

“Mass is boring. We do the same thing over and over.” This is the common lament of churchgoers routinely bored in the pews. Please note that not all of these eye-rollers are children and teenagers. Some folks who’ve attended Mass for decades are still confounded by the need for ritual. It doesn’t change, may not edify, rarely entertains, and isn’t always artfully performed. So why do we do it over and over? The French philosopher, atheist and anti-Catholic Jean-Paul Sartre famously said, “If you Catholics realized what you have and what you receive at Mass, you would approach the holy altar on your hands and knees!” HE knew what we have here, and he was an atheist!

If you think ritual prep isn’t necessary for Mass, guess again. While most of us don’t have to remember to buy more wine or hosts, or launder the linens involved in Eucharist, someone does. Someone also sets the multitude of ribbons in liturgical books for lectors to proclaim the readings and presiders to offer the prayers. Someone vacuums the carpets, repairs broken kneelers, returns hymnals to their place, and retrieves abandoned bulletins. Someone selects flowers and hangs seasonal banners. The music leader chooses hymns and choir members rehearse. Eucharistic ministers, lectors, servers and ushers are routinely trained and scheduled. And of course, preachers thoughtfully prepare homilies every single week!

Why do these armies of folks prepare so much for Sunday Mass? Because Jesus asks us to celebrate this covenant supper with Him. It reminds us that His life and ours are one life. This ritual keeps the whole Church united with Christ until Kingdom Come: on the same page, moving toward the same goals. Even Jesus prepares for His ritual through the man with the water jar, the owner of the upper room, and the elements of the Passover meal. In ritual, nothing is taken for granted. Because this ritual keeps the community together, and this community is a light to the world.

The Book of Exodus reminds us of the covenant God makes with us through Moses. This new covenant is not only with one person, as it was with Abraham; now it is with a whole nation, Israel. Twice we hear the people say, “We will do everything that the Lord has told us. All that the Lord has said, we will heed and do.” Well, at least they will TRY. They rarely succeeded! While all the sprinkling of blood in the First Reading may be a gorier detail than you might have wanted, the story of this ritual offers you something to consider for the celebration of the Body and Blood of Christ.

For the ancient Israelites, life was in blood. No blood, no life. If the blood stopped flowing or left the body, the creature died. Blood, then, had a sacred or sacramental quality, especially the blood of an animal sacrificed to God.

And if people came into contact with the blood of the altar, that meant they were one with the giver of life, God. So when you drink the cup of Christ's blood, you join yourself to Christ's life and accept the covenant to follow Him on your own.

One final reflection: Is the Mass a sacrifice or a celebration? Basically, Jewish shrine and temple worship could be a messy affair. Because the covenant with God involved blood, the word *sacrifice* was not misused. But when people gathered together, it was time to party, and what better reason to eat, drink, and be merry? By the time of Jesus, however, Judaism had already begun to steer away from the idea that ritual sacrifice was primarily what God wanted. Obedience and fidelity could be symbolized by the ritual moment but should not end there. The sacrifice was pleasing to God, as were hearts uplifted and entire lives rendered to God's service. The Gospels tell us Jesus saw His own looming fate as an act of obedience and giving glory to God. His Blood would be poured out for the sins of many, and He was "lifted up" as an offering on the cross.

When Saint Paul talks about the Eucharist, he doesn't hesitate to use sacrificial language familiar to his Jewish audience. The Roman Catholic Council of Trent in 1562 took pains both to affirm that the Eucharist is the "unbloody" sacrifice of that same Jesus and to clarify that His self-offering is not repeated but "made present" in every Eucharist. What better reason to celebrate as well? And to celebrate not only Christ's love poured out in sacrifice, but to celebrate the fact that, as Vatican II says, Jesus Christ is present in His Body in the assembly, in the priest, in the Holy Word of God, and in the very Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Blessed Carlo Acutis, an extraordinary 15-year-old Italian boy who was recently beatified – one step before canonization and sainthood – took upon himself the arduous task of cataloguing on social media every miracle that happening involving the Most Blessed Sacrament. There were hundreds, including dozens of examples where during the Mass, the bread and wine literally turned into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. Forensic studies by professionals all came to the same conclusion: the flesh came from the heart of a 33-year-old man's heart, which suffered physical trauma.

The blood tested was AB Positive, the universal and most requested blood for transfusions. This is what you and I receive when we come up to receive Holy

Communion – the very Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ Himself, truly present in us and with us!

