

## Traveling with Christ

My husband and I left 2 weeks ago to bring our oldest daughter and her family to their new home in San Bernardino, California. There has been an ache in my heart as we help them set up their new home, enroll their daughter in a new pre-K program (having Covid restrictions), visit new groceries, new stores, new neighbors. It is an international city and the diocese conducts masses in 34 languages..... 34 languages. They know no one here.

It was with this present ache, that my husband found an outdoor, weekday mass for us to attend. This diocese does not hold indoor masses yet because of Covid. I was reluctant to go because we don't know the city, I was worried about safety, and I was pretty sure the mass was going to be in Spanish, which we don't speak (yet). It was one more "new" experience that I wasn't ready to take on. He was insistent.

To my relief, the mass was held in the garden area behind an old convent. There was a beautiful statue of the Blessed Mother in the corner and the grass was vibrant green (an unusual site in this arid desert area where most everything is brown). We were warmly welcomed by one of the men who serves at the parish, introduced by the deacon before mass began, and then greeted again by many of the parishoners afterwards. The wonderful Mexican priest said the mass in English, and then translated the homily into Spanish also. It was an absolute delight, and fed my heart and soul in a way that nothing else could. I can't wait to bring my daughter's family with us tomorrow.

The deacon made an important observation afterwards, when we stayed to talk to him. After offering himself as contact person for our daughter, he said, "You know that's the great thing about being Catholic. Wherever you go, you have community." I would add, "you have family" and our savior brother is physically present in our midst. This family transcends space and time, because we worship with each other and with our heavenly siblings. Our 'worship service' brings us to the table of the last supper and to the foot of the cross. It unites heaven and earth and is outside of time. No other religion worships like we do. Our incarnate Jesus necessitates incarnate worship. We can worship over the internet when we can't get to mass because of age or infirmity (or real vulnerability to Covid), but Jesus gave himself to us to be consumed- body, blood, soul and divinity. Catholicism is earthy, gritty, fleshy. Jesus spit in the mud and wiped a blind man's eyes to bring back his sight. He healed by speaking, breathing his Spirit, dangling the tassles of his cloak for the sick to touch, laying on his hands. He wants us to feed on Him (physically) in order that we may become what we eat.

3 big lessons of this experience for me were these:

1. There is never anything to fear when we go to worship. Fear itself is of the enemy and it's a much more fearful thing to be away from Christ in these

- uncertain times. If we throw ourselves into the arms of God, He can send us wonderful surprises.
2. We need the mass. There's a reason Christ was incarnate. He knows we need Him physically present with us as we journey through this life. We will need this living manna in the days ahead.
  3. Finally, we should always assess our motives. The enemy knows us well and will plant ideas in our minds that hit our weaknesses. Prioritize your relationship with God. If you are doing retail shopping, running to Home Depot to redo your gardens, getting together with friends at outdoor coffee shops, or for drinks, then you can go to mass. Mask-wearing is mandatory and we're all very spaced out. I, too, have fallen into the trap of making excuses, so I'm well aware of the temptations. Know yourself and don't let yourself off the hook so easily.

Love is waiting for you. Open wide the doors.