

Perfect Worship

Dabbling in auto mechanics, as I do for a hobby, I've learned a lot about the tools necessary to do a good job. There are many jobs which are simply beyond me for lack of proper tools and equipment. In some cases, a special tool is needed from the manufacturer in order to undertake a very specialized task.

For hacks like me the temptation is to try to get away without having to purchase that tool: I'd rather try to fabricate something that will work or to see if I can get away with "jury rigging" it. This approach never ends well. If there is a tailor-made tool that will get the job done and done properly, one should probably use it.

We have lost many Catholics to other Christian communities or denominations. It is a tragic break in communion which I take very seriously and for which I experience heartbreak. Doctrinally speaking, I believe that they have left the full Gospel for a partial Gospel, and the Church of Christ for an individualized Christianity. The latter designation is very characteristic of what could be termed "American Religion."

While it may be the case that a person leaves the Church for issues around doctrine and morals; I think that, more often than not, leaving has to do with the experience described as "*not being spiritually fed.*" This is not a sentiment I dismiss lightly: It is truly incumbent upon people like me to offer the best possible exposition of the Holy Gospel and to try to build truly Christian Community within the Parish entrusted to my care. According to an ancient maxim of our Faith, "*Grace builds on nature.*" We cannot hope to keep people in "communion" with the Church if we don't witness to love and a deep, abiding faith. And, as one modern Catholic Apologist puts it, "*the Lord is telling us that if we won't feed people with the full Gospel, then he will allow them to be fed with a half-Gospel somewhere else,*" (paraphrase).

This brings me back to my "tool" analogy and, perhaps, a key to our evangelizing efforts. Notwithstanding the failures in our Church among priests and people, there is a problem with the sentiment "*I'm not being spiritually fed,*" and other such sentiments: The focus in this statement is the "I" or "me." If the celebration of Mass/Eucharist is

properly understood as "worship" of God in Christ, then such a focus is backwards. We come to offer the sacrifice of praise, worship, obedience, atonement, and fidelity to the Lord of Life! The question is not really whether it was stirring, or inspirational or whether the music was appealing to my ears. Purely speaking, it really isn't even about whether I felt particularly welcomed into the Church by all the people in attendance. All of those are ancillary and important, but they are not of primary import.

The Eucharist, in fact, is the perfect "sacrifice of praise", the highest glorification that rises from earth to heaven, "the source and summit of the Christian life in which (the children of God) offer the divine victim (to the Father) and themselves along with it" (Lumen gentium, n. 11).

—Pope St. John Paul II

Eucharistic Witness



Consider, the key to perfect worship has been handed down to us: This is why we repeat it every single Sunday of the year! When, at the Last Supper—the Passover without a Lamb—Jesus took the elements of Bread and Wine and identified them with his body and blood and then uttered the words, "*Do this in remembrance of me.*" In this the ancient Church understood that Jesus was fulfilling, once and for all, the provision of God's people with a sacrificial offering which was truly pure, (1 Malachi 11). That is, Jesus was not simply going to die on the Cross as an expiation of our sins and as a pure sacrifice of obedience and faith to the Heavenly Father: **He was providing us with the sacrifice we would offer as our worship of God.** This is what Mass is, in addition to being the graced moment of receiving his divine life through Holy Communion.

No matter how many guitars or singers or video screens you add to some worship service, you cannot compare with what has been given us! No matter how stirring the sermon or how emotional one may feel, the perfect sacrifice of praise remains the Crucified One, re-presented in our moment in time, every time we break the bread and drink the cup.

I would encourage all of us to make this a central part of our evangelization in order to wake all of us up from the stupor of "the self" and to make a full turn to the Lord who assures us, "*my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.*"