

August 2008

My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

I have written many letters to you over the course of the six years I have been privileged to be your pastor. I believe that none has been more important than this letter. Its purpose is neither to raise funds, nor call for support of a new initiative, nor ask you for anything --- except your prayerful consideration. I have long desired to sit down and write to you, the flock God has entrusted to me, a pastoral letter about the Holy Eucharist.

One of the most beautiful quotes from the Second Vatican Council, which affected so many aspects of Church life, comes from the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (#10): “The Liturgy is the *summit* towards which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the *fount* from which all her power flows.” These days, we are all concerned about an “energy crisis.” Because oil costs so much, many are looking for “alternative means” to provide the power we need to run our nation. All people, whatever their political affiliation, would agree that to lose our source of energy would be catastrophic. Now, translate this notion to the quotation I just shared with you from Vatican II. For the Church to continue the mission of Christ, it needs energy. Without energy, the work of the Church ceases. Thankfully, God has given us a Source of power which is not only infinite, but in a sense renewable. The Church is able to be faithful to her commission to proclaim the Gospel because she draws power from the Sacred Liturgy. More importantly, the Liturgy itself proclaims the mighty works of God and presents them to the People of God in their particular time and circumstances.

What does this mean on a down-to-earth and practical level? Simply put, the Liturgy, and especially the celebration of the Mass, is **the** work of the Church. It is the one essential thing we do. It empowers everything else: running schools, taking care of the sick, providing youth or senior programs, staging social events, organizing acts of service --- everything! Without the spiritual energy the Eucharist provides, our efforts are in vain. Furthermore, every thing we do as a Church must be directed towards the Eucharist, the summit of all human activity.

Despite all the richness and beauty the Council gave us, its teachings were often misunderstood or mis-taught. Some falsely taught that Sunday Mass was no longer an obligation for Catholics. Nothing could be farther from the truth, for a number of reasons. First of all, we need to give God thanks and praise for all His blessings, and there is no better day to do this than on the day which saw His Son rise from the dead. From the earliest days of the Church, God’s People gathered on the “day of the Son” to commemorate Jesus’ death and resurrection at the Eucharist. Secondly, our Catholic religion is not about a purely “personal” relationship with God. We are the Body of Christ. We need to come together, often, with our brothers and sisters, to renew our bonds of charity and peace. Thirdly, in an increasingly secular and manic world, the Lord’s third commandment (“Keep holy the Sabbath”) not only remains in force, but is a wonderful antidote to the unrest and turmoil our secular culture leaves in its turbulent wake. These are just some of the many reasons the Church recognizes the fact that we have an obligation to come together for Mass each Sunday (which includes the Saturday Vigil).

The document I quoted also has an interesting sentence in paragraph 9: “Before [people] can come to the liturgy, they must be called to faith and conversion.” The truth of these inspired words seems evident to me. Is there a need to be called to faith? If people truly understood and believed what

happens at Mass, that the Sacrifice of Calvary is represented to us in a sacramental way, that we are privileged to come forth and receive the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, would they absent themselves for anything but the gravest of reasons? Is there a need to be called to conversion? Well, if people miss Mass because of any other lesser activity, they are saying that God is second to that activity; that activity in effect replaces God. That would indicate to me a need for a “change of heart” to make God “number One” in their lives.

Over almost thirty years as a priest, I have been privileged to celebrate Mass in churches and basilicas, on several continents. My eyes have misted watching the innocence of First Communicants and the quiet joy of the dying to whom I have given Viaticum (including my own mother). I have placed the Sacred Host into hands which were old, young, hardened, soft, black, white, red, yellow, trembling, strong, saint and sinner. At each of these encounters, the proclamation was made: “The Body of Christ!” In each of these sacred moments, the answer resounded: “Amen!” “So be it!” “Yes, I believe that this Host is the Body of Christ! I believe that this gathering is the Body of Christ!”

I am edified each week by our families who faithfully attend Mass on Sunday or the Sunday Vigil (Saturday evening). I pray that something in this letter may give you a new insight or help you appreciate the Mystery of the Eucharist in a deeper way. Maybe some of you who are able will try to attend Mass a day or two during the week as well! I remember that when I was first ordained, not only did the retired parishioners come to the daily Mass, but several moms and dads who had just dropped off their children to school. They always told me that this was their time to reflect and organize their thoughts and priorities, and it made their day go smoother because they knew that whatever happened, the Lord was with them. Of course, now most moms work outside the home; but if you don’t, or start later in the morning, give weekday Mass a try.

I am saddened that many do not attend Sunday Mass with us. I pray that God may use the example of their friends and neighbors, or something in these reflections, to help them recognize the “missing piece” in their hearts and bring them home. I speak to them from the heart: we want you to take your rightful place among the rest of us, broken people who draw strength from Broken Bread.

I ask you to especially remember those who are not able to come to Mass because of advanced years or illness. Although they can watch Mass on TV, and our special ministers bring them Eucharist on Sunday, and my pastoral staff and I visit monthly, I know they miss being with the community. Say a special prayer for them, especially when, after the distribution of Communion, you see our special ministers receiving the Hosts they will take to the shut-ins.

Our patroness, Martha of Bethany, often welcomed Jesus to her home. Through her intercession, may we all feel so welcomed in “Jesus’ home” that we long to spend time there, to be nourished by the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, fed by the Word of God broken open for us, and strengthened in our bonds of unity and charity towards our brothers and sisters. May Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, who witnessed the Paschal Mystery as she stood at the foot of the cross and gathered with the Apostles in the Upper Room, bless all our efforts to be broken and poured out for others as the Body of Christ. And, as I daily pray, like Saint Martha, may we always be friends of Jesus.

Sincerely,

Father Al

(Rev.) Alexander Masluk
Pastor