

A Challenge to the Parishioners of St Francis of Assisi: How Do We Continue as Church?

A couple of months ago Mark Krigbaum asked all parishioners to help the Finance Committee with a solution to the \$15,000 budget shortfall. At the same time Fr. Mike asked the Parish Council to come together and provide possible actions to various concerns regarding the continued existence of St. Francis of Assisi parish. Since then, various members of the parish, including the Parish Council and the Liturgy Committee, have been given copies of the book “Mass Matters” by Fr. William Bausch. (ISBN: 978-1940414263 © 2019)

“Mass Matters” is not a one size fits all “fix-it” book for parishes in trouble. “Mass Matters” is a means to open a parish wide discussion of **who are we** as St. Francis of Assisi Parish, **what is our purpose** as church, and **how do we share** our church experience with others? In discerning these questions we hope to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit and renew the vitality of our parish.

Beginning in October the Parish Council will be reading a chapter of “Mass Matters” and discussion questions each month. But, as Mark recognized in his bulletin request, the solutions must come from the entire parish, not just the Parish Council. Therefore, we are asking the entire parish community to read a synopsis of each chapter and the discussion questions in bulletin inserts and return your thoughts and responses at Mass. These will be gathered and sent to the Parish Council to be included in their discussions. We hope you will take this opportunity to participate in a truly parish-wide dialogue regarding the future of St. Francis of Assisi.

Chapter 1 The Mass Then and Now

An overview and context for what makes the Mass matter. We can trace it to an upper room in Jerusalem about the year 33 of our era. We know its basic outlines, no matter how much it has been modified over the centuries: gathering, song, blessing, praise of Yahweh, bread broken, wine passed, and the word, “*take and eat and drink*” in remembrance; that is, break your life and pour out your deeds as I have done, and “*I am with you all days.*”

The first descriptions are written in Matthew 26:28 and Luke 22:20. Luke’s “*Do this in remembrance of me*” started the whole thing off. And it continued as Jesus’s disciples and first followers after his death took him literally. Right away after those Last Supper days, the first Jesus followers ate together... They remembered Jesus with bread, wine, hymns, and stories. In doing so, they experienced his presence, his friendship, and were reminded over and over again to “*do this in his memory.*” Not to *believe* this but to **do** this; that is, do what we would come to call the spiritual and corporal works of mercy--bless, break, and share. See Acts 2:46.

... Gradually at these supper meetings, hymns were sung, scripture were read, and instructions given. In short, we have the first Masses spoken in the vernacular of common Greek and celebrated in homes since early Christianity was illegal. The prayers centered on thanksgiving (Eucharist) and were extemporaneous, although early on some became fixed into what we would later call the canons of the Mass. Communion was under both species. But, all the while, the “bread broken” kept its emphasis: just as Jesus broke himself for us, so must we do likewise for others. This, for the first 300 years of persecution, was what we might call the era of the Simple and Flexible Mass.

In the 5th and 6th centuries the state recognizes Christianity as the official religion. Prayers grew more stylized and fixed. Chants replace familiar hymns and vested clergy led the worship. No longer around the table, the people “were regulated to standing in the gathering space, while only the clergy could preside at the altar... Many lay people received “take and eat” Communion only once a year... Everything is longer, grander and more solemn. There are added prayers for the living and the dead...and genuflections, bowing, kissing, incense and candles. The cults of saints and martyrs flourished. It’s a clergy dominated, complex, and stratified worship.

...By the 9th and 10th centuries we get the Far Away and Silent Mass. For the first time in about a thousand years there is silence in church. No one is talking or singing because no one understands Latin. The choir has taken over all the singing... and the people’s speaking parts have been taken over by the altar boys. The priests stood with their backs to the people, who could not see or hear. Thus, the Church introduces the elevation of the Sacred Species.

The fourth and final category, which persisted until Vatican II’s revisions, was the Mass of the Rubrics... The Council of Trent put out strict rules and very minute directions or rubrics... Trent inadvertently froze the

Mass into a precise ritual passively watched by the people who said their private devotions in the pews. The public Mass of the Clergy became a backdrop for the private piety of the laity.

...The reforms of Vatican II were meant to correct this unbalance... These reforms gave us the gifts of the vernacular, ...hymns, participation by lay ministers and the congregation, and offered a more open church. The downside, new churches were functional, we lost the sense of the beautiful. The angels and saints disappeared. Gregorian chant was out. Novenas and parish missions were no longer around... In a word, popular devotions, intractably connected to ethnic groups, went into a decline. Forty years after Vatican II, the US Conference of Bishops felt compelled to defend popular devotional practices. ...The most recent change, the New Translation of the Mass has ... bequeathed us a decidedly disenchanting and uninspired English translation.

I suspect there are more changes to come, but still there remains that basic action of bread broken and shared-by Jesus, by us. There are the scriptures, the altar table, the hymns, and the people... “the ancientness of the Mass-that it and its antecedents very likely go further back into the human past than any other existing ceremony ...I began to feel that the Mass gave me a living connection with my ancestors...” **We should try to get those feelings not only connection to the past, but also of connection with the present**, especially with our persecuted brethren who as you read this, are breaking bread at their peril.

Questions

1 What do you think of the revised Mass?

2. How does the liturgy in our parish *feed* you spiritually?

3. Do you get “anything” out of attending Mass? If not, why not? If so, what?

4. What brings you back to church every week?

St. Francis of Assisi mission Statement:

We are a Catholic family of Christians gathered together by the Holy Spirit, with the liturgy and the sacraments being the center of our life. We follow in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi by striving to live the Gospel message in joy. We are called to minister through our special gifts; to enhance the dignity of persons, with a vision of peace.

How do you see us fulfilling this purpose as a parish?

Please return your thoughts and ideas at the Saturday and Sunday Masses.

We thank you for joining in the dialogue and effort to rebuild St Francis of Assisi parish.