

Sunshine on my Shoulder

As a long time subscriber to *Emmanuel* magazine, I have noticed that succinct mission statement or motto of this 125 year old eucharistic journal, *Seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist*. How many times? Hundreds? Or how many times have I heard those words in my 30 plus years association with the congregation?

As a teacher, writer, presenter, coach and friend, I have tried to impart those words and the spirituality they bespeak to thousands of people. And yet, how often do *I* stop to hear my own words and this mantra of a eucharistic spirituality?

Now we find ourselves in a crisis we have never confronted in our collective lifetimes; a virus that is taking the lives of thousands of people across the globe. How does one see *this* reality in the light of the Eucharist?

These are some thoughts that come to me as I pray and reflect upon these words:

We are *nourished* by the Word and the Eucharist at Mass. The other day, a favorite young bread maker dropped off a bag of bread and soup on our doorstep. This was ordered long distance by our son and daughter-in-law for us and our neighbors of forty-two years who live across the street (and practically speaking are aunt and uncle to our two adult children).

We are invited at each Mass to experience *reconciliation* and the healing of the Lord. Phone calls this week with a family member and a long-time friend brought to mind some painful memories of harsh words and judgements exchanged between us. How joyful it was to enjoy these conversations minus those old patterns of mutual irritation or anger.

In the Mass we experience the *transformation* of the bread and wine into the body and blood of our Lord Jesus. There we are invited to bring our sins, our bad habits, our rash judgments, our pains and personal and collective woundedness to the altar for personal and spiritual transformation. I've noticed a distinct peaceful stirring in my spirit from a recent "How are you two doing?" text from a younger neighbor, a "thinking of you" email from someone I'd not heard from in a long time, a "virtual" (Zoom) cocktail hour with our closest couple friends who live a 1000 miles away, almost daily FaceTime calls with our four young grandsons who live in Chicago, and a moving homily from our pastor during the parish's first live-streamed Mass — to name a few experiences.

We believe in the *presence* of Jesus in the Eucharist. And yet, during these difficult times pervaded by fear — for our and other's lives — worries about our children and grandchildren, wider families and friends, apprehension about the future of our country and the international order, sadness over the loss of life and the inability to be present at funerals, weddings, family events, etc., we ask, *Where is Jesus present?* Well, we see him in the above stories, and the many gestures of kindness and compassion we are seeing these days, and especially in the dedicated work of all the "helpers" out there. (Thank you Mrs. Rogers for sharing that wisdom with your son Fred.)

Today on a bright sunny day, I was taking a long walk in a park listening to classic folk rock songs and one of my favorites came on, *Sunshine on my Shoulder* by John Denver. And I heard the lyrics in a way I had never heard before.

*If I had a day that I could give you, I'd give you a day just like today.
If I had a song that I could sing for you, I'd sing a song to make you feel this way.
If I had a tale that I could tell you, I'd tell a tale sure to make you smile.
If I had a wish that I could wish for you, I'd make a wish for sunshine for all the while.*

Father Peter Julian Eymard once wrote to a Mrs. Camille d'Andigne (March 4, 1865), a woman for whom he was giving spiritual direction:

Allow me to share with you a great treasure I have discovered. I hope you will reap good fruit from it. . . God loves us personally with a great benevolent love, with an Infinite and eternal love. This benevolent love consists in willing purely and exclusively what is good and what is best for the person who is so loved.

On this walk in the woods, I heard in the lyrics of John Denver the voice of the Lord wishing for me/us a sunny day like today, a song to make me feel this way, a tale sure to make me/us smile, a wish for God's sunshine on my shoulder all the while. Jesus' very presence.

In closing, I think about the *missioning* we receive at the end of Mass. Having been nourished by God's Word and the Eucharist, hopefully reconciled to our sisters and brothers, transformed in heart and spirit, and feeling the presence of the Lord, we go forth to be the eyes and ears, hands and feet, heart and soul of Jesus: sharing the love we have experienced in this gift of God in Jesus his son. And by our lives we are instruments of God helping others in *seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist*.

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