

Homily.6EasterA.5.14.23
Saint Bernard Church
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HOW TO GET MORE OUT OF COMMUNION

Back when my two sons were young adults, and old enough to responsibly drink alcoholic beverages, they happened to be visiting Tulsa at the same time. The youngest one, Tim Jr., asked me this question during his visit: “Dad, how can I get more out of Communion?”

So on a Sunday afternoon, the three of us went to McNellie’s Irish Pub in downtown Tulsa. For two hours, we had a little beer and talked about the Eucharist. That’s all we talked about. It was a great Catholic moment for all of us.

The question about how to get more out of Communion is a popular one. A related, popular expression, especially among young people, is “Mass is boring.” So here’s a 4 step process for getting more out of Communion and making Mass a more meaningful experience.

The first step is to ask the Holy Spirit to help us. In this evening’s First Reading from Acts of the Apostles, the apostles Peter and John go to Samaria to lay hands on new Christians so that they can be baptized in the Holy Spirit. If you want to know what baptism in the Holy Spirit accomplishes, read the first five chapters of the Acts of the Apostles.

We all received the Holy Spirit in our Baptism and Confirmation. But Baptism in the Holy Spirit is an unleashing of the graces and powers received in the sacraments. It leads to an awareness and activation of new levels in our spiritual life.

To receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, we need to desire it, pray for it and expect it.

The second step is to imitate Simeon, a devout Jewish man who shows up when Mary and Joseph bring Jesus as an infant to the temple. God had revealed to Simeon that he would see the Messiah before he died. So the Gospel of Luke tells us that Simeon “came in the Spirit into the temple.”

What this means is that Simeon knew from the Holy Spirit, before he entered the temple, that something special was going to happen in the temple that day. So Simeon’s expectations were high. He believed that he was going to experience something that he was longing for.

So step two means that, before you enter the doors of the church for Mass, you pray to the Holy Spirit, that He will guide you and inspire you. Like Simeon, have an awareness that what will happen inside the church will be beautiful, powerful and change your life. Focus on the fact that you will have an intimate encounter with the Savior of Humanity, that you will meet Him at the foot of the Cross, and that He will give Himself to you and become part of you. Prepare to meet Jesus.

The third step is to offer yourself as a living sacrifice at Mass. You are a priest, a member of what the Church calls the common priesthood of the faithful. So here's how you can make an offering of your life.

The bread and wine that are brought forward in procession and placed on the altar represent your life, and the lives of everyone else gathered in the church. Think about what's going on in your life, all the joys and blessings, and all the trials, challenges and anxieties. Put them on the altar with the bread and wine. Offer them to Jesus.

As the words of the priest express, present yourself at Mass as a "living sacrifice, holy and acceptable." Along with the priest, ask the Holy Spirit to come upon the gift of your life and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, make it holy, make it into the Body and Blood of Jesus. Unite your life to the life of Jesus.

As part of your prayer, you can ask Jesus to accept your life, unite it with His and make it a gift for someone or some group that you know, people who are in need. Your life can be like the loaves and fishes that Jesus took, multiplied and distributed to those who were hungry.

The fourth step takes place when you receive Jesus into your body and your life. Say a prayer of thanksgiving. And, in addition to thanking Jesus, ask Him how He wants you to use the grace that comes from being united with Him. Ask Him how you can sacrifice your life for others as Jesus sacrificed His life for you. Then commit to taking Jesus from the church to all the people and places that are part of your life.

In the fourth step, Jesus asks you if you will drink from the cup that He will drink, and you answer, "Yes," and really mean it.

If you follow these four steps, Mass will take on a new, more powerful meaning and purpose. You will never again ask how you can get more out of Communion. In addition to being united with the Savior of all humanity, you will have made at each Mass the most challenging commitment a human being can ever make.

The life of Jesus in you will steadily emerge in you and from you. You will receive more and more graces. And you will experience what Saint Paul calls the "surpassing greatness of His power for us who believe."