

Eucharistic Formation 2023

Last Sunday Fr. Hecker filled in for me and he was very impressed by our parish, specifically everyone's participation in singing. I just wanted to pass this compliment along to you. And I wasn't going to mention anything about receiving Holy Communion on the tongue while kneeling which I encouraged a couple weeks ago, but I really want to thank you. Many of you are giving it a try and it has edified me. If you haven't noticed, when I celebrate the liturgy, I'm pretty efficient. But when a person kneels to receive Communion it slows down the distribution of Communion a little...and that's a good thing. The distribution of Communion should not be overly efficient, it should be extra reverent and highlight the solemnity of this mystery and gift. So thank you.

+Now that summer vacation has begun for the school kids, many of them will be attending camps. There's Totus Tuus camp, Boy Scout camps, and numerous sports camps, and they're all for some type of formation. Sports camps for example are meant to help a child become a more proficient athlete in a given sport. If a teenager wanted to become better at basketball, you wouldn't simply hand them a book to read about the rules and techniques of the game...an interactive training where one actually engages the sport is necessary. The same is true of ongoing faith formation, specifically on the Eucharist. The whole person must be engaged.

I want to focus on the importance of Eucharistic formation as we stay on this theme until Corpus Christi. Too often we view Eucharistic catechesis as what 2nd graders do before their first Communion, or a theological study where one attends a lecture or reads a book about the Eucharist. These are both good and have their place...but Eucharistic formation entails so much more. It's a lifelong project by which we come to participate in the Mass more maturely, growing as disciples of Christ who more perfectly live out our Eucharistic identity. Just as an athlete gets better with practice and camps, we become better Christians with formation of our own. And unlike most young athletes who will never play professionally, we do have the potential to become professional disciples because we're called to become saints, perfect in holiness.

But this requires ongoing formation, staying at a 2nd grade level is not an option. Eucharistic formation enables a person to more fully participate in the mystery of Jesus Christ through the

celebration of the Mass. This actual participation is meant to order the whole person, body, mind, and heart in the act of worship, done here at Mass. Eucharistic formation involves the whole person, what we do with our body, we contemplate in our mind and we love in our heart. So you see, Eucharistic formation is not becoming a scholar, it's living in greater union with the person Jesus Christ, the pursuit of excellence when it comes to holiness.

There are several components to this formation or catechesis and one is forming our memory. To be clear, this is not reduced to mere memorization, rather it's keeping alive the memories of salvation history...storing up in our heart the events that make clear God's presence and action in our lives. Formation of memory is to enter into salvation history, to relive it in ourselves. It's like muscle memory for the athlete. And this memory takes hold of us as we attend and participate at Mass because the Mass is bringing the memory of our Lord's sacrifice, really and truly, to the present moment.

The reason this formation of memory is so helpful is because if I remember what God has accomplished, what He has done for me, it no longer remains just past actions on the part of God...but they become my memories, and I become part of them because they involve me. It's why St. Augustine spoke of the memory as a warehouse to which so many things are committed. Anything our Lord has said or done, any private experience with him in prayer can be recalled and brought out for use when needed, when we need to relive any number of experiences...this is the purpose of our memory and why it deserves formation.

Without living 2,000 years ago, events from Christ's earthly life can become my experiences. And what we experience, what's written upon our memory...it makes us who we are. This is why ongoing formation is truly formation of the whole person and needs to be engaged in multiple ways. Understanding the Eucharist not limited to reading about Eucharistic doctrine,

understanding is the active reflection on the meaning the Eucharist has in my life. When we come to Mass are we prepared for this, giving ourselves time to prepare for what we are about to do?

As a freshman when I showed up for the first football practice I arrived at the high school a few minutes before practice was scheduled to begin. So I was confused when I arrived to see the other players already on the practice field. I didn't know that for practice to start at a certain time, it meant we arrive at least 15 minutes early to get suited up and receive instructions. If practice started at 3:00, showing up at 2:55 wasn't acceptable. To more fully participate in the Eucharist it's helpful, if not necessary, to show up early and prayerfully prepare. Call to mind why you're here, bring your intentions that you want to offer at Mass into focus.

To become what we celebrate, the Body of Christ, we need to be intentional about filling our memories with all sorts of things related to the Eucharist, including the mysteries of faith and scripture. Starting next Sunday, there will be missalettes in the pews. My hope is that this will aid your participation. There's a reflection for each Sunday at the front of the missalette, I encourage you to read it before Mass begins. And if you look up and read the Sunday scripture passages beforehand, earlier in the week, you'll be amazed at how much more they'll impact you during the Mass. But either way, the missalettes have the readings so you can follow along more closely during Mass. Use them to your advantage, if nothing else, it'll help prevent you from being distracted and we all struggle with that.

The Eucharist is meant to continuously transform us into greater likeness of Christ. This happens with a more dynamic participation in the Mass; and thus we require ongoing formation in what is offered on the altar, what is celebrated, and what is received.