

REAL PRESENCE IN THE EUCHARIST - April 11, 2016

What is required for communion? Bread and wine, of course. The gathering of the people of God, the proclamation of the Word, the leadership of a priest. All this the church holds together in a Living Tradition, a precious heritage.

From our childhood we have been taught that Holy Communion is the Body of Christ, His Real Presence. The Lord is really present to us and asks only that we be present to Him and one another.

Each Sunday hundreds gather in our church to celebrate and experience His Presence. To be present to God and in communion with one another involves awareness and responsibility on our part. Do I realize that the Holy Mass is a prayer that requires my active participation through listening and responses? Do I choose the Mass I will attend based on a judgment about when I can most worthily give praise to God? Do I ever distract others by arriving late or disturb people's prayers and communion by leaving early, before the final hymn has been sung or the priest has left the altar?

SOME MEAL TIME THEOLOGY

When we share an important meal with friends or relatives, say Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner, we take great care. We spend time with one another even before we move to the table, sharing our stories and telling of past events and future hopes. Sounds very similar to hearing God's Word proclaimed.

Once at the table, people tend to stay there. We know that the meal is more than a sharing of food, even though we may take pride in a beautifully set table (or a well kept church) we know that it is an experience of communion with one another. To leave the table early -"please, may I be excused?" is, in a way, to break communion. The empty chair at the table is a troubling sign to those who remain at the end of the meal. Is it something we said, they wonder, have we done something to offend?

At home, we are troubled when a family member or a guest arrives at the last possible moment before dinner is served, says nothing during the meal and then leaves early before everyone is finished. A young child may be dismissed from the table early, but when an adult rises to leave before the meal is ended, it disturbs all who are left behind.

What does this suggest to our experience of Sunday Mass? Are we truly gathered as ONE bread (meal) praying to ONE Lord?