

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

ONLY ONE THIRD?

Just a couple of weeks ago a poll came out which received some publicity within Church circles. The poll conducted by the "Pew Research Foundation" discovered that most people who describe themselves as Catholic really don't believe what the Church teaches on the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

In fact, just one third of U.S. Catholics (31%) believe in the traditional teaching which is called transubstantiation-the fact that the bread and wine consecrated at each Mass become the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. Almost seventy percent believe that what happens at Mass is just symbolic-that there is no real change when the priest offers the Mass.

This is a very serious problem and not very good news for the Church amid all her other current troubles. Perhaps some of the practices introduced after Vatican II have something to do with the catastrophic decline in eucharistic belief. In the past fifty years, many of our churches were renovated and updated. Communion rails and statues disappeared. The tabernacle where the Eucharistic Christ dwells was taken out of the center of most churches and placed off to the side or even into a separate room.

Receiving Communion on the hand became the norm for the majority of people while it was conveniently forgotten that the preference of many of the Popes was that the Eucharist be received on the tongue. Now, I think that Communion can be received reverently in the hand but it does present some problems. In years past at other churches, I have found Communion hosts on the floor or in the missalette racks which was disturbing to say the least. As one wise priest said to me, "Maybe some of the old rules were in place for a reason." Yes indeed!

Apropos of a lack of reverence for the Holy Eucharist, this summer on vacation at the Jersey Shore, I dropped into the local church to say a few prayers. Alas, I could not even kneel down to say a prayer because the pastor in this parish had removed every kneeler in the place!

In the bulletin, he explained that some churches in Rome don't have kneelers and if you wanted to kneel, you can do so by genuflecting on the bare floor! That might not be too easy for some of the elderly parishioners.

Why do we priests kneel after consecrating the bread and wine at Mass? Why does the congregation kneel at this point too? Well, it's simply because something happens during the liturgy. Jesus Christ the Son of the Living God becomes present on the altar and that is something to talk about!

The great saints and other holy people couldn't stop talking and writing about the Eucharist. They recognized that Holy Communion really is the greatest treasure that the Church possesses-the source and summit of our entire Christian life. It is more than a symbol.

The novelist Flannery O'Connor once asked a friend of hers what she thought the Eucharist was. The friend replied that it "Was a symbol of Christ-but a pretty good one at that." Flannery O'Connor replied, "Well, if it's a symbol to hell with it!" I would agree with that assessment. In our own time, we need to enkindle what might be called "Eucharistic Amazement." The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist should amaze us and stir our hearts.

One way to rekindle our devotion and fervor for this great sacrament is to spend time in Eucharistic adoration. We are privileged here at Saint Charles to have adoration in our chapel five days a week from 12-5 PM. Why not come and spend time with Jesus? When we come to visit Christ and adore Him, then we can begin to perceive that the Eucharist is not a symbol-in fact is the living heart of Jesus present in our midst!

*Sincerely in Christ,
Father Jerome*