

A Friend's Reminder

The Catholic Review

Many are aware of my desire for full Eucharistic devotion in our parishes, a desire that received new impetus as a result of a recent conversation with a good friend.

A strong Catholic from the start, she was a daily communicant at Mass into her high school years, deeply impressed by the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. As happens not rarely, teenage years found her drifting from the Church and being introduced by Protestant friends to a local community church. At first the lack of the reserved Blessed Sacrament and the celebration of the Eucharist made for an unfamiliar and uncomfortable transition. What interested and inspired her, on the other hand, was the deep conviction on the part of her new church partners that Jesus was very much alive, really present with them as a result of their Baptism, their life of worship and “fellowship.” This is something she had not experienced all that movingly during her Catholic days; it offered her a new and rich appreciation of Christianity and a newly discovered role her faith could play in her daily life.

In time, the pull of the Mass and the Real Presence drew her back to her Catholic faith, but the Eucharist became ever more meaningful and rewarding as a result of her Protestant experience. As she expressed it to me, Catholics can become so absorbed in the Presence of the Lord in that “little white disk,” that they can tend to miss His Presence in their neighbors and in the midst of the worshiping community. Too often there is lacking that connection between love of God (in the Eucharist) and love of neighbor.

A point well taken but the nexus between Communion and community is one that we find emphasized from our very beginnings as a Church:

- When He washed His disciples' feet at the Last Supper, the Lord dramatized the intimate connection between the Eucharist and love of neighbor.
- Does not St. Paul chide the Corinthians for celebrating the Eucharist without due respect for their poorer neighbor?

- Through the centuries, from the Benedictines through the mendicant orders of the Middle Ages, and in our time the joy and fruitfulness of community life in Christ has begun with and is sustained by daily Eucharist.
- The *Ite Missa Est* at the conclusion of every Mass: “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord and your neighbor.” This directive challenges us to relate to every neighbor with that love we had just experienced in the reception of the Lord’s Body and Blood. Might this not account for the unparalleled series all over the world of Catholic schools, hospitals, nursing homes, food pantries, homeless shelters, etc., etc.?

The joy in receiving Holy Communion should foster joyful, Holy Communities. We thank God for the many instances wherein true “communio” is lived. And we thank so many of our parishes for encouraging increased Eucharistic devotion. But if my friend is right—and I think she has a point—we all have a long way to go in our appreciation both of the Eucharist as much more than a personal gift and of our Baptism as a powerful source of grace alive throughout all our lives.