

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

As you have noticed, we have suspended the use of the common cup during Communion. Bishop Libasci has issued this mandate to all parishes in the Diocese of Manchester until Holy Thursday. The first reason he gives for this is *health*: guarding against possible spread of contagion through the common cup.

The second reason the Bishop gives for this mandate is *theological*. He is concerned not only for our physical health, but our spiritual health as well. The Bishop is concerned that we have a fuller understanding of the Eucharist, specifically the *doctrine of concomitance*. The Doctrine of Concomitance is our belief that when we receive Communion under one form (for instance, under the form of bread), we receive the *whole Christ – Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity*. Not having the Chalice available to us, does not mean that we are not receiving the Blood of Christ, rather, we receive the *fullness of Christ* under either the form of bread or the form of wine. The Bishop will be providing further teaching on this belief as we move closer to Holy Thursday.

This brings up a question, though: **Do we really believe that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ?** While I don't have the statistics at my fingertips, there have been several studies done which show that a high percentage of practicing Catholics in the United States do not believe in the "True Presence of Christ" in the Eucharist. And yet, this has been the constant teaching of the Church from the very beginning, taken from the mouth of Jesus both during His public ministry (John 6) and at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:19-20). Let me make this clear – the Church teaches and has always taught that what we receive in Communion is not merely a symbol of Christ's Body and Blood, nor merely a ritual meal of sharing, nor just a sign. We believe that we really and truly receive the Body and Blood of Christ, our God, when we receive Communion.

We may say we believe this truth, and ascent to it with our minds. The next question is whether we believe it in practice. Think about it: The God of the Universe, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Maker of all that is and ever has been, the Infinite One, chooses to come to us humbly under the forms of bread and wine. Do we truly believe this? The first indication of our practical belief is **what we are willing to give up in order to come to Mass to receive Him?** For many of you, you give up the one day of the week to sleep in! That's truly a sacrifice, and, when done in faith, God rewards us for every gift of love.

I'm thinking of the story of the American who had gone to visit friends in China, but because of the governmental persecution of Catholicism, he didn't let them know that he was a priest. In the middle of the night, he heard a commotion around the house as people were passing to go to "The Wall." Asking about it, he was told just to come and witness. When they got to "The Wall," a man went and removed a brick, and placed the hidden Eucharist in a Monstrance on the wall for Adoration. For an hour, they prayed there, then the same man again placed Jesus in hiding, and they all went away. Dozens or hundreds had risked their lives to come and Adore the Lord in the Eucharist, for they had no priest to celebrate Mass. The American shared with his friends that he was a priest, and the next night they went and celebrated Mass at "The Wall" – the foundation of their Catholic Church that had been destroyed – for the first time in many years. All of these same people risked their lives again in order to receive the Eucharistic Lord.

How about us? Would we miss receiving the Lord if we did not have access to Mass? Even with the priest-shortage in our Diocese, we still have Mass so readily available to each of us. Do we long to receive Him? When we do go to Communion, how do we prepare ourselves to receive Him? Do we show proper respect to the God of the Universe?

Things to ponder.

At the heart of this pondering, though, must be the question of our relationship with Jesus. Do I really believe that He loves me, not from a distance but right here? That He cares about my choices? That He wants what is best for me? That He longs, *thirsts* to be united to me in Holy Communion? That He waits for this union with more eagerness than a young child waits for Christmas (seriously! I'm not kidding!)? That His Heart aches when we choose to do other things rather than come to be with Him?

Do we, **do I**, truly believe that the Living God is truly present, **waiting for me in Holy Communion?**