I conclude with excerpts from one of most beautiful meditations on the Eucharist I have found to date: It is the **Litany of the Most Blessed Sacrament, *Written by St. Peter Julian Eymard, the founder of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers.*** The full prayer is in today's bulletin:

FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT BELIEVE IN YOUR EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE
FOR THOSE WHO ARE INDIFFERENT TO THE SACRAMENT OF YOUR LOVE
FOR THOSE WHO HAVE OFFENDED YOU IN THE HOLY SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR,

THAT WE MAY SHOW FITTING REVERENCE WHEN ENTERING YOUR HOLY TEMPLE,
THAT WE MAY MAKE SUITABLE PREPARATION BEFORE APPROACHING THE ALTAR
THAT WE MAY RECEIVE YOU FREQUENTLY IN HOLY COMMUNION WITH REAL DEVOTION AND TRUE HUMILITY,
THAT WE MAY NEVER NEGLECT TO THANK YOU FOR SO WONDERFUL A BLESSING,
THAT WE MAY CHERISH TIME SPENT IN SILENT PRAYER BEFORE YOU,
THAT WE MAY GROW IN KNOWLEDGE OF THIS SACRAMENT OF SACRAMENTS
THAT ALL PRIESTS MAY HAVE A PROFOUND LOVE OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST,
THAT THEY MAY CELEBRATE THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS IN ACCORDANCE WITH ITS SUBLIME DIGNITY,
THAT WE MAY BE COMFORTED AND SANCTIFIED WITH HOLY VIATICUM AT THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH,
THAT WE MAY SEE YOU ONE DAY FACE TO FACE IN HEAVEN,

O SACRAMENT MOST HOLY, O SACRAMENT DIVINE,
R. ALL PRAISE AND ALL THANKSGIVING BE EVERY MOMENT THINE.

LET US PRAY,
MOST MERCIFUL FATHER,
YOU CONTINUE TO DRAW US TO YOURSELF
THROUGH THE EUCHARISTIC MYSTERY.
GRANT US FERVENT FAITH IN THIS SACRAMENT OF LOVE,
IN WHICH CHRIST THE LORD HIMSELF IS CONTAINED, OFFERED AND RECEIVED.
WE MAKE THIS PRAYER THROUGH THE SAME CHRIST OUR LORD. R. AMEN.

[Readings: Ezekiel 17:22-24; Psalm 90; 2 Cor. 5:6-10; Mark 4:26-34]

Has it ever happened to you that you send a letter or an email or a text, expecting a reply? And when that reply doesn't happen soon enough for you, you send a second letter, or email or text, and in the meantime a reply DOES appear from your pen-pal? That's what happened with this weekend's bulletin.

The bulletin copy is sent to the publisher ten days before we get the finished product delivered a couple of days before the weekend. But a lot can happen in ten days. For example, the staff met to discuss the proposed changes to our COVID-19 protocols. So what you read in my column this week is obsolete. Here is the latest "skinny" – like I know what it's like to be skinny...

Beginning next weekend, June 19th-- 20th:

Our church will have sections for open seating and safe-distance seating, whether you are vaccinated or not vaccinated.

Wearing masks or not wearing masks during Mass will be your choice, regardless of whether you are vaccinated or not vaccinated.

The upper baptismal font will be filled with fresh and circulating water. The lower font and the small holy water stoops at the church entrances will continue to remain empty. Please sanitize your hands before and after Mass.

Eucharistic Ministers will continue to wear masks during the distribution of Holy Communion, and will sanitize their hands before and after.

We ask that you continue to receive Holy Communion in your hands. Those wishing to receive on the tongue, please extend your tongue far enough to avoid the Eucharistic Minister's fingers coming into contact with your tongue.

After July 1, our parish office will be open on Mondays from 10 AM to 2 PM and on Fridays from 9 AM to 12 Noon. The office also will be open on the first and third Saturday of the month from 9 AM to 12 Noon.

Most importantly, we are hoping to resume all parish activities come September. Praise God!

Finally, another "Gentle Reminder" to keep your feet off the kneelers and to raise and lower them slowly and quietly with your hand. They are delicate.

Also please use your hand, not your cane or walker to gently press the handicap plate to open the church doors. Banging on the door plate short-circuits the plate and it won't work. I thank you, the kneelers thank you and the door plates thank you. Now on to the homily...

