

Reflections

by the
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What's at the heart of being Catholic?

The question of identity is important for us in so many dimensions of our lives. We describe ourselves in various ways in response to questions asked of us regarding age, occupation, hometown, etc. But sometimes we are also asked about our religious beliefs. It is easy to respond, "I am Catholic." But what does it mean to be Roman Catholic? I believe the response to that question is found in Eucharist.

The call to follow Christ is a call to greatness. We listen to Christ's words, but listening is not enough. We must respond. Our response is to unite ourselves with the Lord and with others who share the vision of the Gospel. We form Church and we inherit a tradition of almost 2,000 years. When a community gathers, it celebrates its meaning and identity.

Nothing reveals our identity as Roman Catholics and the nature of the Church as does Eucharist. In each celebration by a community, the people of a local parish discover anew the dynamic nature of its structure and the purpose of all it does. Without the Church, there can be no Eucharist, but without the Eucharist there would be no Church for each stands as a sign of the other.

The smaller parish communities of our Diocese have a real advantage when everyone in the parish is able to assemble for a single celebration of the Eucharist. Such a gathering is a powerful sign of unity of a complete parish gathered around its pastor, who represents the Bishop. It is tragic when we give up this value for the sake of convenience and the number of Masses are multiplied without reason in a parish community.

The Eucharist is a covenant-sacrifice. Our presence at Eucharist invites us to renew the covenant we made on the day of our Baptism. In Eucharist each person shares in the priesthood of Christ, whether general or ministerial, that was conferred on him or her by baptism and ordination. The celebration of Eucharist truly represents the Church. Within the celebration, there is a distribution of liturgical roles which reminds us that the assembly is not a gathering of people, but a manifestation of the Church itself.

The Eucharist offers us a source of spiritual and supernatural energy. But we in turn are asked to be prepared for Eucharist through lives which respond to the challenge of the Gospel, fidelity to what membership in the Roman Catholic faith community asks of us, and the faith to see far more than meets the eye.

We are very conscious at this time of year of gift giving. Year-round, we have the opportunity to receive and participate in the greatest gift which God has shared with us - the gift of Jesus. Let us give thanks - for that is what Eucharist is all about.