

First Holy Communion and Reverence for the Eucharist

Before this school year began, I expressed my mind and vision that, for the goal of unity in our parish and to underscore the communal nature of the Sacrament of First Holy Communion, all our Basilica First Communicants would come together on *Corpus Christi*, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, to receive First Holy Communion. I remain very earnest in promoting the communal aspect of First Holy Communion as a parish on the same day, as a significant element of our *Corpus Christi* celebration and a witness to the broader community. As pastor, I ask that families take to heart this vision and bring it to prayer.

However, knowing that there are a few First Communicants who have scheduled to be out of town on the coming *Corpus Christi* (June 14, 2020) and because some parents have expressed a strong desire that their children receive First Holy Communion at a Latin Mass, a conflict with the proposed date and vision has arisen. We don't currently have a Latin Mass every Sunday, but only on the fourth Sunday of the month. It just so happens that *Corpus Christi* falls on a Sunday that does not offer the Latin Mass. Therefore, in order to accommodate those whose schedules conflict and to answer the legitimate request of the parishioners, I have decided to allow for these children the alternative to receive their First Holy Communion at the June 28 *Missa Cantata* in community with all our First Communicants, who will be invited to come back again to share in this special day, in solidarity with them.

This has been a beneficial exercise for us as we continue discerning our identity as a parish with three communities emerging that must seek ways of fostering unity. This next year will present a healthy challenge for us to work on ways that we can welcome and accommodate the legitimate needs of our English speaking, Spanish speaking, and Latin Mass communities, all of whom meet "Under One Roof".

The Eucharist is, of course, the source and summit of the Christian life, and our reception of Holy Communion is indicative of our faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Recently there have been troubling statistics about the lack of belief in the Real Presence. This is a source of pastoral solicitude that I take very earnestly. Our actions speak volumes about our faith. Before the Second Vatican Council, many pious Eucharistic practices were in place that bolstered a belief in the Real Presence, including: genuflecting and kneeling - even with a double knee genuflection in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament; and the pious practice of women veiling their heads in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Belief was also bolstered by the piety surrounding the reception of Holy Communion, which was always done kneeling and on the tongue, as if to say, "This is not just any ordinary food," and that this is something worthy of veneration, respect, reverence, and dignity. For various reasons after the Second Vatican Council, many people took it upon themselves to experiment with new ways of approaching the Blessed Sacrament - some, for noble reasons, such as avoiding ostentatious displays or avoiding the mindless following of ritual action without the proper disposition of heart. But some developments were for purposes extraneous to the Gospel, and to accommodate false notions of maturity and prideful self-importance - which culminated in a rebellion against these pious, traditional practices. Sometimes it was just simply a logistical matter that was resolved with merely practical solutions that forgot the higher ideals.

I liken some of the innovations, such as Communion standing and Communion in the hand, to the introduction of *kudzu*. *Kudzu* was a Japanese grass introduced to the hillsides of the United States in the late 1800's in an effort to reduce erosion. There was a good reason to think that a fast-growing plant, such as *kudzu*, would help alleviate that problem. And it was planted with good intention in many places. However, as you know, the good intention quickly became a bad idea in execution, in that the *kudzu* went far beyond its territory and started choking off vegetation and even trees, which it smothered by its rapid growth, and has since done more harm than the intended good, in that its shallow root structure does not really help with erosion. The same thing can be said about the efforts to "throw off the oppressive practices of old" and somehow create a justification for introducing novelties or historical anomalies into the standard practice of Christians in the "Modern Era." While perhaps done with good intention, these practices have not only failed to accomplish the stated purpose of increased appreciation for the Blessed Sacrament, but have, in fact, been detrimental to an understanding of the Eucharistic species as the Sacred Body and Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

In future pastor's notes, I would like to talk about and encourage the traditional understanding of Eucharistic practices surrounding Holy Communion, and how we here at The Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul celebrate the joy of these traditions inasmuch as they speak to us about the greatest gift of God's presence in our midst. The big picture is this: We have been taught for 50 years to be overly familiar with the Divine so much that we have become complacent and even dismissive of the awesome reality of God's offer of friendship to us. In some areas, I even see a contempt for the majesty and transcendence that forms a true part of the God-man Jesus Christ, made present in the Eucharist. We must remember that the Divinity of Christ precedes His humanity. His transcendence is primary to His closeness. Our unworthiness before such a Great Mystery is the primary emphasis that is graciously alleviated by His mercy in emptying Himself for our sake and inviting us into communion with the Godhead. To reverse this order, as the Eucharistic practices introduced fifty years ago did, whether purposefully or not, is, in my opinion, the cause of the great breakdown in belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. For the time being, let us rejoice in the opportunity presented to us at The Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul to express the joyful tradition of receiving Holy Communion kneeling at the altar rail!

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