



EUCHARIST: WE COME, BUT DO WE GET THE MEANING?

Most of you reading this column, come to our celebration on a regular basis. But to what extent do we enter into the celebration? Has our celebration of the Eucharist become rote and boring? Perhaps it has for all too many Catholics. Jim Dinn addressed the above concerns in an article in the *U.S. Catholic* in December 2004. The following are some excerpts from his article.

Sometimes we have an experience but miss the meaning. We come out of a movie and need to discuss it with friends to see what they got out of it. In sorting out our life we talk not only with friends, but maybe with a counselor, psychiatrist, or a spiritual director because we need their help to find the meaning of our experiences.

The gap between experience and meaning was brought home to me by two friends who had separate experiences of visiting the Grand Canyon.

The first friend, "Henry," went to the Grand Canyon and sat all day in one spot, watching as the sun moved across the sky and continuously changed the colors of the canyon walls and the pattern of the shadows. He just sat there and drank in the colors and the shadows all day long. He couldn't get enough of it. That visit nourished him for years.

The other friend, "Nick," was a neighbor in Pennsylvania. When he retired, he and his wife bought one of those huge RVs with all the comforts of home, and the first place they visited was the Grand Canyon. They left on Monday and we didn't expect to see them for a month. But they were back in less than a week. We thought they must have had engine trouble or changed their minds. But no, they had driven all the way to Arizona and the Grand Canyon. Nick went to the rim, checked it out and wasn't impressed; he said he had seen better. So he and his wife climbed back into the RV and drove back to Pennsylvania.

Both friends saw the Grand Canyon, in that sense they had the same experience; but clearly there was a world of difference in what they got out of it, in the meaning they found. Nick had the experience, but compared to Henry he certainly missed any meaning.

That can happen in our experience of receiving Holy Communion. We've all had the experience of Communion and we share a foundational belief in the presence of Jesus in this sacrament. But the meaning of the experience continues to be revealed to us from our

own reflection and from the example of other participants. Four aspects of the Eucharist have grown more precious to me because of other believers.

When I was a boy Eucharist was an experience of isolation: Come back from Communion with your eyes lowered and bury your face in your hands. Close out everyone around you. It was just me and Jesus. I had been taught to ignore all my fellow believers as if they were a distraction or temptation, because Jesus had just come to me.

Clearly there was something missing in that approach. Communion is a celebration of connection. We had the experience but sometimes missed the meaning. Jesus in this sacrament unites us to himself and to one another. Joining together in a Communion hymn can be a recognition of this connection.

In fact, our celebration of Mass doesn't allow us to approach the altar for Communion as disconnected individuals. Before we can go to Communion we do two important things. We pray the Our Father together, which expresses the fact that we are one family with the same Father and we ask God to forgive us just as we are forgiving our sisters and brothers. Then what do we do? We offer one another a sign of peace—a sign that we truly do forgive everyone.

Many families have a rule about not going to bed without making up. In our faith family we don't go to Communion without making up—because Communion celebrates and intensifies how connected we are.

Participant: Moved to Tears

I learned from a Protestant pastor that if we celebrate Mass with faith and attention and sing with enthusiasm, we are enriching the sacramental experience of everyone else around us.

This local Protestant pastor came to a funeral at our church because the deceased woman had been married to a man from his congregation. Our pastor invited him to proclaim one of the scripture readings, so he was seated near the altar for the whole funeral. On the way down the aisle afterward, our priest noticed tears streaming down the man's face. When they got to the sacristy, the priest asked if he was all right. "Oh, I'm fine," he said. "It's just that the ritual was so sincere."

This man come from a church that didn't believe in ritual. They thought that ceremony and ritual were just window dressing, some decorative flourishes that had no meaning. And this man was experiencing for the first time, up close and personal, the power of religious ritual. "The ritual was so sincere" that it moved him to tears. It

was so powerful that he started coming to weekday Mass at our church and attended a whole year of RCIA sessions.

