

Fullerton youth minister talks Millennials

As I am wrapping up the Millennial series for The Catholic Review, I thought it would be nice to share more from my notes. First up is a question and answer session I did with Lauren Aroyo, youth minister at St. Joseph in Fullerton.

Matt Palmer: What do you think the state of teenage faith is these days? Do you think the teens you work with are the exception or the rule when it comes to the generation's approach to religion and spirituality? **Lauren Aroyo:** Teens yearn for a solid truth in their relativistic worlds. They need something to grasp onto that is bigger than themselves... it is a yearning from deep in their souls because that is what they were created for. If we truly hold that the Catholic Church is designed by God to lead his people back to himself, and that the church is truly the bride of Christ, then we must trust that our hearts and souls were created to recognize and embrace those realities. Adults constantly sell teens short by believing that they cannot fall in love with objective truth, with tradition, ritual and mystery. There is a huge generational gap in catechesis and because of this there are millions of Catholic adults who do not know why they are Catholic or why we do things certain ways. The un-catechized believers do not believe that the innate beauty of the Catholic faith can attract a younger generation because much of it is lost for them. This has lead to an unspoken belief that catechesis, in order to keep teens interested, needs to be watered down, without mandates, almost relative in fact. We stress what "I believe and what YOU believe" instead of what the CHURCH believes and in that we ought to take part. Not blindly but through education and seeking the beliefs of the church become our own. In that we experience ultimate freedom. Remember that freedom is not the ability to do whatever you please (this is impossible to do without infringing on everyone else's "freedom") but rather the ability (free will) to choose the good for its own sake (philosophically speaking). For this reason I believe our teens are the exception because our program strives to present the Catholic faith in all of its absolutes, rules, dogmatic theology and seemingly archaic ritual... and the teens keep coming back. They are seeking the truth in the tradition and are falling in love with Christ and the Institution. He

established and the Body of Christ we are a part of.

Matt Palmer: What is your biggest challenge ministering to today's teens? **Lauren Aroyo:** Parents. If the parents do not feel that youth ministry and catechesis is important then the teens cannot even get through the door. We have no chance to love them if they don't have a ride to the church or a family who sacrifices to get them there.

Matt Palmer: How would you describe your approach to ministry? **Lauren Aroyo:** Eucharistic Centered. I am fallible, broken and a sinner but I have been blessed to have been given this task to lead teens to Christ. When I fail, he is there so why wouldn't I stress having the teens receive Christ in the Eucharist and sit in his presence in adoration.

Matt Palmer: It seems like people in their late 20s and in their 30s didn't grow up with adoration. How did you introduce it to your young people and why did you think it was an important? **Lauren Aroyo:** Not to correct you but it is exactly our generation that fell back in love with adoration. My parents' generation got the shaft, so to speak. Blessed Pope John Paul II ignited the young church at the time with a love of Christ in the Eucharist. You explain the reality by starting with the liturgy and then put it in perspective in words teens can understand. THAT IS REALLY JESUS!!!!!!!!!!!! You explain the reverence. I always tell teens that we kneel during the exposition and reposition (bringing Jesus out and placing him in the tabernacle) but other than that, do not let your posture impede your prayer. The reason we kneel is so our bodies express the state of our hearts, which should be utter reverence. You need to explain different forms of prayer and let teens know that distraction is normal so sometimes. You need to just sit and listen and other times your prayer can be active (scripture reading, rosary, chaplet, prayer journaling, singing) but never be afraid of silence. I am a huge proponent of using praise and worship music as well as intermittent Scripture readings (nothing to distract from the Eucharist) but to NEVER fear SILENCE. Teens can handle it. Then work up to an hour (Matthew 26: 40-41) but you can begin with 20 minutes. Prayer is a conversation. It is personal, so let God tell you what he desires to do in your heart during each visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

Matt Palmer: What was the initial reaction amongst the teens and how has it grown as a part of your ministry? **Lauren Aroyo:** Well when I began at my church, the teens thought I was crazy, but then we started our monthly adoration night. They understand the concepts and they love praise and worship music so they showed up. Then God did the rest of the work. Once we begin there is nothing else I can do but intercede and call upon the Holy Spirit. We continue to have our monthly XLT where we have adoration. The teens keep showing up. Did I mention it isn't mandatory?

Matt Palmer: Why do you think a significant number of young people have embraced adoration? **Lauren Aroyo:**