



FR. DANIEL'S CORNER

Mass Moment: Part 27

THE SIGN OF PEACE

We now come to the greeting and exchange of the Sign of Peace. The prayer of peace recalls our Lord's words at the Last Supper in which he himself, in effect, calls his body and blood by this name— peace. He said, "I leave you peace, my peace I give you" (John 14:27). In addition, his death offers us peace, which is the first thing he says to his Apostles upon his appearance, "Peace to you!" (John 20:21). This is important because it is through his blood on the cross that he made peace, reconciling all things in himself (Col 1:20).

We know from the *Didache* (Teachings of the Apostles) that the Sign of Peace has been a part of the gathering of the apostles for the celebration of the Lord's day. In numerous places Paul and others encourage the Christians to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom 16:16, I Cor 16:20, II Cor 13:12, and also, I Peter 5:14). This practice found its way into the liturgy. It calls the assembly into unity, solidarity, reconciliation, and love. By it "*the Church asks for peace and unity for herself and for the whole human family, and the faithful express to each other their ecclesial communion and mutual charity before communicating in the Sacrament. As for the sign of peace to be given, the manner is to be established by Conferences of Bishops in accordance with the culture and customs of the peoples. It is, however, appropriate that each person offer the sign of peace only to those who are nearest and in a sober manner* (G.I.R.M. # 82). Unfortunately, many congregants at Mass seem to confuse this ritual with an expression of affection reserved for intimates.

Furthermore, the Sign of Peace is a ritual exchange and not merely a practical greeting. It is a *playing out* in a sober, stylized embrace being joined together as one body in Christ. As brothers and sisters, we have just called God our Father in the Lord's Prayer. Having prayed, "forgive us as we forgive," we turn to one another with this sign of reconciliation. It is a strong and powerful ritual expression of the love we must share among ourselves as the condition for being united with Christ, our Head.

In some places, a handshake suffices. In others, a hug or just a simple bow expresses this exchange of peace. In the work of Aquilina and Wuerl on the Mass, they assert, "The gesture we make- whatever it may be – must be a sign of deeper and more pervasive peace in our lives. We are not just declaring our peace with the person who happens to be in the seat next to us. We make a sign that we are at peace with everyone- even those people whom we may count as rivals, opponents, or adversaries" (Donald Wuerl & Mike Aquilina. *The Mass: The Glory, The Mystery, The Tradition*, 185).

The sign of peace is so essential that Jesus made it a precondition for participation in the Eucharist. "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).

And that is your Mass Moment for the week.