

Pastor's Message

So then, **who celebrates the Mass?** Imagine most Catholics when asked that question would say "the priest". That would be incorrect. The correct answer is "We all celebrate the Mass". This idea may be the most central idea about our Eucharistic liturgy that came out of the Second Vatican Council. Many will remember as I do the days when a priest could and would celebrate "his own Mass" without any congregation present in a small side altar in a large cathedral. In those days before the council the Mass was seen as the private prayer of the priest. That was never what Jesus had in mind as he inaugurated the Eucharist at the Last Supper. The Eucharist was always meant to be the prayer of the faithful, the entire people for the entire people. So, since the council "private Masses" said by the priest alone are discouraged because the Mass needs the gathering of the community to be true to its essence.

Jesus says: *For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.*" (Mt. 18:20). Just by gathering in his name as a community that believes that Jesus is the Son of God, so God is here among us. That is what we say and believe. The Mass is our best way to make that belief real and visible. All seven of the sacraments make God real and visible. Some will remember the Baltimore catechism definition of a sacrament: "A sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace." In other words, a sacrament makes God's presence (grace) real and visible. In the Mass we use bread and wine to make God's presence real and visible. But bread and wine need the gathering of God's people to make it the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Bread and wine do not become the Body and Blood of Jesus by magic. Bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus because Jesus told us: "Do this in memory of me". At that last supper, Jesus took bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, "Take, eat, this is my Body". In a similar way he took the chalice and said, "Take, drink, this is my Blood of the covenant..." Bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus by our gathering in faith and doing what we do in his memory.

For a Jew, to do something in memory of another is to make that other person present and real again. Memory for a Jew is more than just remembering that person. To remember is to make that person "real" again. That is what Jesus is asking of us and telling us we must do at each Mass, remember him, make him present again among us in our gathering in his name and in his love.

So the simple act of our gathering in faith as a community is the first and most important sign of Eucharist. We gather in love, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and in that gathering we make Jesus real and present again as Jesus promised in Matthew 18:20 (see above). As you leave your car to enter church, as you greet one another and catch up on the week, as you settle in to your seats and quiet yourself for prayer, we are making Christ present simply in the act of gathering together. We are preparing to celebrate Mass. The priest will preside for good order so that our gathering and our prayer does not disintegrate into chaos but we all celebrate the Mass. That is why the "full, conscious, and active participation (of all of us at Mass) is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy", as the Council document states (see the pastor's message from last week).

So then, who celebrates Mass? We all do!

Fr. Chris