

“ECUMENISM AND INTERCOMMUNION” EUCHARISTIC HOSPITALITY II

One of the great joys of my priestly ministry is found in my interaction with parishioners and visitors. Whether it is in gathering for coffee and donuts or greeting our many visitors during Confirmation “season,” I enjoy the words of mutual encouragement, your prayers while I was on my Everest Trek in March, the bulletins from your own travels, and yes, even your willingness to offer constructive feedback. I look forward to Sundays more than any other day of the week. (No offense to Saturday night intended!) And while I sincerely desire to make all feel welcome here, it is with the understanding that Sunday Mass is first and foremost a solemn act of worship of God. If an usher asks a visitor to refrain from taking photos *during* Mass, it is for this reason. Legitimate tensions can arise when balancing the desire to be hospitable to all, while at the same time being respectful of the sacred space into which we have entered as well as the liturgical norms governing the distribution of Holy Communion.

I distinctly recall an encounter following a funeral Mass that I celebrated during my first year as a priest. A woman approached me during the funeral luncheon— “I need to speak with you regarding the Communion announcement you made during the service.” “Certainly” I replied, while inside I was thinking, “Uh, oh...get ready to be scolded!” Much to my surprise she elaborated, “I wanted to thank you for **not** inviting everyone forward for Communion. I am Protestant, and have attended plenty of Catholic Masses during which the priest invited all in attendance to come forward to receive.” While she respected our faith, she was grateful that I had not presumed that all non-Catholics desired to receive Communion. In reality, I was merely following established Church norms, offering a warm welcome to all at the Mass, while articulating Catholic teaching with respect to the norms for the reception of Holy Communion.

Funerals and weddings often provide challenging pastoral situations with respect to the Holy Eucharist, as does a church such as ours that naturally attracts many visitors. We all desire to be welcoming, and yet the prohibition regarding inter-communication strikes many people as anything but hospitable at first glance. My experience that day as a “rookie” priest helped me to see that there is clearly more than one way to frame the issue. If it is presumed that the inadmissibility to Holy Communion of those who are not Catholic is itself an act of inhospitality, then the conversation is a non-starter. We Catholics need to frame the issue of hospitality within the context of our conviction that the Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life.” (cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* #11) We believe that the celebration of the Eucharist, by its very nature, ought to be reflective of that unity. By anticipating a unity that has not yet been achieved, we do a disservice both to the nature of the Eucharist and to wider issues of ecclesial doctrine.

Because the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life, and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion. The U.S. Bishops’ guidelines indicate: “All who are not receiving Holy Communion are encouraged to express in their hearts a prayerful desire for unity with the Lord Jesus and with one another.” (14 November 1996) It is that phrase—“oneness of faith, life, and worship”— that causes me to pause. Simply put, the prohibition for intercommunion is not only due to differences in doctrine about the Eucharist. I have met Protestants who tell me that they believe the Eucharist is truly the Body and Blood of Christ, and not a symbol, despite what their own tradition might officially teach. Not a few Catholics struggle mightily to believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, as it is a tremendous mystery of faith.

The Catholic Church permits intercommunion only in very limited circumstances. Canon 844 §4 of the Church’s Code of Canon Law states that the Eucharist, Penance, and Anointing of the Sick can be given to Christians not in full union with the Catholic Church who cannot approach a minister of their own community and who *share the Church’s faith* in these sacraments (the qualifier is significant) only “if the danger of death is present or if, in the judgment of the diocesan bishop or conference of bishops, some other grave necessity urges it.” For those of the Eastern Churches (i.e. Orthodox), the prohibition is less severe, as they have preserved apostolic succession and all seven sacraments. Those Christians only need to “seek such on their own accord and [be] properly disposed.” But even here, Orthodox guidelines forbid their members to receive Holy Communion in a Catholic Church. Yes, it’s complicated and often awkward!

But it is equally awkward to witness people approaching the altar during the distribution of Holy Communion

with obvious looks of confusion on their faces. Every priest and deacon experiences these moments, as do Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, especially here at the Cathedral with our many visitors. We publish an abbreviated form of the Communion guidelines in the liturgy guide in each bulletin. “For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself” (1 Cor. 11:29). We respect the sanctity of the consciences of those who make an individual decision to approach or not approach the Communion line, just as we desire to maintain the integrity of the Holy Eucharist.

- The unexpected naming of **five** new Cardinals to the group of clerics eligible to elect a new pope has kept Vatican watchers on their toes with Pope Francis. The Consistory will take place on the day before the major **Solemnity of SS. Peter and Paul** on June 29. Hailing from Bamako (Mali), Barcelona (Spain), Stockholm (Sweden), Paske (Laos) and San Salvador (El Salvador), the men range in age from 67-74. These choices further internationalize the College of Cardinals.
- Kudos to **Archbishop Robert Carlson** of St. Louis for his steadfast defense of life. He vowed to disregard a new “anti-discrimination” ordinance that adds people’s “reproductive health decisions” to the list of things for which it’s illegal to discriminate in employment and housing. Imagine if a Catholic School could not act based on knowledge of one’s stated positions/decisions on abortion? He said: “Let me be perfectly clear: The Archdiocese of St. Louis will not comply with this ordinance.” Time will tell how the city of St. Louis responds.
- Our beautiful statue of **Our Lady of Fatima** remained in the sanctuary throughout the month of May. Our Lady will return to the same place on the 13th day of each month to commemorate the various apparitions that occurred at Fatima, Portugal. Please see the helpful guide to obtaining the special Plenary Indulgence in this 100th anniversary year; it printed on page 7 of this bulletin.
- The *minimum* salary in Major League Baseball is \$535,000 per year, while the **average** salary is a \$4,250,000. One player, Dodger’s Pitcher **Clayton Kershaw**, makes more (\$33 million) than the entire 25-man active roster of the San Diego Padres combined! Talk about a foul ball!
- In light of the civil unrest in the government Please keep **Fr. Greg Schaffer, Fr. James Peterson**, the Parish of **Jesucristo Resucitado**, and the country of Venezuela in your prayers. Our Archdiocesan mission in Venezuela has been in existence since 1970. The President of the Episcopal Conference in Venezuela issued a courageous statement: current governing political system is rationally unjustifiable, ethically illegitimate, and morally intolerable.”

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John Ubel

Rector