

From the Pastor—June 14, 2020

Thinking Eucharistically One of the most powerful moments of the Mass (indeed, the most important from a theological point of view) is when the priest lifts the consecrated Body and Blood of Jesus above the altar and says, “Through him, and with him, and in him, O God almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, forever and ever.” At this elevation, we are called to place our lives onto the paten and into the chalice to be offered with Jesus to the Father; we make a living sacrifice of self. For, this is the only way that we can approach the Father is by Jesus’ atoning sacrifice of his life for our sins. If there is no Jesus, there is no heaven. When Jesus first touched the earth, it took the Virgin Mary to say “yes” to the archangel Gabriel. What would have happened if she said “no”? We might speculate (and it’s only speculation) that God would have found an alternative plan of redemption had Mary said “no” to the angel. When we celebrate today’s feast, Corpus Christi, it ought to make us grateful for the gift of participating in the Mass and being able to receive the Lord’s Body and Blood. This is especially brought into focus during these days of the Covid pandemic when we have been unable even to attend Mass. The Eucharist, the Mass, is itself the sacrifice of Jesus (yet in an unbloody manner) upon the Cross. Father Mitch Pacwa, SJ, on EWTN recently said that the altar is Calvary. In considering all of the “screen” Masses you have watched in these past months, have you seen the connection that you have made the sacrifice of NOT going to Mass? This is ironic. So much the more ought we, now that most parishes have re-opened, appreciate the profound gift of attending Holy Mass in person, and, if our souls are in right relationship with Jesus (no mortal sins snuffing out God’s life within us), then we have the sublime privilege of receiving the Lord in his true Body and Blood, his human soul, and his divine nature. *** Thinking Eucharistically will also give us another important attitude: thanksgiving. For this is what the word “eucharist” means in the original Greek language, that of “thanksgiving”. How thankful ought we to be for the slightest joy? How thankful ought we to be even in the most precarious of circumstances? I like to think of it like this: is it better to be alive or to not be alive? To have been created, or to never have been created at all? When we think at a deep level, our lives are total gift from our benevolent Creator. In good times, or bad, in sickness, or in health, every moment of every day is total gift from God to you and me. The Eucharist, the Holy Mass, encapsulates in one setting (by sitting, standing, and kneeling) all that we need. It shows us the splendor of God’s creation, it shows us the sacrifice necessitated because of our sins (both personal and the sin of Adam), and it shows us the adoration and thanksgiving that ought to flow from our hearts for all that we have been given. *** I am thankful for my devout Catholic parents who lived the Mass, who made me want to go to Mass, without any extreme pressure applied by them. If your outlook on the Holy Mass, on the Eucharist, is not what you would hope, or what it once was, remember the man in the Bible who told Jesus, “I do believe...help my unbelief!” Our Lord will not be able to resist a similar prayer from your heart to his.

Impactful Eucharistic Moments I was thinking of what some of the most stirring experiences of the Eucharist have been in my lifetime. I could probably make a Top 10 list

of Eucharistic moments. Chronologically, I remember that, before my First Holy Communion, our class had to go to the office of our parish priest, Father Danko, and “pass” his interview of us before we were admitted to receive the Sacred Host. Like a real grown-up, I sat down opposite his office desk while my parents fretted outside the door (probably), hoping that 2nd-grade me would answer the father’s questions correctly. I still remember the moment...and I did answer his questions correctly! Oddly, I do not remember well the moment of my First Holy Communion; I do remember the interview with the priest, though! *** Another moment, or really a panorama moment of all moments, was the steady, every-Sunday attendance of our family at Holy Mass. That formed me. Every so often, Dad and Mom would announce that we were going to Grandma and Grandpa Hajek’s church for Mass—without telling them beforehand. We would walk into tiny St. Mary’s Church, Odell, and my grandmother would turn around, at first with a slight scowl until she realized it was us. My grandpa was more jovial and nodded his head at grandma to skootch down the pew to let us in. Even when we went on vacation, which, on an active farm, was not an every-summer prospect, we always found Mass to attend. As I grew into high school and early college, Grandpa Hajek had passed away and Grandma Hajek had moved into Beatrice. My Grandpa Grell was still alive, living in his own house a stone’s throw across the farmyard from ours. At Mass, Grandma Hajek would sit on far left of our little group while Grandpa Grell anchored far right, on the middle aisle, of St. Joe’s Church in Beatrice. My brother, sister, and Mom and Dad placed ourselves between the family elders. I’m not just lifting this up to you to make my family look good. Rather, for those of us of us of European descent, and of Latino descent, this is the way that you went to church—with the whole, entire family. In such a world, you didn’t even consider for a second NOT going to church. It’s what you did. Now, there is a danger that one’s attendance could be taken too casually in this way. We call such a phenomenon being a “cultural Catholic”. We might go to church because everybody else is. But I think such a cultural ease can be combatted, even in society’s “woke” 21st-century attitudes, with the firm, explainable rationale of each family’s Mom and Dad (or Grandma and Grandpa) for why we do what we do on the Lord’s Day, that is, go to Holy Mass and keep the whole day holy. *** On my list of Eucharistic moments, I can easily contemplate college days at UN-L. Attending Mass at the Newman Center was where I ended up, but not how I started. Daily Mass interested me, and my sister introduced me to the concept my freshman year. But I almost always went home on the weekend and attended Mass at Beatrice. It’s when I sensed the communal worship of the Lord at the Newman Center, with kids my age, that the Eucharist became my belief. I “owned” it, as they say, in a way that was so impactful over and above my parents and grandparents’ example. I remember one time at Newman that, by total accident and no one’s fault, a visitor with a Catholic student received the Sacred Host, even though she was not a Catholic. When Father Fucinaro was told after Mass that the non-Catholic had not swallowed the Host but instead placed it somewhere (in a missalette, songbook, behind a kneeler), we all spent at least an hour after the Mass looking for the lost Host. It was unfortunate, but the faith of Father Fucinaro and my fellow students taught me more than taking classes and reading intellectual books could ever do. We were looking for

