Wherever you live, feel welcome to visit us on LiveMass, a modern expression of the 'communion of saints'. You may also like to forward the [livemass.org](http://livemass.org) and *iMass* links to your friends and colleagues, especially if they have never attended the traditional Latin Mass. LiveMass is a good way of getting a taste of it from a distance. Be sure that we in Warrington are aware of your presence with us, through God's lenses, and that we include you and your friends in our prayer at the altar of God. □

