

***A New Dawn for the Church***

# ***Why Return to Mass?***

These are Father Ricardo's reflections on the role of the Church in the post-Covid world. Or more concretely, why one is called to leave the comfort of the televised Mass in our homes, to participate actively in your Parish, in this case, Holy Trinity Parish.

This page contains highlights for those not inclined to read the entire reflection.

**"While the televised Mass can, and indeed it has, filled a void in a time of crisis, it cannot take the place of the real, physical presence at the Eucharistic celebration, that is, of the Mass. It cannot make authentic celebration possible, especially the celebration of the Eucharist.**

**Why??? Because the Mass is meant to be celebrated as a community, a medium or way of communication not only with God but also with others, and that is often the difficult part.**

**As Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI has put it, celebration of "the Eucharist is never an event involving just two, a dialogue between Christ and me. Fellowship in the body of Christ and in receiving the Body of Christ means fellowship with one another. It breaks up man's entire self and creates a new "we."**

**Communion with Christ is necessarily also communication with all who belong to him. The Church is of her nature a relationship, a relationship set up by the love of Christ, which in its turn likewise founds a new relationship of men and women with one another."**

**Pope Francis himself has alluded to the problematic nature of electronic transmitted Masses, that there was the temptation to replace the real presence of the faithful in the celebration of the Eucharist, with the substitution of worship on a television screen.**

**Yes, the argument that watching Mass on television arouses pious feelings in viewers may be true, but it reveals an incomplete understanding of what participation in the Mass involves. It is not simply a matter of feelings. It is much more than that.**

**As St. Paul says, "the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "you shall love your neighbour as yourself." And this means the neighbour we can see sitting next to us, during the celebration of the Mass. Not the neighbour we are connected to by virtue of a television or computer screen. There is the danger that in claiming to Love God, and by extension, our neighbour, what we really love is an abstract idea, a concept, as opposed to Jesus the person, as represented by the neighbour next to us at Sunday's Mass.**

**One of the characters in the writer Dostoevsky's novel "The Brothers Karamazov" says, "the more I love humanity or mankind in general, the less I love man in particular." And, the character continues, "I am incapable of living in the same room with anyone for two days together." But this is EXACTLY what Christ asks of us during the Mass. This is what loving our neighbour entails, putting up with his self-evident flaws and defects."**

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I ended my previous message raising the general question as to the continued relevance of the Church in today's post-Covid world. This leads us to perhaps the key question, namely, the role or perhaps, more accurately, the relevance of the Parish Church today.

More concretely, why should you leave the comfort of your home and return to your Parish, Holy Trinity Parish, despite the dispensation to attend Mass until September 1. Of course, what I say applies just as well to other Parishes, as it does to Holy Trinity Parish.

*Masses on television or the internet cannot take the place of the real, physical presence at the Eucharistic celebration.*

The role of the Parish has been and will always remain that of bringing the Gospel, the Good News, Jesus Christ, to the People through the proclamation of the faith and the celebration of the Sacraments. Christ specifically told his disciples “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

However, we have to face the harsh reality that the Parish in today's world is no longer the primary gathering and social centre, as it may or may not have been in former days. And Covid-19 has only complicated matters.

Yes, one cannot deny that the transmitted Masses over the TV and internet provided a vital role during the enforced confinement we all had to endure. For many it was a source of solace and inspiration during the unbearable isolation that was imposed on the world. In addition, no one can deny the enormous contribution of the electronic age in fostering the idea of a shared humanity, a common brotherhood among all the peoples of the world. This one cannot deny.



Social networks have made an enormous contribution in the transmission of information, and the Church has benefited from this, especially in the form of homilies and catechetical instruction.

But, celebration of the Mass is something different. While it can, and indeed it has, filled a void in a time of crisis, it cannot take the place of the real, physical presence at the Eucharistic celebration, that is, of the Mass. It cannot make authentic celebration possible, especially the celebration of the Eucharist.

Why??? Because the Mass is meant to be celebrated as a community, a medium or way of communication not only with God but also with others, and that is often the difficult part.

