

FAMILY



The Risen Lord in Our Midst

To hold a dozen first or second graders still and attentive for an hour would tax the genius of even the Muppets' creator.

Yet I have repeatedly experienced a cluster of such children gathered at some parishioner's home, totally engrossed in a Mass of just that length.

These were tiny tots preparing for communion and they had come with one or both parents for an explanation of the eucharistic liturgy. This session served as the culmination of our parental preparation series for first Eucharist and always seemed the most effective or drew the best feedback from sometimes grumbling moms or dads.

At the outset of our formation program participating parents were asked to volunteer their homes for several small group presentations, including this so-called "demonstration" Mass. The total class would then be divided into units of 8-12 children and assigned to particular homes for a given night with each parent having the option of switching locations to accommodate personal schedule conflicts.

Hosts merely prepared simple refreshments for afterwards and opened their homes for the visitors; the parish staff took care of other details.

The explanation began promptly at 7 p.m. With adults sitting in chairs around a large living room or family room and the children assembled before the celebrant on the floor, he would first explain the various articles used for Mass. In doing so, he gave each boy and girl responsibility for that particular

Fr. Joseph M. Champlin



Our Church Family

object — chalice, paten, cruet, purificator, corporal, pall, finger towel, candle, sacramentary or altar book and lectionary or book of readings. Later, during the actual liturgy, the responsible child would bring his or her item to the priest as needed.

Next, while vesting for Mass, the celebrant named, described and sketched the historical background and symbolic meaning of every garment — the amice, alb, cincture or cord, stole and chasuble.

With the priest ready for the eucharistic liturgy, all stood, sang an entrance hymn, responded to the penitential rite and listened as their celebrant spoke the opening prayer from the sacramentary held by a youngster.

A parent read the first scriptural passage, the responsorial psalm was replaced by a period of silence and the priest proclaimed the gospel from a lectionary likewise held by a first communicant.

An informal homily followed, with questions for and

participation by the boys and girls. This led to a spontaneous prayer of the faithful; both adults and children being invited to offer petitions.

As the priest moved to the table for the liturgy of the eucharist, each child brought to him the materials needed to transform that piece of furniture into an altar.

During the preparation of the gifts, and the subsequent eucharistic prayer, the celebrant often interjected brief explanatory comments. They covered such points as the "Blessed are you Lord, God of all creation..." prayers, mingling of water and wine, finger-washing, laying on of hands over the offerings, breaking of bread, mixing of our Lord's risen body (particle) with his precious blood (cup), genuflections, Our Father and cleansing of the sacred vessels.

The children gathered around the altar for this part, linked hands during the Lord's Prayer, greeted each other with the sign of peace, peered into the cup at the co-mingling, and sat down as their parents received communion under both kinds (the youngsters did not communicate).

After the altar had been cleared and the group seated, the celebrant invited those present to mention specific blessings for which all could reply, "Thank you, Lord." He concluded with the final prayer, once again from the sacramentary held by a child.

Designed to explain the Mass to first communicants, this real but demonstration Eucharist often taught more to their parents.

On God, Colds and Humility

If there's one sure way of remaining humble, it's being scheduled a year and a half in advance for a talk at a conference and then getting a cold. Not a polite, p'choo, southern etiquette kind of cold, but one accompanied by all the grosser accoutrements: runny nose, red eyes, and laden vocal chords — all of which result in a much different kind of speaker than originally envisioned by the planning committee.

It's rather humiliating to stand before a couple of thousand people who are anticipating a lively and profound presentation only to come away shaking their heads in disappointment over the fact that you sound like their kids with a cold.

In my public speaking, I've had only the kind of cold made to offend listeners twice, but the latest was a zinger. Last June, I hooked three appearances together, the first at Notre Dame, and the second, a couple of days later at the Benedictine College in Lisle, Ill. I got through Notre Dame in fine style; but as I was leaving South Bend I felt the first signs of a sore throat.

I prayed, "Dear God, please hold off this cold for a few more days." But by next morning, my nose began to run, my head felt achey, and I added to the intensity of my prayer, "Lord, either make this a fast cold or postpone it until I get home, p-l-e-a-s-e." He wasn't hearing me. In fact, He tossed in two complicating

Dolores Curran



Talks With Parents

factors: damp, and cold Illinois weather and an unheated dormitory.

