

Fr. Ben and I are continuing our focus on the Eucharist, and I remind us of its centrality to who we are as Catholics, not merely as a source of identity, but as our source of spiritual sustenance. In exploring the reasons for why there is a lack of belief in what we teach about it, last week I spoke of our failure as a Church, parishes—and by extension, our families—to share the teachings of our faith—that bad catechesis or no catechesis is a major cause.

In this weekend's homily, the third part, I'll identify and speak to another cause within the Catholic Church and her parishes: it's the loss of mystery and reverence. Some of you recall when the experience of Mass and what took place inside the parish church was very different than our current experience.

For all the good things that came with the liturgical reforms of the *Second Vatican Council*, it also led to some misunderstandings of what the reforms intended. Among the good things that came from it is that we came to better understand the dignity of all the faithful by virtue of our baptism. It therefore called for the faithful to assist in the offering and prayer that is the Sacrifice of the Mass. Instead of being removed from the liturgical activity, all people must be present in the entire liturgy—full, active and conscious participation.

But the unintended consequence in reforms of the Mass is that it came to be a rather common experience and rather casual. With it, the interior of the church buildings became stripped of art and architectural elements, intending to remove distraction, and thus to give greater focus on ourselves. The hymns came to be more and more about us, and less about God: *We Are Many Parts*; *We Are the Body of Christ*; *Gather Us In*; *God Has Chosen Me*; etc. With the intended purpose of acknowledging our inherent dignity as sons and daughters—that God is near us and within us—it came to be disproportionately about us, and more and more seemed to express a God, whom we had rendered to be in our image.

As Catholics, we recognize that part of what feeds our intellectual understanding and even belief, is our senses, our imaginations, and our human experience. The beauty and power of art and architecture inform us in ways that words and doctrine cannot. The sensory experience of music, the smoke from incense and its smell, the resting in extended silence, all feed into our imagination and by extension, our consciousness and even our belief.

And of course, our body postures are part of this: We genuflect when we pass the Tabernacle, we bow when we pass the altar, we sign ourselves when we enter the church, and all of it, the muscle memory, praying with our bodies—it all informs our consciousness that we are experiencing something beyond ourselves.

One more thing: While I think fellowship and enjoying each other's company is important and absolutely necessary for a Christian community, and we must offer opportunities and have places in the parish where we gather and can visit, maybe it's fair to say that the idle conversation and activity that occurs before and after Mass, can undermine, in our subconscious, the sacredness of this space and what takes place within it. Some, who want to pray before or after Mass, often find it difficult when idle chatter floods the space.

In all this, I'm not suggesting that we need to go back to the experience of the 1950s or that we should not feel at ease here. But too often, what was sacrificed and lost over time was the sense of mystery, transcendence and reverence. We domesticated the Eucharist and, in our consciousness, rendered it ordinary bread. There's a need to recover some of what was lost.

Believe it or not—the elements that engage our imagination, our senses, our experience—in our liturgy, but also in this space itself—it all feeds into our regard for and understanding of the Eucharist. Let us remember, the Eucharist holds within it, God's inner-life, and this is the one place where we come to encounter it and receive it. While rejoicing in our inherent dignity, let us temper it with humility, recognizing that we are in God's house and in the presence of something beautiful, powerful, something beyond us and worthy of our adoration, and yet given freely to us.