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Sunday’s Mass. One of the characters in the writer Dostoevsky’s novel “The Brothers Karamazov” says, “the more I love humanity or mankind in general, the less I love man in particular.” And, the character continues, “I am incapable of living in the same room with anyone for two days together.”

But this is EXACTLY what Christ asks of us during the Mass. This is what loving our neighbour entails, putting up with his self-evident flaws and defects.

Yes, the social network has contributed a great deal to the idea of a shared humanity, a “common brotherhood.” But a shared humanity, a “common brotherhood,” that is a concept, an abstract ideal. We are called to live in a real world, with real people, not a virtual world with its virtual reality, or its abstract ideals.

There is no such thing as a “private Christianity.”

The Mass is where one encounters real people, the person with “an oily expression on his face,” those that “sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak, or double chins, or odd clothes.” These are the words the older devil uses in his advice to his nephew, the younger devil, in C.S. Lewis’s “Screwtape Letters”. This, the older devil explains, this lends itself to creating the idea that the Catholic “religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous.” But this is exactly the so-called “ridiculousness” what Jesus Christ willed and wanted, and which the devil will never be able to understand.

How much easier to remain in the comfort of your tv or computer room than meet those type of people in the Church. But this is precisely what being a member of the Church is about, “love of God, and love of neighbour.” There is no such thing as a “private Christianity.” And as Christians, we are called to take the Church in her human day-to-day reality (as messy, or smelly, or devious or conniving as it may be) as much as her divine and eternal perfection.

And you, Parishioners, you are all too aware of this flawed human day-to-day reality: From Priests who are not dedicated to their vocation as they should be, reflected in the scandalous pursuit of money, be it in the form of baptismal or funeral fees, or even year-end bonuses . . . the fancy sunglasses or SUVs . . . homilies whose content and grammatical structure are worthy of an adolescent . . . to employees of the Church who are officious or lack social graces, or who use their position to satisfy their unfulfilled need for power, power which they will not be able to achieve in the much more competitive secular world.

Yes, we all know that. That is nothing new! The Church has always attracted what the world considers “the second rate.” WHY??? Because unlike the secular world, the world that does not believe in God, she does not discard or spit or vomit out what the world considers second rate. In fact, she protectively embraces the second rate, gives them a home. That is a historical fact. It is nothing new. St. Paul himself says this explicitly in the First Letter to the Corinthians: 26, “Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. Rather, God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might boast before God.”

As that great Saint and intellectual giant of the 19th Century, Cardinal Newman, perhaps the greatest mind of that century, writing about his time, which would be applicable today as well, he compares his time to “the first age of the Church, when there was little of position . . . of learning, of wealth . . . when Christians were chiefly of the lower orders; when we were poor and ignorant, when we were despised and hated by the great . . . as a low rabble, or a stupid and obstinate association.”



“God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong”

Saint Newman left the security and fame that he enjoyed in the Anglican Church, the intellectual giant of Oxford University, and became a Catholic even though he “found nothing attractive about Roman Catholics; he admitted that he did not find himself attuned to them . . . he expected little from them, and in becoming one of their number he had made himself an outcast; he had, as he put it, turned to the wilderness . . . Yet, to his soul, full of faith, the step was inevitable, and he was never to regret it for a moment.”

And why did he do it??? Because he was convinced that it was the one true faith . . . that in its embrace of the “lower orders, of the poor and the ignorant, that low rabble,” he was following an unbroken line from the time of the Apostles. And this is what God expects of us, as baffling and as difficult as it may seem.

This is what being a Catholic means. Embracing the so-called “lower orders, the poor and the ignorant, that low rabble.” And yes, MUCH MORE DIFFICULT, embracing those as well who try to take advantage of one’s presumed naivety or innocence, the bullies and the connivers with their tangled webs, (and they exist among the Clergy as well!!!), of whom one has to pretend to be oblivious to their silly and amateurish shenanigans, or their clumsily disguised condescension.

Yes, one has to embrace that lot as well, as difficult as it is. Because this is what Christ himself did: he descended from Heaven and became one of us, one of the so-called “lower orders, one of the poor . . . that low rabble,” a human being with all our strengths and weaknesses and limitations. And if He did it, we can at least try to do the same.

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