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It's a book! It's an app!

It's Mass Explained!

Like many of you in ministry or business, I get lots of e-mails promoting the "latest and greatest" materials that will make me a better musician, social media expert, pastoral minister, catechetical leader, and so on. Most of the time, after a cursory glance, I deposit said notice in the digital trash can and move on. A few months ago, I'll admit, I performed the same ritual with an e-mail about a new Catholic app called Mass Explained and didn't give it another thought — that is, until my editor got my attention and asked if I'd like to review a copy of it for this column.

After downloading a complementary version and putting it through its paces, I was pleasantly surprised while somewhat

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perplexed by this unique, ahead-of-its-time Catholic book ... app ... uh, I'm not quite sure what it is, really. Let me try to sort this out for all of us.

Mass Explained (iPad only, for now) is billed as "a multimedia journey through the Roman Catholic Mass" and is indeed filled with interactive slideshows, 360-degree panoramas, and videos and liturgical music to enhance all of its scholarly information.

The author of this very complex undertaking, Dan González, has a degree in graphic design from Rhode Island School of Design and seems to have spared no artistic expense in making his work a thing of beauty. The app is visually stunning, from its opening swinging thurible through its 23 well-laid-out chapters, with comprehensive multimedia and resources indices that on their own are a valuable aid to catechists and theology instructors.

Navigating is a bit tricky, though, because those of you who may have a touch of ADHD (like I do) may not know where to tap first! You can only view the material in portrait mode — something I normally despise, but it seems to make sense here. The user reads by scrolling up rather than swiping left, which can be very confusing at first. As you read, tapping on underlined words and phrases brings up definitions or explanations of ancient customs and traditions. There are many audio files and video clips, and a running sidebar on the left contains the information for all the numbered notes. Each chapter concludes with an overview or recap of what was presented, and the reader has the choice of going to the next chapter, returning to the previous chapter or to the table of contents, or checking out the multime-

dia index. All in all, other than the nonintuitive scrolling, Mass Explained reads like a textbook yet is a full-bodied app that will delight both educated liturgists and average Catholics.

I contacted the author and asked how he envisioned his app being used. He answered, "For the average Catholic, there is no right or wrong way to read the app. Some may want to read it from 'cover' to 'cover' as soon as they can. However, one way which I think may be more beneficial is to read one chapter per week, perhaps on a Friday or Saturday. Then, see how their newfound knowledge impacts their worship on Sunday."

When I asked if there was a study guide for schools or parishes, he said, "Presently there is none. However, a group of high school theology teachers are in the process of writing one." This is a good idea because the average parish catechetical leader or youth minister may like the app but not know how to integrate it into their program.

The most important question I wanted answered was, why the high cost? At \$25 for the first volume of a two-volume set, it is one of the more expensive applications offered and will need

a lot of rationalization for most folks before they purchase it. González's detailed answer made a lot of sense: "I realize that \$24.99 is not the average price for a mobile app. Many people are used to apps being free, 99¢, or perhaps \$1.99. This app could have been created to fit that price point. However, I do not feel it would be my best. In order to create an app to the best of my ability, I needed to source content that I pay for every time the app is downloaded. ... Also, despite the possibility of creating a revenue stream, I chose not to include banner or pop-up ads which would, in my opinion, compromise the learning experience. In addition, I chose to enroll in Apple's VPP program, where educational institutions receive a 50% discount."

This contribution to the New Evangelization is a beautiful and faith-filled work that will help both Catholics and non-Catholics better understand the Mass. Despite its high price and quirky page turning, Mass Explained is a worthy addition to the iOS user's collection — one that will educate both mind and soul. **ML**



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