

Reflection for Thursday 17th September 2020

Let us return to the Eucharist with joy!

A few days ago, Cardinal Robert Sarah who is in charge of the office of the Liturgy and Sacraments in Rome made a plea for Catholics to come back to Mass. He said returning to Mass is necessary and urgent. In a message to all the bishops he is encouraging them to return to the ‘normality of Christian life.’

He says, ‘As soon as circumstances permit ... it is necessary and urgent to return to the normality of Christian life which has the church building as its home and the celebration of the liturgy, especially the Eucharist as ‘...the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed.’ He made the point that although many people are happy to watch Mass on a live stream, no broadcast is equivalent to personal participation. ‘On the contrary, these broadcasts alone risk distancing us from a personal and intimate encounter with the incarnate God who gave himself to us not in a virtual way, but really,’ he writes.

Cardinal Sarah also mentions the question of receiving Holy Communion on the tongue and in the hand. It is every Catholic’s right to receive on the tongue as this is the way mandated by the Church. Many Catholics do not want to receive in the hand as they think that only those in Holy Orders should handle the Holy Eucharist, Some Catholics will not receive Holy Communion at all while the current arrangements remain in place and will make a spiritual communion instead. But in the current circumstances Bishops have issued instructions requesting that Holy Communion should be received in the hand and he insists that these emergency measures should be followed but points out that they expire when the situation returns to normal.

The whole theme of Cardinal Sarah's letter is encapsulated by its title, "Let Us Return to God with Joy!" It puts the emphasis on what the Catholic response should always be with regard to Sunday Mass: we attend not principally because we have to, but because we want to, out of gratitude to God and out of love and desire to do his will. God loved us so much that he not only humbled himself to take on human form and even further humbled himself to allow us, his creatures, to crucify him; he humbled himself to the extent that he hides himself under the appearances of bread and wine, so that we can spend time in prayer with him substantially present, and so that we can become one with him in Holy Communion.

God has made possible for us to enter with him in time and into eternity during the Last Supper and on Calvary, so that we might journey with him through the new and eternal Passover from death to life. Jesus came so that we might "have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10) and emphasized that unless we "eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood," we will have no life in us (6:53). The Eucharist is the greatest means we have to achieve that saving and life-giving gift.

Watching Mass on our screens is good, but nothing in comparison with entering into Jesus' presence. Spiritual communions are important, but are nothing in comparison with actually receiving Our Lord in Holy Communion. Personal prayer at home is great, but we need to have Mass to enter into Jesus' greatest prayer that redeemed us and brought salvation to the whole world.

So now is the time to return to Mass, especially as we have very good arrangements in place in church to minimise the risk of catching the virus. But we should encourage rather than command bearing in mind that there will be many people who are still very worried about

spending time in public or in close proximity to others whatever the precautions taken.

May the Lord bless us, keep us safe and Our Lady protect us from all harm.

Deacon Kevin