By morning the obvious was obvious. I coughed, I sneezed, I wheezed, I blew, and I felt the first signs of laryngitis. Also panic. In irritation, I prayed, "Okay, Lord, what are you and I going to do about those talks tomorrow?"

That night a priest gave me a little purple and gold capsule, saying if I took it a bedtime, I'd be completely well by morning. A listening nun said, "Don't take that. You'll never wake up in the morning." And she passed me a white tablet to take. I smiled and nodded my thanks voicelessly. On my way to the dorm, I met a stranger who wore a conference name tag. "Oh," she said, grabbing my arm in the dark. "I heard you had a bad cold and I brought you a never-fail remedy." She gave me another pill.

Back in the dorm, I studied the pills and chose the purple. No reason except the color seemed appropriate. The way I felt, I didn't mind sleeping through the following day.

But it was not to be. I arose early and one registrant with a car knocked a few weeks off purgatory by taking me out for an early breakfast where I drank gallons of coffee, coughed, cleared, blew, and went over speech notes. I also prayed between every cup, with some annoyance. "Okay, God. What did you have in mind — bringing all these people here and giving them this?"

But when I was introduced an hour later, a curious thing happened. I apologized to the listeners for my voice, nose and ever constant tissue, but I launched into the talk with bravado. At the end of 45 minutes, I realized with astonishment that I had forgotten my cold completely, hadn't coughed or blown once. Even my voice cooperated. Afterward, several participants suggested that my cold was "psychological," stage fright in origin.

I couldn't answer. My voice was gone again. I rolled my eyes to heaven and He only shrugged. He has His own ways of keeping us dependent.

Easter's Meaning and a Five-Year-Old

Dear Readers: This Easter column first ran in 1975. Cara is 10 now and we both have grown in acceptance and expectation.

I do not know how parents who disdain the idea of a life hereafter explain death to their children. It is hard enough even when you trust that dying is but a rebirth.

On Friday the five-year-old who has been discussing cemeteries with her best friend got to the nitty gritty.

"But, if we go to heaven why do we have to go into the ground?" she wanted to know.

It was bedtime and conversation then is usually a stalling technique. But, the answer to this question wouldn't wait.

"The important part of us goes to heaven. We don't need our bodies."

She was adamant. "Well, I want mine!"

"God promised us our bodies and souls would all go back together later."

She, who has trouble differentiating between two days and a week, wanted an exact time. "When? Two years, three years, when?"

Sarah Child



All in the Family

I was losing control of the conversation. I told her the truth as I understand it. "Jesus said if we loved Him and trusted Him we don't ever have to be afraid."

As she chewed on that, I tried a diversionary tactic not immediately aware of my own irony. "Think of something pleasant. Think about Easter." She settled down, her Easter a montage of a trip to her grandparents, a candy-filled basket and a new, long, yellow dress.

On Saturday night we went to Mass fulfilling our obligation for what used to be known as Passion Sunday. I listened to the miracle of the sermon; Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. A new peace settled on me and I looked over at the five-year-old but the afternoon of hard swimming had taken its toll and she was asleep on her father's shoulder.

On Sunday we were out of the house and on our way to the Montezuma Swamps by 9 a.m.

Just inside the entrance to the wild life refuge, we spotted three deer including a yearling and when the kids went to the chain fence the deer came bounding from the little thicket to munch the heavily salted pretzel that was offered.

Farther down the trail we watched the brilliant blue of the sky turn almost black as wave upon wave of Canada geese headed for the marsh.

On our left, the tall winter wheat they would feed on waved in the slight breeze. On our right the huge carp could be sighted in the icy water. Then a helicopter swooped low and a "zillion" geese took to the air in a frenzy of swooping wings and flashing white underbodies.

Winter weary, I took in the warmth of the sun, the melting and mixing of snow and mud and the honks of the geese.

I thought of Spring and new beginnings and Jesus raising Lazarus from the grave. A promise worth waiting for. A promise to trust in. I looked for the five-year-old to pass on new reassurance. But she was hunting snails in the mud and snow.