

Pastor's Message

This week I want to begin to walk us through the parts of the Mass. But before I begin that journey I want to review the preliminary ideas I have discussed in these reflections over the last four weeks. First, the Second Vatican Council made it a focus of the renewal to engage the faithful (that's us) in our rightful *fully conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations*. Second, the Mass "is said" by all of the people not just the priest. The priest presides but we all celebrate. Third, the Mass is both a sacred, holy sacrifice of the Lord for the brokenness of the world AND a meal of the Lord's followers around the table. Fourth, The Lord is equally and fully present at Mass in the Word (the readings from the Bible) and in the sacrament (the bread and the wine consecrated and consumed).

Now let's start to look at how we actually do this every time we gather. Mass actually starts in the parking lot. The first sign of the presence of Jesus Christ is our coming together. In Mt. 20:18 Jesus says: *Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst*. This act of awareness seldom acknowledged when we arrive at church is essential to all that we will do. We believe that Jesus is risen from the dead and is alive and active and present to us whenever we gather in his name. We do this around our family tables when we say grace at meals, when we pray before bedtime, when we pray with a sick friend in a hospital room, when we pray before a wedding reception, ... I always liked the description of sacrament given by Edward Schillebeeckx, a Dutch theologian, who said that God the Father is mystery beyond our comprehension, too great for us to even begin to grasp. So God the Father becomes human, real, visible, understandable in Jesus Christ, His Son. Schillebeeckx' book "Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God" beautifully describes how the love of God so powerfully wants to be known by us, His creation, that He sends His only Son as the first sign of that love for us. Schillebeeckx goes on to say that when Jesus dies, rises and ascends to God the Father, he sends the Holy Spirit to us, the Church as the primary sacrament (real sign) of God present in the world. St Paul says it this way: *You, then, are the body of Christ. Every one of you is a member of it.* (1Cor.12:27). When we begin to gather together in the parking lot we are creating the sacrament of the presence of God in Christ Jesus.

As we enter the church, as we greet one another, as we catch up on each other's week past and discuss future plans and hopes, we are the body of Christ. We bring our lives, our gifts, our sacrifices and our generosity to this celebration and by that very act we become the sacrament of the encounter with God just as surely as Jesus was when he walked the earth. That is what we believe. That is why we must gather weekly at Mass, not because it is an obligation but because we need to remind ourselves who we really are, the body of Christ, sent, like Jesus was, to heal and save the world.

The first action of our Mass is our arrival in the parking lot. So next time you drive into the church parking lot give a thought to who we really are simply by the act of gathering together: we are the body of Christ and Christ Jesus is here, in our midst.

Fr. Chris