

Friends,

A recent Pew Study entitled "What Americans Know About Religion" reported that only 31% of Catholics believe that the bread and the wine consecrated during the Mass actually become the body and blood of Jesus, and that only half of Catholics know of the Church's teaching concerning the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

In order to help people gain a better understanding of the Eucharist, on Holy Thursday 2020, the Archdiocese of Boston will begin a *Year of the Eucharist*. It is my hope and prayer that through this spiritual initiative we can invite and encourage our brothers and sisters to find the consolation of the Lord through participation in the celebration of the Eucharist and in times of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

When my parents were married, my uncle Fr. Jerry Reidy gave them as a wedding gift Leonardo Da Vinci's iconic painting of the Last Supper. That painting hung in our dining room, and one of my earliest memories was my parents explaining to us that this painting depicted the first Mass, the first Eucharist. They made clear that is the reason we go to Mass, to partake in the same Eucharist that Christ shared with his closest followers at the Last Supper before he would suffer and die for us.

My mother and father held the evening meal as a priority for our family; attendance was not optional. It was an institution in our house to gather around the table and it was there that we bonded with one another. We shared our experiences of the day. We would laugh together, would even argue with each other. The evening family meal was essential to our formation and it was where we discovered our identity.

The same can be said of the celebration of the Eucharist. As Catholics, it is in the Eucharist that we learn our identity. At the table of the Lord, Jesus makes a gift of Himself to us because God loves us so much. Just as we discover our identity at the family table, it is in the Eucharist that we discover who we are, why we are here, and what is our mission as disciples of Christ.

Growing up I remember many wonderful devotions that kept the Eucharist at the center of our lives as Catholics: the Forty Hours Adoration, Corpus Christi processions, and the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. From an early age I knew the Eucharist is what distinguishes us from most other Christian churches, that the Body and Blood of Christ was actually, sacramentally, present in our Church.

At the Last Supper, Christ gave us the priesthood so He could be present everywhere in the world, not just in Jerusalem, in every time and age. Through the Eucharist, we have direct contact with the Lord at the celebration of Mass and in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. When we visit our churches at times other than the celebration of Mass, we can see the red glow of the sanctuary lamp and know that Jesus is there for us. He is always waiting silently and lovingly, ready to receive us and console us.

The Capuchin Friars have a commitment to make two periods of meditation a day and I always do mine in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. For me, as Archbishop of Boston, my holy hour is late at night when the phones stop ringing. It is a time when I am renewed by the assurance of the Lord's presence and His love for me, knowing He will guide me and give me the strength I need. Praying in the presence of the Eucharist, in adoration of the Lord, is a very important part of my daily existence; it is essential to perseverance in the vocation I have embraced.



Before I became a bishop, I served as a priest in Spanish and Portuguese ministry where I learned many of the hymns I sing to the Eucharistic Lord during my Holy Hour. I also love the Latin hymns I learned in the seminary, the *Pange Lingua*, and the English hymn, *Jesus My Lord, My God, My All*. I memorized these hymns, and it is my hope that they can become a regular part of devotional practice at all our parishes, hymns that everyone learns by heart and sings together. As St. Augustine told us, singing is praying twice, because singing lifts our hearts to God and provides us with a glimpse of His beauty in the beauty of the music.

Recent times have been very difficult for the Church and her people. In the Year of the Eucharist, we all have the opportunity to renew and strengthen our faith and our closeness to the Lord. If we center ourselves in the Real Presence of Jesus, in His friendship, then everything else will make sense. At the celebration of Mass, Jesus is there, waiting for us, inviting us to the table where He is making a gift of Himself to us so that we may have the strength to make a gift of ourselves to others. That is what human fulfillment is about. It is about love and giving of ourselves on behalf of others. That is the meaning of the Eucharist, it is love taken to the extreme. The more we understand that, the more we will want to be present to the Eucharist and the more the Eucharist will transform us.

Discipleship is not a solo flight. Jesus sent people out two by two, not one by one, and spoke of the importance of "two or three are gathered in my name." The Eucharist is where we gather as Christ's family, where we can witness our faith to one another and grow in our capacity to love. The Eucharist gives us the strength to carry out our mission to transform the world, to work for justice, to serve the poor, to bring healing and reconciliation. But we can't do these things unless we have the strength that comes from the intimate contact with God's love that is given to us in the Eucharist.

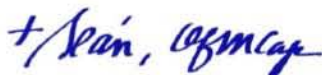
Discipleship also requires a plan. We need to ask ourselves what we can do, individually and with our families and friends, to prepare for the *Year of the Eucharist*. We can find the answer to these questions in times of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament in our churches. We can read and reflect on the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John. We can invite family, friends, and colleagues to join us at Mass and times of Adoration. We can reflect on the importance of receiving the Lord in the Eucharist, the difference that makes in our lives, and share that insight with those who are close to us.

We don't exist by accident. Our lives are a gift of God's gratuitous love, and the Eucharist is the most profound symbol of His love for us. Jesus comes to us in humility, in littleness, so that no one need be afraid or unsure of His acceptance. He makes Himself present to us so that we can have the strength we need to live our mission in the Church as disciples of Christ.

God created us and entered into creation in Jesus Christ so we could be close to Him, hear Him, know and love Him. The sacraments not only touch our lives, they mold our very being, and the Eucharist is the center of our sacramental life. That is why I am a Catholic. That is why I am a priest. Without the Eucharist, I would ask myself, "Is it worth it?" I know it is worth it, because Christ really is present in the Eucharist. May God bless you all abundantly with this assurance that Jesus will be with us always, even to the end of time. That is Jesus' promise and He keeps that promise in the gift of the Eucharist.

With the assurance of my prayers for you and all whom you hold dear, I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Archbishop of Boston

