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SIMON AND OUR EXPECTATIONS IN RECEIVING THE EUCHARIST

Our Gospel this evening raises the issue of expectations. Where do our expectations come from? Are they reasonable? And when it comes to matters of faith, should we be limited by what we think is reasonable?

Poor St. Peter. So often he comes off looking badly in the Bible.

He sees Jesus walking on the water. Then he makes what seems like an absurd statement. “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” And Jesus says, “Come.”

For a moment, Peter’s expectations are beyond reason. The Master has called him. He must obey. He must trust the Master. In a burst of spontaneous faith, Peter gets out of the boat and walks on water. But not for long.

Let’s each of us ask the question this evening, “What are our expectations in our relationship with Jesus?”

Let’s be even more specific. This evening most of us will receive Jesus in the Eucharist. The very life of Jesus, the Savior of Humanity, who shared in the creation of the universe, will be present in us. What do we expect from this? How do we expect He might change our lives? If He wants to change our lives, will we let Him? Do we really believe in grace? If we do, it would seem that having Jesus inside us would be the greatest source of grace possible.

What is the teaching of the Church on the impact of receiving Jesus in the Eucharist?

The Church teaches that the presence of Jesus in us in the Eucharist is effective only if we have the required dispositions. Receiving Jesus produces effects in our lives **if** it is preceded by evangelization, faith and conversion. Jesus is always present in the Eucharist, but the power, the impact of His presence, depends on our expectations.

So just believing in the presence of Jesus and being reverent do not bring about the impact that having Jesus in us should bring. On the contrary, we have to expect that His presence in us is going to change our lives by making His divine power active in our lives. We should expect to walk on water, or something like that, something that might really surprise us.

When it comes to our expectations when we come to Mass, it might help to think about Simeon, a Jewish man who shows up in the Gospel of Luke.

Simeon had a belief that he would see the Messiah before he died. So, one day, the Bible tells us that Simeon “came in the Spirit into the temple.” He was filled with expectations and excitement.

When He came into the temple, he came upon Joseph, Mary and Jesus, who was only a few days old. Simeon knew immediately that Jesus was the Messiah, and he took Him into his arms, saying “Now, Master, you may let your servant go...for my eyes have seen your salvation.”

Father Timothy Gallagher, a well-known spiritual writer, suggests that we meditate on Simeon in preparation for going to Mass. He quotes the following recommendation from his mentor, a Fr. Bruno:

“When I enter the church, I will imagine that I see Simeon, who went in the Spirit to the Temple for the presentation and circumcision of Jesus. Pause now for a moment and accompany Simeon on that day. Sit with him in the quiet of his home. Remember with him the many years of desire, the long-delayed fulfillment, the never-failing hope. Feel with him the awareness that today is the day. Open your heart, like his, to receive the Spirit’s prompting. Draw near with him to the Temple. Enter the temple with him. Feel with him the longing, the hope, the joy, and the love of the encounter that will now take place.

In the communion of saints, speak with Simeon. Ask him to open his heart to you. Ask him to reveal to you what he felt that day. Then, ask him for a share in his expectations as you prepare to meet Jesus in the Mass.”

Saint John Vianney, a French priest, offers similar encouragement. He says about the Eucharist: “When God blesses you in the Eucharist, ask Him to open the eyes of your heart. Say to Him, like the blind man of Jericho, “O Lord, make me see!” If you say this to Him sincerely, you will certainly obtain what you desire. He has His hands full of graces, seeking someone to distribute them to.”

It would be very sad if any of us received little or no grace from receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus because our expectations were too low. Our goal should be, as St. Paul said, “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me.”

I’ll close with these words from Psalm 63:

O God, you are my God –
It is you I seek!
For you my body yearns;
For you my soul thirsts,
In a land parched, lifeless
And without water.
I look to you in the sanctuary,
To see your power and glory.

Amen.