Something, because Something had been lost. It was no longer bread, otherwise why would we have cared to find it? *** When I began to sense the call to the priesthood, and seriously considered the seminary, it was a Eucharistic moment again. I remember that, at the same time I entered seminary, a young woman, and fellow Newmanite, was entering the convent. At her last Mass with us before entering the enclosed life of the convent, she had a look on her face that I will not soon forget. She looked up at the huge crucifix in the former blue-windowed Newman chapel, and she was talking to Jesus. He was real to her; and she helped him become real to me. This is the power of witness. *** In seminary days, and in young priesthood, it has been again and again the example and witness of faithful priests, religious sisters, and lay faithful that has won and re-won my heart for Eucharistic Jesus. What I have seen, what I have experienced, from this great cloud of earthly witnesses, tells me that these people KNOW Whom it is that they receive and adore. Stated in another, sort of quirky way: I know that I know. (Repeat this phrase in your mind and see if you follow my thought process.) It is a gift of faith to believe that Jesus is present in the Sacred Host. But it is also a very knowable thing when one sees witnesses. *** Finally, my last impactful moment has to do with the words of consecration. I don't know if I realized, fully, at the time of my ordination how the priest's words are spoken in third person up until the consecration. At that point, the Roman Missal directs the priest to speak in first person. This is noticeable in the following paraphrase: "On the night before he died, Jesus took bread...gave thanks, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take this, all of you and eat of it; for this is *my* Body; this is the chalice of *my* Blood. [emphasis added]' " Do you see the different tenses spoken? It is the same with the words of absolution in Confession ("I absolve you from your sins") and in Baptism ("I baptize you"). The priest, mystically, acts in the person of Christ and thus speaks in the first person. *** I hope these Eucharistic moments are an encouragement and a witness to you.

Our First Christian Relative It is fascinating to consider who in our family first became a follower of Jesus. Or, to consider if one's family ever had a stoppage of practicing the faith and to give thanks for the way that the faith was reignited. On my mother's maternal ancestry, which I know best out of my familial heritage, we are Catholic back to 1800. That's 220 years! More than likely, we are Catholic going back into the 1700's, the 1600's, etc. Could I say we are Christian back to the 1500's, the 1300's, the 1100's? I am not sure. My mother's side of the house are Czech in ethnicity; my dad's family is German and Irish. I don't know what part of Ireland we are from. The German part is from the Alsace region, which is a border area with France, as I understand it. *** As society and culture continue in many ways to decrease the integrity and adherence to Christianity, and as we immerse from the pandemic of Covid, it is good to consider our heritage, and, moving forward, to consider the patrimony we provide to family members who come after us by the way we live our Christianity now.

My First Seminary When I entered seminary studies in the Fall of 1991, our diocese had not yet founded St. Gregory the Great Seminary at Seward. For around a decade, we sent young men to study at St. Philip's Seminary in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. There, we were trained in philosophy and priestly formation by the Oratorians of St.

Philip Neri. Last week, the head Oratorian, Father Jonathan Robinson, passed away at age 91. Please pray for him, and for his religious sons who mourn his loss.

Our Re-opening I have received helpful feedback that our re-opening of public Masses was not given the attention and widespread promotion which it deserved. I am sorry if this caused anyone distress; I, like you, find these times challenging, with no template or infrastructure of "best practices" for our parishes' advancement in faith.

Our Fourth Year This Friday, June 19, marks the three-year anniversary of my arriving here to serve St. Mary's and St. Joseph's. Since I didn't receive a phone call from the Chancery and Archbishop Lucas, June 19 begins my fourth year. Let's "drive this car around the block", for one more revolution of the Earth around the Sun, for Year #4 together. I'm up for it if you are!

Living Liturgically This month of June has great festivals of Catholic celebrations. Let me recommend your observance of them. Try to attend Mass on these days.

The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus This will be celebrated this Friday, June 19. We consider the Lord's pierced Heart upon the Cross, from which flowed out blood and water. It is a great day to pray the Sacred Heart litany. In many places, it is a day dedicated to praying for priests.

The Most Immaculate Heart of Mary This day to Our Lady is the day after the Sacred Heart celebration, this year on Saturday, June 20. Mary's heart was sorrowful, and joyful, which makes her heart a great compass for when we experience sorrows and joys.

The Birth of John the Baptist Always observed on June 24, this day is in honor of who Jesus referred to as "no one greater than he has been born of woman."

Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul On June 29 each year, we observe these two great apostles. Even though Paul was not of the original 12 chosen by the Lord, the Scriptures are clear that he was chosen by the Lord on the road to Damascus. These saints died in Rome, which established this city as the "headquarters" of our Christian faith from the first century to our own 21st century.

Collections Deferred The Holy Father Pope Francis has deferred the collections for the Holy Land and Peter's Pence to be held later this year. The Holy Land collection is usually on Good Friday; Peter's Pence is the Sunday nearest to June 29th. If you have already given, this is fine. But if you haven't given, be looking for more information on when the collections will be held.

Parish Council Election Deferred Our past elections for new St. Mary's Parish Council members have been held alongside of our fiscal year, July 1 – June 30. However, due to the extraordinary circumstances, the election will be deferred to December. We thank everyone on our Council for their willingness to serve.

God Bless You!!!

Father Grell