

No.25.

18th March 2021

Dear Friends,

This week we consider the Holy Eucharist - the Mass - the greatest prayer of all. I have chosen a few lines from the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church to set the scene; followed by a reflection by Fr Ronald Rolheiser on the Eucharist.

A completely different reflection this week has been chosen by Caroline Rother. It is called a Time to Weep and asks us to consider some of the sadnesses of life - but which challenges our humanity by our reaction.

Finally, Bishop Barron talks about our Gospel passage from the Fourth Week of Lent. It includes what he argues could be considered the most important verse in the whole Bible - quite a claim! The sermon is entitled : What Christianity is all about.

Take care and God bless,

John de Waal.

What is the Eucharist?

The Eucharist is the very sacrifice of the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus which he instituted to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the ages until his return in glory. Thus he entrusted to his Church this memorial of his death and Resurrection. It is a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet, in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.

Jesus instituted the Eucharist on Holy Thursday, "the night on which he was betrayed" as he celebrated the Last Supper with his Apostles.

After he had gathered with his Apostles Jesus took bread in his hands. He broke it and gave it to them saying, "Take this and eat it, all of you : this is my Body which will be given up for you." Then he took the cup of wine in his hands and said : "Take this and drink of this, all of you. This is the cup of my Blood, the Blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me."

It is the source and summit of all Christian life. In the Eucharist, the sanctifying action of God in our regard and our worship of him reach their high point. It contains the whole spiritual good of the Church, Christ himself, our Pasch. Communion with divine life and the unity of the people of God are both expressed and effected by the Eucharist. Through the Eucharistic celebration we are united already with the liturgy of heaven and we have a foretaste of eternal life.

(Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 271-274).

The Eucharist : the source and summit of the Christian life.

Jesus didn't leave us a lot of rituals. He left us his Word and he left us one ritual, the Eucharist. He refers to other rituals such as Baptism, and other parts of the Christian scriptures refer to laying on of hands, to the confessing of sins, and to various kinds of anointing with oil, but Jesus, himself, left us only his Word and the Eucharist.

And it is around these two things , the Word and the Eucharist, that we form the Christian community, the Church. Historically Roman Catholics and Protestants have differed as to which of these to give priority. In classical Protestant theology and practice, the Word is central; it is what first and foremost draws people into "community". The Eucharist may or may not follow. In Roman Catholicism, the Eucharist is given priority and the Word and all the other sacraments are ultimately in support of the Eucharist and flow from it. In a vast oversimplification it may be said that Roman Catholics form the Church around the Eucharist while seeing the Word as a necessary prelude to and supplement to the Eucharist; whereas Protestants form the Church around the Word, while seeing the Eucharist as flowing from that in different ways.

Partly this can be seen by walking into either a Roman Catholic or Protestant church. When you walk into a Protestant church, what is at front and centre? A pulpit or lectern, something from which the Word of God is proclaimed and preached. Secondly, there may or may not be an altar, and if there is one, it

is generally less centrally situated. The architecture speaks the theology : they gather first and foremost around the Word. The Eucharist takes a secondary place. When you walk into a Roman Catholic church the reverse is true. What is front and centre? An altar. Off to one side, far less prominent, is placed a pulpit or lectern. The message is also clear in the architecture : we gather first and foremost around the Eucharist, and the Word takes second place.

St Augustine, one of the most influential Christian theologians of all time, puts it this way : Jesus left us the Eucharist and the Community of the Church is built around it. Because of this, Roman Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the source and summit of all Christian life (2nd Vatican Council) ...It is the sign of our unity.

(From : "Prayer : Our Deepest Longing, by Ronald Rolheiser).

A time to weep

On this planet, psychic numbing has been raised to high art. This people avoids pain and misery, in others as well as in themselves, at all costs. This is not a people who braves grief in the face and stares it down. No, this people dedicates itself to the elimination of pain—its own—and the aversion of pain—everyone else's. But grief comes nevertheless.

Tears fall despite the fact that we resist them so strongly. Weeping and wailing are heard everywhere in the land of milk and honey—from the unemployed and under-employed who want basics they can't have; from the sick and lonely who feel they have nothing to live for at all; from the beaten and the powerless whose lives are faceless and unrecognized; from the privileged and well-to-do who have it all and still have nothing that really satisfies.

Unfortunately, few of us see our weeping as spiritual gift or a matter of divine design. But we are wrong. Weeping is very holy and life-giving. It sounds the alarm for a society and wizens the soul of the individual. If we do not weep on the personal level, we shall never understand humanity around us. If we do not weep on the public level, we are less than human ourselves.

If we do not allow ourselves to face and feel pain, we run the risk of entombing ourselves in a plastic bubble where our lies about life shrink our hearts and limit our vision. It is not healthy, for instance, to say that massive poverty is sad but "normal." It is not right to say that sexism is unfortunate, but "necessary." It is not human to say that war is miserable but "essential." It is not healthy to insist that our deep hurts and cutting disappointments and appalling losses and great personal mistakes do not exist. On the contrary. To weep tears of frustration about them may be

to take our first real steps toward honesty, toward mental health, toward a life that is worth living.

Weeping, in fact, may be the best indicator we have of what life is really all about for us. It may be only when we weep that we can come to know best either ourselves or our worlds. What we weep for measures what we are. What we weep over indicates what others may expect of us in life.

—from For Everything a Season by Joan Chittister (Orbis)

Bishop Robert Barron's Sunday Sermon.

This Sunday Sermon covers the Gospel reading from the Fourth Sunday of Lent : St John's Gospel : 3 : 14-21. Bishop Barron says that verse 16 could possibly be called the most important in the entire Bible!

https://youtu.be/RhA_zXQoXJ4

Final Prayer - taken from Compline (the Night Prayer of the Church).

Antiphon. Save us, Lord, while we are awake; protect us while we sleep; that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with him in peace.

Nunc Dimittis.

At last, all-powerful Master,
you give leave to your servant
to go in peace, according to your promise.

For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared for all nations, the light to enlighten the Gentiles
and give glory to Israel, your people.

Antiphon. Save us, Lord, while we are awake; protect us while we sleep; that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with him in peace.

A short time for silent prayer.

Concluding prayer.

Lord our God,
restore us again by the repose of sleep after the fatigue of our daily work;

so that, continually renewed by your help, we may serve you in body and soul.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen

Blessing. Lord, grant us a quiet night and a perfect end. Amen.

A final thought.

“As often as the sacrifice of the Cross - in which ‘Christ our Paschal victim was im-molated’ (I Cor. 5:7) - is celebrated at the altar, work of our redemption is made manifest.”

(Vatican Documents : Lumen Gentium, 3)