The readings this week show that what is small, hard to see, and even invisible can have vast importance. Whether it's the tender shoot of the cedar tree or the tiny seed of the mustard plant, what seems slight now will become something mighty.

"We walk by faith, not by sight," the Second Letter to the Corinthians says; we hope in that which is unseen, and in the future will come to pass. The important thing, though, is to realize how the present still matters. How you tend that invisible seed makes a difference; what you do "at home in the body" now has consequences for when you are at home in the Lord, so "aspire to please him" at all times.

Think of the little seeds, shoots, and easy-to-miss places in your life where more attention and cultivation "shall bear fruit," as the psalmist says, in the kingdom of God. What we say and what we do are like seeds planted in the hearts and minds and spirits of our children. Jesus makes it very clear that often times it's the smallest things which make the biggest difference in our faith. The same can be said about parenting. They say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Your children will not only imitate you, but in many ways, they will grow up to be like you simply because you're their parents.

I cannot tell you how many times growing up as a kid and a teen, my mom would look at me with love and say, "You're just like your FATHER!" Or my dad looking at me the same way and saying, "Don't look at me with your mother's eyes! You look just like your MOTHER!"

Unknowingly, we can teach the next generation of believers wrongly. There seems to be two schools of learning, when actually there is a third way.

Here are the two main ways to get religion wrong. One is to presume it has nothing to do with the material world. So forget political and social realities, pray harder, and concentrate on the spiritual life because it's the only forum that

counts. The other mistake is to assume that if religion has nothing to do with the material world, then it has nothing to offer because that's where people find themselves. So eat, drink, and be merry, get what you can, and never mind about God until the unlikely event when heavenly possibilities intrude on practical, earthly realities.

Jesus issues an invitation to a third way. It's the way of the farmer, who views the ground not only as dirt but as the seat of all hope. For the ground, coupled with his own purposeful activity, is the medium of a harvest through God's holy desire to bring forth life. The seed sleeps in the dark soil, dying to its original being to emerge as something greater than itself. This world is the soil of our lives. It's where potential meets possibility and possibility the movement toward perfection.

The mystic writer Thomas Merton described grace as the hidden potential we have for every virtue -- like the oak tree hidden in the meat of an acorn. "To be an acorn," he wrote, "is to have a taste for being an oak tree." You and I seek grace, desire its transformative effect, because we're acorns with oak trees inside with a taste for who we're meant to be.

Planted in the soil of this world, with proper care and attention, the virtues in our spiritual genes will emerge and we'll assume our place in the grove of those giants, the saints. It's not only simple to do, it's the plan. God's plan, anyway. The only thing that interferes with its maturity is if we plan something else. Saint Paul says mortal life keeps us away from the fullness of life with God. But he doesn't advocate throwing our lives away. He urges we invest them, with courage, walking by faith. We walk by faith and not by sight. Let us please our Heavenly Father whether we are at home or away, so that we may receive our recompense for our good example and not our bad. AMEN!

[Job 38:1, 8-11; Psalm 107; 2 Cor 5:14-17; Mark 4:35-41]

If you really get into today's readings, you see that they form a biblical dramedy – a dramatic comedy or a comedic drama. To set the scene for today's First Reading, you have to know the story of Job. He is a good and holy man. A successful business man. A devoted husband and father. The biggest house in the neighborhood. And one by one, each of those blessings is taken away from him. His house burns down. His business goes belly-up. His wife and children are stricken down with illness, disease and eventually, death. Job himself becomes covered with sores. He loses it all.

Then Job asks the question which you and I ask once a month, once a week, or once a day: "God, why are You doing this? God, do You have any idea what You are doing? You're bringing my house down. You're bringing ME down!" Job dares to confront and to challenge God. He doesn't doubt God, nor does he give up on his great faith. Job needs assurance that God is in control.

So God slides up His sleeves, takes a deep breath and responds with a few questions of His own: "OK. You wanna do this? Fine. Where were you when I made all of creation? Were you around? Were YOU my advisor?" If we were to read all the verses of God's reply, it would be some 129 verses! And I imagine Job shrinking with each verse, in humility and in humiliation. Job has nothing to say to God but to re-affirm his faith in God. "I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be hindered. I have dealt with great things that I do not understand; things too wonderful for me, which I cannot know. I had heard of You by word of mouth, but now my eye has seen You. Therefore, I disown what I have said and I repent; truly, totally, completely."

