

PASTOR'S COLUMN

“The Eucharist: Beginning Well”

On this Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, we take “homily time” to catechize on the Eucharist. We take time to reflect upon a few practicalities and suggestions, which can assist and enable the Assembly to celebrate the Eucharist, the grand Mystery of the Real Presence of Christ under the forms of bread and wine, with greater reverence.

As a context in which you can reflect upon my comments, I share with you parts of an article written by Rev. Thomas J. Reese, S.J., a senior fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center. This article, “The Eucharist: Beginning Well”, urges the Assembly’s need for preparation in anticipation of celebrating the Eucharist:

“One of the most difficult problems we face with the Eucharist is taking it seriously. How can we Americans take seriously something that is so inexpensive, readily available, and open to practically everyone? When you shell out \$100 to see Nicholas Nickleby, you know you are going to a theatrical event that must be taken seriously. When the Superbowl is played, you must make room for it in your life or you will not have a chance to see it for another year. But the Eucharist is like a life-long running movie on HBO – if you are busy today, you can always see it later. And if you fall asleep during the show, you can always watch it again.

Spiritual writers from at least the time of St. Ignatius Loyola have recognized the problem of routine and have emphasized that the most important time in prayer is the beginning, or even before. This is true for the Eucharist also. While I had heard this point made hundreds of times, it never hit home until I began going to the ballet this past year. Working on the staff of “America”, I never left the building without some material (manuscripts, galleys, etc.) that I could read on the subway or while waiting for an appointment. At first I followed this same practice while waiting for the ballet to begin, but I soon found that the first performance was half over before my mind could change gears and start enjoying the ballet. I began leaving my reading material at home and enjoyed the ballet more. I also found that a performance was more enjoyable if I got there in plenty of time rather than making a last minute dash. Finally, I began reading books on ballet, especially about the particular performance I was going to.

Am I willing to do as much for the Eucharist? I’m afraid not, but shouldn’t we? A last minute rush to church – getting the family together, finding a parking place – is not conducive to a prayerful experience. How many times have you, like myself, found yourself unable to remember what the Scripture readings were by the time the priest begins his homily? Our minds are so busy, distracted or sleepy that the Word of God goes in one ear and out the other. St. Ignatius tells us to begin all prayers with a recognition of God’s presence and with a preparatory prayer asking God for the grace to be attentive to His praise and service. The Eucharist demands at the very least a moment’s reflection about why we are here and what we are about to do.

Ideally, we should also prepare for the Eucharist by reading and praying over the Scripture readings before the celebration...Taking the Eucharist seriously and beginning it conscientiously may be the most important things we can do as individuals to renew our liturgical celebration.”

Remember – the celebration of the Eucharist, the Mass, begins at home!