Interestingly, only once did this man experience the sincerity of our rituals from standing by the altar next to our pastor. All the other times he experienced it in the pews from the way parishioners participated and prayed. It made me realize more deeply that we all help to make our liturgical rituals sincere. The question raised by the incident is: If a visitor or neighbor or children from our own family watch us participate at Mass, will they comment on how sincere the ritual is? Will they be moved to tears?

Covenant: You are what you eat

The Gospel of John insists that Holy Communion is a covenant, a solemn commitment to live out what the sacrament expresses.

When we receive Eucharist it's like a couple exchanging vows in a wedding. That's the public pledge of their love. But the living out of that pledge is done in nursing sick children, admitting mistakes, forgiving one another. The promise is made by the altar, but the living is done in kitchens, backyards, supermarkets, hospitals, fast-food restaurants and moving cars.

That's how Eucharist is, too. To receive Eucharist is to publicly renew our pledge to live out the values and vision of Christ. The public pledge, the reception of the sacrament, is typically done in church during Mass. But the living out of that pledge occurs everywhere.

We receive Jesus so that we can more and more become what we eat, so people will see in us the concern for the weak and the poor and the sick that Jesus had. And we know that is how we will be judged. "I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was homeless, I was sick and you helped me." Jesus says that's what the test will be. The test isn't, "How often did you receive Communion?" But we need the strength of many Communion if we are to live by the standards Jesus offers us.

We have all had experiences but missed the meaning. Perhaps receiving Holy Communion is one of the experiences whose fuller meaning has escaped us. We can even walk away from it—the way my friend Nick walked away from the Grand Canyon. (He really thought the problem was with the canyon!) Better yet, we can keep learning from others at every point of our life some of the meanings of Eucharist that we may have missed before.

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Father's Day

This weekend we remember our fathers living and deceased. If our relationship with our father was/is good let

us be grateful. If it was/is wounded, let us pray for healing. Father's Day, like Mother's Day, can be very painful for all who have recently lost a father, want to be a father and/or is alienated from ones son/father.

The Father Factor — How Your Father's Legacy Impacts Your Career by Stephen Poulter, Ph.D. is an interesting book about how our relationship with our father impacts how we relate to others and our career.

The following are a few excerpts from *Love Never Fails—Spiritual Reflections for Dads of All Ages* by Patrick Reardan

The Human Spirit

As a father, your job is to tend the flame of your child's soul. If you are inattentive, it will be buffeted by the winds, stunted, starved, dimmed.

But, if you find ways to nurture it, to protect it, to help it grow, your child will be a shining light in the world.

There are incalculable resources in the human spirit, once it has been set free. -Hubert H. Humphrey

Integrity

At the checkout line, the clerk gives you ten dollars too much in change. You point this out to him, and he takes the bill back, giving you an odd look. Your six-year-old son is watching, too.

Live so that when your children think of fairness and integrity, they think of you. -H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

www.dadmag.com/dadskills/values.php

Take a look at this site where several writers discuss the challenge of bringing up a moral child.

Money

I've always been ambivalent about how my children, both now teens, spend their money.

When they go to the mall and buy fashionable clothes, I understand that it's a way for them to identify with their peers—a way for them to fit in. That's fine. But I worry about their beginning infected with the consumer culture. America, I suspect, is the only place in the world and in history that has such a term as "sport shopping." This is spending money for the sport of it, acquiring "stuff" for the fun of it.

I know how strong the pull is. I can feel it in myself. I may not spend a lot on clothes, but books? Well, we all have our weaknesses.

My father used to play with my brother and me in the yard. Mother would come out and say, "You're tearing up the grass." "We're not raising grass," Dad would reply. "We're raising boys."

-Harmon Killebrew

Stepfather

You're not just marrying the woman you love.

You are, in a real way, marrying her children. They are going to take to you, or not. You're going to find them delightful, or not. This is awkward, and there's no getting around it.