Those words come from Chapter 42, verses, 2-6. But a more famous quote comes from Chapter 19, verses 23-26: "Oh, would that my words were inscribed in stone... I know that my Redeemer lives! And from my flesh, I shall see God!" It is not a sin to question God's purposes; it is a grace to accept them. Do YOU really believe that your Redeemer lives, and that He is in control?

In our Second Reading, St. Paul reminds us that IF we really believe that our Redeemer lives, IF we choose to live in the love of Christ, measuring all of our thoughts, words and actions according to the will of Jesus Christ and not our own, then we are going to see life with a new set of eyes. "The old things have passed away; behold, new things have come." This is a common penance that I give to folks who confess that they are being too judgmental, prejudicial or discriminatory: say this prayer: "Lord, help me see them with YOUR eyes."

When we are tempted to lash out at God, we look at the example of St. Paul. When St. Paul wrote his Second Letter to the Corinthians, he had already experienced three shipwrecks! St. Paul calls us to a new and deeper world view; a new way of seeing, a deeper insight into the meaning of human life. With this, we can judge the events of our lives, so that it is not a human response we give, but a response, made in faith, hope and trust.

In today's Gospel, when Jesus and the apostles are caught in a violent storm on the Sea of Galilee, the apostles are convinced that they are going to die. There is both desperation and accusation in their voices as they ask Jesus if He even cares that they are doomed.

Their loaded question at the end is a faith statement about Jesus. It is clear that Jesus has the same powers as God Himself. He is making it very clear that real faith means believing that God is not absent, cold or uncaring. That whatever happens to us, God will be present and working on our behalf. We experience personal disappointment, failure and tragedy. It is in these moments that we pray to accept what God has to offer us – strength, consolation and hope. When do YOU think that Jesus is sleeping in your life? How do YOU handle the storms of your life? And where are YOU in all of this?

And finally, I would like to share some thoughts on this Father's Day. In the United States, there are about 62 million fathers. Unfortunately, some 25 million children in our country live in homes without their fathers -- making our country the world leader in fatherless homes.

According to the National Center for Fathering, children whose fathers are present, loving, mature, faith-filled and responsible parents, raise children whose lives are "more confident and less anxious in unfamiliar settings; better able to deal with frustration; better able to gain a sense of interdependence and an identity in addition to the mother-child relationship; more likely to mature into compassionate adults; more likely to have higher self-esteem and grade point averages; and are more sociable." The role of the father is indispensable.

This is the Year of St. Joseph, the "Father of All Fathers," the Foster-Father of Jesus and the Protector of the Universal Church. On a recent program on Catholic Radio, the observation was made that with Jesus being truly sin-less and Mary conceived without sin, St. Joseph was the only imperfect member of the Holy Family. So, off went my creative imagination! Mary asks, "Who left their clothes on the floor?" Jesus asks: "Dad, are you sure we're going the right way?" Mary and Jesus look at each other and wink knowingly. Poor Joseph!

Yet, despite this handicap, St. Joseph becomes a perfect husband and a devoted foster-father. If you are a dad, how do you become a such a father? Over 5000 fathers were surveyed by the National Center for Fathering, and there are seven secrets to their success:

1) Commitment ("Everybody Hates Chris" – "See you tomorrow."); 2) Knowing your children; (really take time and look at them with love) 3) Consistent discipline (NO "Good Cop/Bad Cop"); 4) Protecting and providing (It's YOUR job!); 5) Loving, or if the parents are separated, at least respecting their mother; 6) Active listening (don't pretend to pay attention when you are just waiting for your moment to jump in); and 7) Equipping children spiritually (conscience and worship). No God, no peace. Know God, know peace!

Let us pray for all fathers, that they may fulfill the important and irreplaceable mission the Lord has entrusted to them. Let us give thanks to God for all those men in our lives who have been "father" to us as parents, mentors and friends. And don't forget to thank them today, or very soon. AMEN!

[Readings: Wis. 1:13-15; 2:23-24; Psalm 30; 2 Cor 8:7, 9, 13-15; Mark 5:21-43]

What do we make of all the controversies and contradictions in our world, in our country, and in our Church? Truth and Justice will prevail. If not in this world, certainly at the end of this world and in the world to come. I wonder how many decisions made by the popular and the powerful would be different if they thought of the Four Last Things – Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell.

