

The Eucharist: Source of Transformation of the World

Everyone has heard someone say, “I don’t go to church. I can pray better at home.” Perhaps; but prayer with the Sunday assembly really isn’t about my personal prayer life. When baptized people gather to pray, we become more than just ourselves. We enter a crucible of transformation which melts us together into a Spirit-filled assembly. The singing, the prayer, the proclamation of the Word, the varied ministries, the giving and receiving of sacred Food and Drink all create a communion which changes us. We have become the mysterious living presence of the Body of Christ in this world.

There is definitely an asceticism required in letting go of our individual desires and tastes in order to become part of such an assembly. Most basically we must get out of bed, get dressed and come. Then we must surrender our personal burdens and needs and walk through the “door” – both literally and figuratively – into the community. Like the child with just five loaves and two fish, we place the little we have in the hands of Christ. By letting Him touch us in the Word and in the Eucharist, we begin to feel His personal love through the love of the community around us. We begin to see people and situations with His eyes, to hear with His ears, to respond with His words. We become able to forgive people’s trespasses against us without resentment or blaming. Through this process we are being prepared to be a healing presence in this world.

At the end of the liturgy when the presider says, “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord,” or “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life,” – two of the dismissal texts from the new Roman Missal – we go in many directions to take the presence of our Risen Lord to the world. Our “coming together” has transformed and strengthened us for this task, while our personal prayer carries us until our next Sunday encounter with the community we call Church.

Blessing and Sending

John 3:16, the Scripture citation we see in the stands at football games, has become a kind of joke. Anyone can rattle off...

“God so loved the world that He gave His only beloved son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

These lofty words become less remote when we re-translate “believes” as “trusts.” This simple change moves the meaning of the text out of the head and into the heart – and that is no joke.

How much did God love the world? Enough to entrust His only, His beloved Son to the likes of us. Just as the Father sent Jesus to us, we are sent to continue Jesus’ mission in this world. In the gathering, the hearing of the Word, and the offering and eating of the sacred food and drink, the Holy Spirit who filled Jesus has changed us. Our trust deepens and our vision changes. We become able to see that, if we offer bread on the altar and do not offer bread to the hungry, our offering condemns us. We recognize that, if we offer a greeting of peace to fellow Christians and do not bring peace to our homes, neighborhoods and places of work, we betray our calling. We accept the challenge of John Chrysostom speaking from the 5th century:

“Would you like to honor the body of Christ you receive in the Eucharist? Do not despise the poor when you see him clothed in rags... He who said ‘this is my body’, has said also ‘You have seen me hungry

and you did not give me to eat! Whatever you have refused to do for any of these little ones, you have refused it to me also!"

The Church sends us, saying, "Go, you are dismissed" or "Go, your mission now begins." The liturgy propels us out into the world to continue Jesus' presence, His love, His capacity for forgiveness and healing, His courage to transform the world God so loved. This task is not beyond us when we walk in trust.