

Grace Notes in Miniature

Friday, November 20th, 2020

Dear Friends:

It seems almost impossible to believe that we are coming to the end of our Church year as we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King – more formally known as Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe – this weekend. This is the culmination of the cycle which takes us from waiting in joyful hope last December in response to the message of the prophets, to Jesus' humble birth in a stable; through his teaching and healing ministry; his betrayal and death; his resurrection and return to the Father; and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnVJCeEXIqM>

Our Christian calendar is marked essentially by the passage of Sundays and the major feast days, many of which either occur on Sundays or for which the celebration has been moved to Sundays. In contrast to many other countries, in Canada we have only two Holy Days of Obligation other than Sundays: Christmas and its octave, Mary Mother of God. This highlights for us the importance of Sundays – stressing that they are days of obligation for us – as the day to participate with our community within the Body of Christ in the Eucharistic Liturgy. The word liturgy originates in the Greek word, *leitourgia*, meaning “public work of the people,” and is defined by the Church as “the participation of the People of God in the ‘work of God.’” (CCC 1069) And the focus of the Mass is the Real Presence of Jesus: in the assembly, in the person of the priest, in the Word, but above all in the Eucharist. This is very basic teaching of our faith.¹, our belief in “transubstantiation”, that through the action of the Holy Spirit and the prayers of consecration offered by the priest, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. Yet a 2019 Pew Research study of American Catholics revealed that less than a third – 31% – believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist². I wonder what a study here in Canada would reveal. As Catholics we believe that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Church's life (see Sacrosanctum Concilium) and that it is the food which enables us, with the help of the Holy

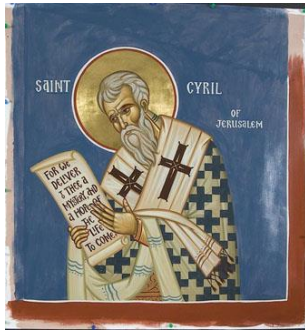


Icon of Christ with
Sergey Radonezhsky
and Evfimy of Suzdal,
1681

¹ United States Catholic Catechism for Adults p 223

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/05/transubstantiation-eucharist-u-s-catholics/>

Spirit, to carry out the work to which we are called, through the Sacrament of Baptism, to bring about the Kingdom of God here upon earth. Ludwig Feuerbach, a 19th century German philosopher, wrote 'Der Mensch ist, was er ißt' –you are what you eat (Das Wesen des Christentums, 1841). It is ironic that, although Feuerbach attacked the celebration of the Eucharist as “religious materialism”, this phrase defines pretty much what we believe. We are the Body of Christ fed by the Body of Christ. Bishop Robert Barron, in his presentation on Real Presence at the



Los Angeles Religious Education Congress in 2020³, tells the story of an altar boy running to him and saying, “Father, there is a whole bunch of blood on the floor”; he applauds the server for recognising that once consecrated – although our senses cannot see the difference – the wine is no longer wine but Christ’s Precious Blood, just as the bread has become his Body.⁴

In the 4th C CE, St Cyril of Jerusalem wrote in his Catechetical Lectures : “When you approach, take care not to do so with your hand stretched out and your fingers open or apart, but rather place your left hand as a **throne** beneath your right, as befits one who is about to receive the King. Then receive him, taking care that nothing is lost”.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tIsTmUOODo> Perhaps if we remember this each time we go forward to receive the Eucharist, it will help us to remember that we “are a chosen people, a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9), going in joy to receive our King.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTrdJTGgN40>

As you take a few moments of Sabbath to feed your soul, you may enjoy listening to “Saturdays with the Saints”, a free series of lectures from the McGrath Institute at the University of Notre Dame. My favourite is the last, about St Nicholas, which may give you some wonderful faith knowledge to share and counter some of the effects of Santa-mas.⁵ You can register for this program until December 20th.

I wish you a joyful Feast of Christ the King, whether you may be celebrating it in person with your socially-distanced parish or virtually with them as you watch a live-streamed Mass. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2N0iVysrykU>

With every blessing, Gillian

³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzCPu_lEhe8

⁴ Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24

⁵ <https://mcgrath.pathwright.com/library/saturdays-with-the-saints-copy/about/>