Most people will go to any lengths to avoid talking about or thinking about death. We fear and dread it, and when it comes for us or for those close to us, we are angry and even more fearful. People spend billions of dollars avoiding it, delaying its effects, or trying to remain perpetually young. But as the old expression goes: the mortality rate in life is 100%. The violent deaths of so many people over these past few weeks is proof that none of us “knows the day or the hour.” What does God say about death? Our First Reading says “God did not make death” – an odd statement, given that all things must die. God says through the inspired author of the Book of Wisdom that all creation is good. God takes no delight in death and destruction, and these are never God’s intentions.

So... If God made everything good, why doesn’t God just “fix” everything? The “death” spoken of here is the unnatural and avoidable kind: war, violence, starvation, disease and injustice. This “envy of the devil” describes HUMAN actions rather than the reaction of a vengeful God. It’s not up to GOD to make things right -- you and I are the ones to make things right. It’s up to US to “fix” things that can be avoided or reconciled.

When we fail to bring peace, fellowship, nourishment, health and justice, it is unfair to get angry with and to blame God. Natural biological death is not a punishment, but an essential element of creation. And death, when it is understood as separation from God, is met with God’s response: the gift of eternal life. Jesus Christ, Who died an unnatural and violent death, is the promise of a new life, an eternal life without sorrow or pain.

The power of God to do this is limited only by our own attitude. Faith makes healing possible. In almost all of the Gospel healings, Jesus declares that

it is the faith of the individual that makes the healing possible. It seems that God can exert a positive, active healing power on our behalf, but it must be met by an open and receptive power that only WE possess. God intends for us to have life and to have it abundantly. God does not afflict us with death and disease as some sort of punishment or test. Life will deal out many painful situations, but only you and I can decide how we will respond to them.

When the Lord called my sister Kathy four years ago, I asked her if she was ready to meet the Lord. "Are you ready for your transition?" I asked. She responded very peacefully. "Yes. And it will be quick and peaceful." It was.

Negativity, fear and doubt have to give way to faith, trust and hope. We who have much of this do not need more. But perhaps our call today is to be a positive witness to those who have less. To "pay" it forward, or better still, to "pray" it forward! St. Paul is not calling us to some socialistic commune in today's Second Reading. He is asking us to meet everyone's needs equally.

While we are meeting our needs and the needs of others, doesn't it seem that the task is constantly interrupted? Life is an endless series of interruptions. If you're not being interrupted, you're not living. One bishop defined the interruptions of his day as the "real work" that God sends his way for him to do!

Jesus would agree. During His Galilean ministry, He escapes one mob only by taking to the sea. Docking on the far shore, He encounters another crowd. Mark gives us one of his brilliant little details to spice up the scene: As the crowd moves in, Jesus "stayed close to the sea." Keep the boat handy, boys. We may need a quick getaway!

An important man named Jairus breaks through the throng and pleads with Jesus to save his little girl's life. If Jesus had a sermon planned or any sort of agenda for that crowd, He abandons it quickly to follow Jairus. So too does the large, claustrophobia-inducing multitude.

Meanwhile, at least one member of that group has another agenda for Jesus and is determined enough to pursue it. She reaches out to snatch a miracle from Him. And guess what? It works.

This is the only miracle in all of the Gospels in which someone steals a

healing. You gotta give credit to that poor woman with the hemorrhage problem. She even startles Jesus! This is the sort of interruption that's downright unique to His experience as Son of God. He just has to acknowledge it -- and her.

Interruptions, after all, were part of Jesus' business. Maybe the lesson we should take home from this is that we should treat our own daily distractions with a little more respect. Jesus could be calling us to do His work, to be Christ to others, through those very holy interruptions.

He may be calling to you and me. "Get up!" His voice is strong, commanding, and vital. "Get up!" Life is frightening, when it intrudes into the realm of death. Hear his voice now. He is shouting. There is so much death. We are asleep with death, so it takes a loud voice to wake us.

Death is chaotic. Jesus Christ has come into the world to deal with the chaos of death. Jairus rejoices; the old woman tells the whole truth.

What is the whole truth? Surely, the Way, the Truth and the Life could order her chaos. In this fallen world, in this world suffering from sin and death, there's plenty of chaos. Jesus came into the world to deal with death and chaos.

And we Christians are meant to share this fact with the world. We are to go to the ends of the world, as joyful, missionary disciples, announcing the Good News that chaos will not win.

Against all odds, all our evidence, God will order the chaos. But He needs our cooperation and help to do it! AMEN!