

21st Sunday OT Year B
August 25-26, 2018

“Master, to whom shall we go?”

Readings: Joshua 24:1-2,15-18; Ephesians 5:2a, 25-32; John 6: 60-69

Today is the last Sunday of the Eucharistic discourse from St. John that we have been hearing the past few Sundays. These weeks build one upon the other. Today, I would like to address the relationship between the Eucharistic Sacrifice and our families, especially since this weekend marks the 9th International Meeting of Families, held this year in Dublin.

When we think back to childhood memories, it is not always easy to describe why some stick in our minds more than others. However, I have vivid recollections standing in line while one by one my father would comb our hair as we got ready for Mass. I was quite young because I assume that at some point I learned how to comb my own hair!

Getting the family ready for Sunday Mass is a routine that many of you know all too well, or can recall. We priests appreciate the difficulties of doing so. You are juggling numerous things at once and keeping the family together is a challenge. This is all done in order to gather for the Eucharistic banquet, the presence *par excellence* of Jesus in our midst.

Families quibble, families argue and struggle. They also reconcile and enjoy wonderful times together. They draw close to mourn the loss of loved ones and celebrate weddings, Baptisms and First Communions. God willing, they attend Mass together, drawing strength for their family.

I am not naïve enough to think that everyone wants to come to Sunday Mass every weekend. Sometimes it is very much done out of a sense of fulfilling one's duty, and even then, at times done so begrudgingly. So much competes for our attention; so many troubles occupy our minds, and we may wrongly conclude that skipping Mass is occasionally justified. Jesus gives us the Eucharist as food for the journey. The Gospel of St. John records that His flesh is true food, His blood is true drink. He reveals the depths to which the real Presence animates the celebration of the Eucharist. This is why we come each week. And some could not handle the teaching. They no longer wanted to stay in his company.

How painful for a faithful parent when one of their children shares that he no longer wants to attend Mass, or who, after dropping off a child at college for the first time, wonders what will happen on Sunday morning? These are all legitimate realities in many parents' lives and one that we are not ignorant of as pastors of the Church. We too suffer those losses.

I go to Church because it is my life blood. I have celebrated Masses in unusual places; on canoes in the BWCA, on a bed in a Tea House in Nepal (the only privacy I had in two weeks), on a ship in Antarctica, in a Church in Northern Canada above the Arctic Circle, and numerous churches, large and small. And in every place in which I celebrated, the Lord Jesus was present, Body and Blood, soul and divinity.

And so the Eucharist continues to draw us , to ground and to animate the lives of our souls, and this is why we remain. How can we get more out of the Mass? How can we re-invigorate our faith if it seems lukewarm?

Rather than focus on the quality of the preaching, the music, the comfort of the pews, the heat or humidity, it might be more beneficial to bring to Mass special intention each week, a person for whom you pray and offer this Mass in a special way. Rather than become fixated on finding a parking spot, juggling schedules or dragging yourself out of bed, think of the sacrifice of Jesus for each of us. Allow the grace of the sacrament to soften your heart, to smooth out the rough edges we all have- in short, allow the Eucharist to transform you.

When we are focused, we get more out of the Mass. If you are able to arrive early, please do so and pick up the hymnal to look at the readings. When you hear them proclaimed, you will already have some familiarity.

Make the sacrifices to go to Mass together whenever possible. Clearly, it is not always possible, which is one reason why we offer different times. You may need to split up and attend different Masses. That is okay, but whenever possible, it is even more beneficial to pray together.

Do not be afraid of how the Mass may change you; embrace the change, for it is a change that will make you a better man, woman, son, daughter, student, husband, wife, single person or widow. “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”