

A two-for-one special this week

Teaching Masses

The “Teaching Masses” I celebrated last week at Sacred Heart, this week at Nativity and St. Charles Borromeo, and next week at St. Augustine-St. Monica and St. Elizabeth focus on five invitations that the risen Jesus offers us at each Eucharist. Jesus invites us *to gather* in his name. Would we turn down an invitation from some sports or music star to be with them? Sunday is Jesus’ invitation to us. The Son of God! How can we not but say “Yes” to that invite? However, we too often think of it as the Church’s invitation because the Church talks about an obligation to attend Mass, but this is really Jesus’ invitation. He is inviting us to dine with him. Let’s say “Yes” each week.

Jesus invites us *to listen to and be shaped by his living Word*. The Liturgy of the Word is not meant to be a Bible study or a historical analysis of what happened. Jesus is the living Word who wants to shape us and transform us through that Word. Some images, some phrases, some memories elicited, and some situations we are dealing with come into our minds. If we open ourselves to that living Word, something will touch us. Note that the reader is asked to end the Scripture reading not with “*This is the Word/Gospel of the Lord*” but “*The Word/Gospel of the Lord*.” The Word is not contained in the book or the reading of the book, but it is the living Word that touches our hearts. I find it much easier to hear that Word if I have read and meditated on the readings prior to the Mass.

Jesus invites us *to offer a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving* in order to unite our lives to his once-for-all saving sacrifice. Jesus has died for us and is truly risen. He has opened up within time and space a way to connect our lives to that sacrifice. Our great “*Amen*” at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer is our affirmation that we have done so. Think about it. If we truly and freely and unconditionally offer ourselves to the Lord at the time of the Eucharistic Prayer, then everything in our life up to that very moment—good and bad, successes and failures—is now part of that perfect sacrificial offering. Amen!

Jesus invites us *to eat and drink* his sacramental Body and Blood. “*Take and eat; take and drink; this is my body; this is my blood*.” This is the awesome gift that Jesus gives us—offering a way for us to truly feed on him. This is not merely symbolic. Yes, it involves sacramental symbols—bread and wine—but we take Jesus at his word. Notice that the ritual calls for us to wait until all have received before taking time for personal meditation. Notice that the communion minister says “*The Body/Blood of Christ*.” Not “*This is the Body/Blood of Christ*” or “*Receive the Body/Blood of Christ*.” Those other phrases limit the meaning of communion to Jesus’ presence in the consecrated bread and wine. We deliberately are presented with “*the body/blood of Christ*” so that our “*Amen*” means “*Yes, I believe the consecrated bread and wine are the Body and Blood of Christ; Yes, I believe that this communion is uniting me to all who are receiving communion today; Yes, I believe that we are to become what we are receiving*.”

Finally, Jesus invites us *to go forth* and be the Body of Christ broken and the Blood of Christ poured out for the good of the world. We have the privilege of being sent forth by the risen Lord. He trusts us to be his presence in the world. Notice how short and definitive that final ritual is? It is almost like Jesus saying to us “*Now get out of here and be me for the world’s salvation*.”

And then we gather again next Sunday to offer anew and be fed anew. Sunday worship is so much more enjoyable with wonderful music, excellent preaching, and having good friends to connect to. But when we remember that at the core of the Eucharist, we are saying yes to Jesus’ invitations, then every Eucharist is extraordinary.