

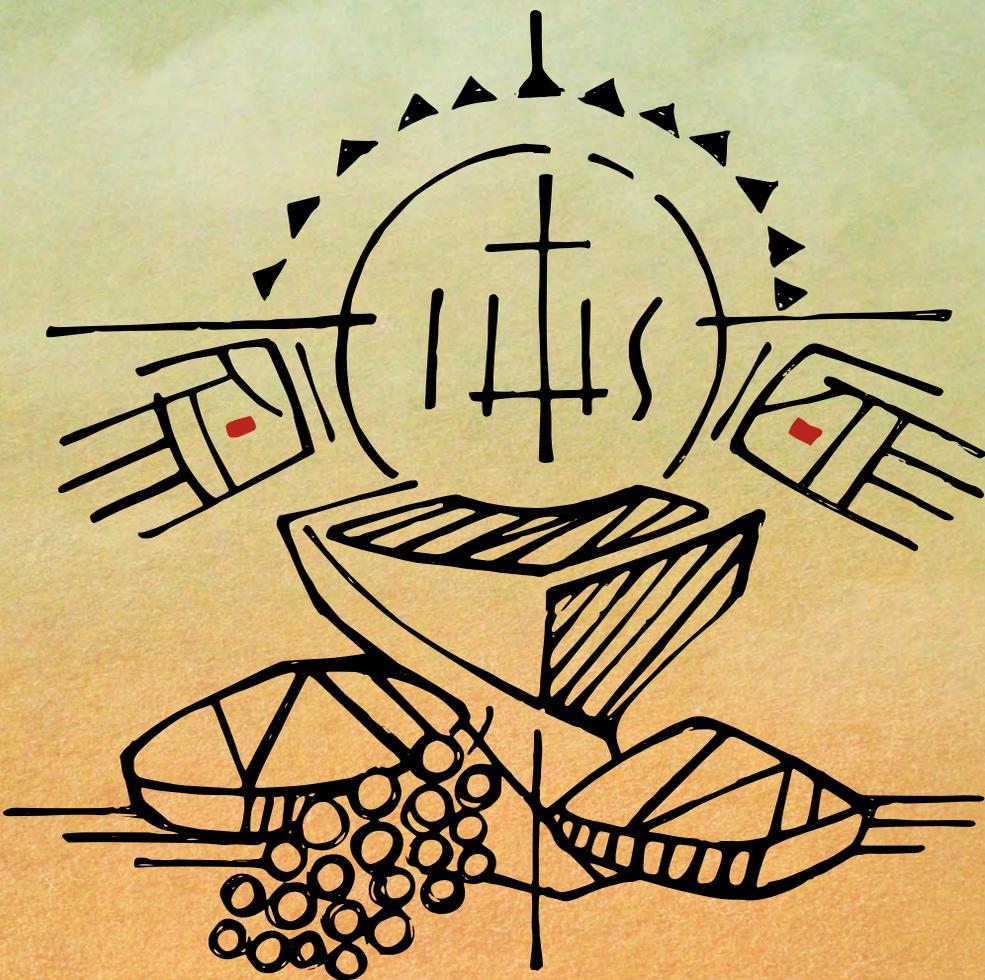
FAITH MATTERS

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A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD CONNECTED BY WORSHIP

BY SUSAN CUMMINS



When I was 22, I made the decision to become a member of the Catholic Church. I was attracted to the Catholic Church because of the joy-filled faith of the young students I met at St. Mary Student Parish in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The beauty of the Easter Vigil liturgy captivated me. Most of all, I was drawn by the presence of God in the Eucharistic celebration. I experienced tangibly what it means to encounter Christ in the communion of the altar as his faithful people gather to give thanks and commemorate the death and resurrection of their savior.

As human beings, we are created to be social beings. It is natural for us to live in families and to form civic and religious communities. As Christians, through baptism, we are brought into *God's* family and made part of a supernatural community. We read in I Peter 2:9, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you announce the praises of him who brought you out of darkness into his wonderful light." In our secular and individualistic society, the experience and understanding of family and community has been distorted and watered down. For most of

us, the words from I Peter are almost indecipherable. Yet our understanding of what it means to be *God's* people is key to our understanding of the celebration of the Eucharist.

During the COVID-19 lockdown and the months of restrictions that followed, many people were unable to share in the Eucharistic celebration. There were laments, most of them focused on not being able to personally receive the grace and nourishment of the body and blood of Christ. This was a genuine loss. We are personally nourished and strengthened by the graces we receive at Mass, in particular through the reception of the body and blood of Christ. However, our concerns should extend beyond the lack of personal spiritual nourishment and missing out on seeing our friends at Mass. The loss of the freedom to gather for corporate worship strikes at the very essence and underlying purpose of the celebration of the Eucharist. "Sacrosanctum Concilium," the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy states, "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the