But, just as you're promising to love your wife, you're

also promising to love her children. You don't have to like them—although that will help. But you are saying “I will” to taking on the responsibility for being a father to them.

Your new life is going to have its odd bumps.

But, really, that's the way it is for any father.

So you see, kids, a stepfather is just like a new puppy. He needs love and care.

www.lifecoachingstudio.com/rel13.htm

Check out this site for ten very sensible tips from Jeannette Lofas on being a stepfather.

Non-Violence

Your son comes home bloody and bruised, and you're not sure what to teach the boy about fighting.

Revenge is wrong. But self-defense—yes, your son should defend himself.

But should the boy defend himself by going toe to toe with the attacker? Or should he run? Is that cowardly?

There aren't any simple answers.

You tell your son this one guideline: Go out of your way to avoid hurting people. Sometimes you will have to bring pain to others—in standing up for what's right or in protecting yourself or in giving constructive criticism. But try, as much as you can, to be gentle.

Many people see gentleness as softness. But it's really a kind of strength—a rare and wonderful kind of strength.

What if we taught our students the lessons of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther Kings, Jr. and Dorothy Day, that peaceful non-violence in pursuit of a high goal—the welfare of children, for instance—is a noble pursuit that imbues life with meaning?

—Geraldine Gorman

Opportunity to sign up for a weekly hour in our Adoration Chapel next Sunday.

Next Sunday, Fr. Vallone will visit us again and invite you to either recommit or commit to praying one hour a week in our Adoration Chapel. Concerning prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, the late Pope John II wrote:

It is pleasant to spend time with him, to lie close to his breast like the Beloved Disciple (Jn 13:25) and to feel the infinite love present in his heart. If in our time Christians must be distinguished above all by the 'art of prayer,' how can we not feel a renewed need to spend time in spiritual converse, in silent adoration, in heartfelt love before Christ present in the Most Holy Sacrament? How often, dear brothers and sisters, have I experienced this, and drawn from it strength, consolation and support!

Mary writes of her experiences

Mary a parishioner who lives in Rockledge wrote me the following letter about her experience with adoration.

Dear Fr. Tobin,

Just wanted to give you a few thoughts on my experience of Eucharistic Adoration. I signed up around this time last

year. It was a difficult step to take, because our lives are so busy. It was hard for me to commit to coming to the chapel each week at the same time. However, I did, it, and it has been wonderful. Before I had gone to the chapel for the first time, I remember thinking that an hour seemed so long; I wasn't sure how I could stay focused for an hour. Within a few weeks, I was often staying longer than an hour. It is such a peaceful time for me. I do a variety of things while I'm there; pray the rosary, pray spontaneously, read. Recently, I am trying to spend more time being quiet and listening. This is very difficult to do. I fall asleep, my mind wanders, etc. but I continue to try. It is still difficult to discipline myself to be there every week, but I'm always thankful once I'm there. Spending that hour in the presence of our Lord really is spiritual rejuvenation for me on a weekly basis. In the past few weeks I have considered giving up my hour in Adoration, as increasing gas prices are really putting a pinch on our finances. However, I've decided that my hour in Adoration is way too important to me, and I will have to find another way to cut costs.

When it comes to prayer, our primary concern should not be “getting something out of it”. Such is a consumerist mentality. Rather, we come to be in the presence of Him who knows us best and loves us most. We come primarily to give—to be as present as we can to the One ‘in whom we live, move and have our being’. We come and offer God our distractions, our weaknesses, joys and sorrows. We come as we are with our brokenness and lay it down before our Lord. We may feel that the hour is a waste of precious time. But it is not if we do try to be as present as we can to our Lord. Don't we realize that he appreciates our sacrifice of precious time and our meager efforts to be prayerful. It doesn't matter if we *get* anything from our hour. It matters a whole lot more that *we want* to spend an hour with our Lord. So I invite you to be open to Fr. Valone's invitation at the Masses next weekend.

Have a prayerful week,