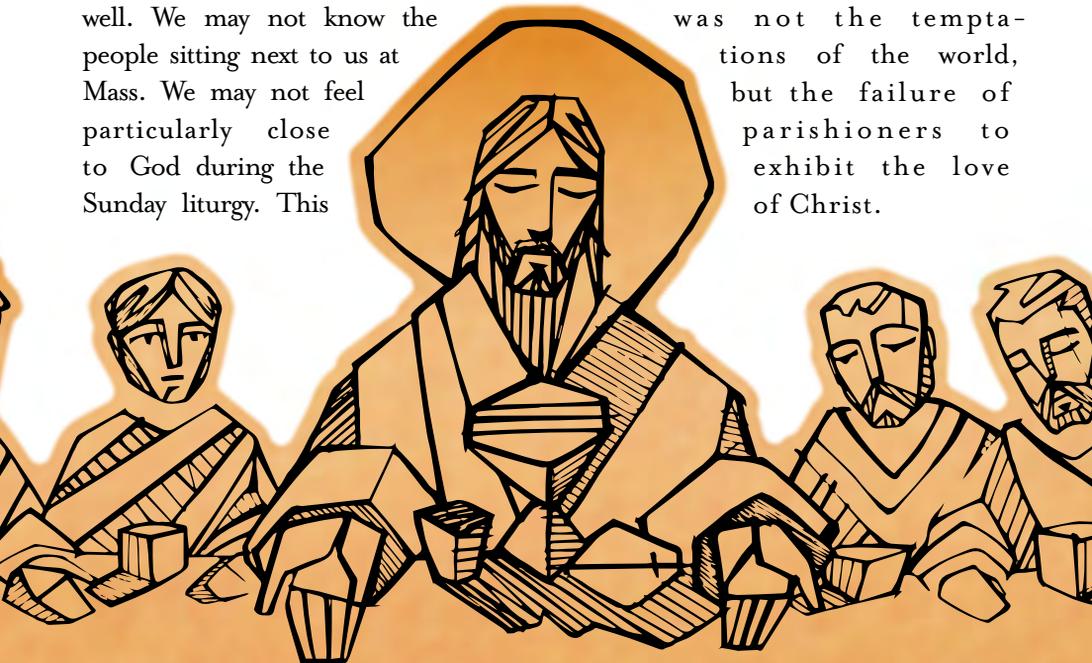
fount from which all her power flows.” (SC 10) The primary focus of the Mass is that we gather together as the people of God to commemorate the death and resurrection of Jesus and to offer our worship to God as a royal priesthood.

Every time we gather together for the celebration of the Mass, we encounter Christ in his word, on the altar, in the priest and *in one another*.

Our God is a God of relationship. Through the sacraments, we are incorporated into the loving relationship of the Holy Trinity. This is not an analogy; it is a reality. We are part of a spiritual family that transcends the natural. When we gather to worship on the Lord’s Day, or on any other day, we enter into the worship of heaven, and we are connected to all who worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:23-24) As we worship, we are nourished and strengthened individually and our unity with our fellow worshipers is nourished and strengthened as well. We may not know the people sitting next to us at Mass. We may not feel particularly close to God during the Sunday liturgy. This

does not change the spiritual reality of the importance of our worship as the body of Christ. “Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.” (I Cor 10:17) It is because of Jesus, the one true sacrifice, that we can come together as one body, one people. In I Cor. 11 the apostle Paul rebukes the Corinthians for the divisions and factions that existed among them. He exhorts them to examine themselves in order to worthily receive the body and blood of the Lord.

Several months ago, I had the opportunity to talk with my Uber driver about his faith journey. He had been away from the Catholic Church for many years and wanted to begin practicing his faith again. He confided that he was hesitant to do so because of the gossip and backbiting that went on in his former parish. I was sad to hear the stumbling block standing in the way of this man’s return to the church was not the temptations of the world, but the failure of parishioners to exhibit the love of Christ.



Father Raniero Cantalamessa writes in his book *“The Eucharist Our Sanctification”*: “The Christ I receive in Communion is the same undivided Christ the person next to me receives. He unites us one to the other while uniting us all to himself.” Father Raniero points out that while many people are easy to accept, there will be others who are difficult to embrace. The great and beautiful mystery is that we are loved by God and incorporated into the love of the Trinity; through that union with the Trinity, we are made one with the family of God. This means that the way we live our lives the entire week prepares us to enter into the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday. We are called to love those close to us and reach out to our fellow parishioners. We must examine our hearts and repent of our sin. There is no place for envy, gossip and division among the people of God. We are weak and we will falter, but Jesus, our great high priest, knows our condition and he will forgive us. We go to the Eucharistic celebration seeking forgiveness and the grace of the Sacrament. We encounter Christ in the proclamation of his salvation and the reception of his body and blood. We encounter our brothers and sisters as we partake of

the heavenly banquet, and our communion with one another is strengthened. Mystically we share with other believers around the world and all the saints and angels in heaven as we worship at the altar of the living, triune God. Then we are sent out to love again. *Ite, missa est.* Go forth, the mass is ended. Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord. Go in peace glorifying the Lord by your life.

In these challenging times God is calling us to recover and hold fast to the full meaning of family and community in the natural and in the supernatural sense. As we begin to pick up the pieces and re-engage fully in the celebration of Sunday Liturgy, may we do so with greater appreciation of the solemn and joyful privilege that is ours to worship the king of kings together as members of his royal family and citizens of his holy nation. “The Church and the world have a great need for Eucharistic worship. Jesus awaits us in this sacrament of love. Let us not refuse the time to go to meet him in adoration, in contemplation full of faith and open to making amends for the serious offenses and crimes of the world. Let our adoration never cease.”



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