

Living the Spirit

November, a Time for Evangelization

As we go about our ordinary pursuits in life, the Church continues her work of evangelization in places we hardly expect ever to see. Evangelization is the task that Christ gave to the Church as He ascended into heaven. It is the work that the Holy Spirit sustains in myriad ways as history unfolds. Once there was a clear evidence of success in this work. At Pentecost there were thousands added to the faithful. In the ages of the first millennium nations were added to this number. In their development they adopted Christian principles and formed many traditions to support a Christian way of life. That was the work begun by the great apostles of the Gospel, like Cyril, Methodius, Patrick, Boniface and others known only to God.

In our own nation in much later times the Eucharistic presence of Christ began in a very small way. Catholics were generally not appreciated as Christians. The Puritans left comfortable homes to establish a refuge from the evils they saw as personified in popes, bishops, and in religious acts like the Mass etc. Meanwhile the Spanish sought out gold and brought a religious belief to the natives they conquered. Fortunately, many good persons knew well the dimensions of their faith. They overcame greed to bring spiritual blessings.

The Church in our nation has grown in numbers. It has experienced long periods of fighting to exist – of course, in a rather peaceful way. There still remain battles for the soul of the nation. Christians join together to oppose the evils that oppress the human spirit. One of these is the absence of God from our lives or the lives of our fellow citizens. We stand firm to hold up the dignity of every human person, from conception to natural death. That mission is our present evangelization.

Within the smaller boundaries of our faith life we must be careful not to discard too readily the pieties of our past. The bishops meet again this month to help us sort out the needs we have for living a good Christian life as members of Christ's Body, the Church. They will make serious efforts to bring the Church's teaching on major truths to our nation. Confronting the ordinary problems of our own daily lives will probably hardly be touched by their pronouncements. Yet, the Church must stand for something.

This leads me to meditate upon what you and I stand for. I hope we can agree to uphold the many little aspects of our traditions that help us in our spiritual life. This life is a quest for something yet to come. It is for a permanent possession of the life that God began in us at baptism. One of our traditions is to celebrate God's goodness by a time of thanksgiving. We Catholics know that the word Eucharist means, "to give thanks." So, for us every Mass is a time for thanksgiving. It is a celebration in which we all join. Priests preside and in that time and place they act in the person of Christ. Christ comes among us to live within us. His substantial presence lasts only minutes within us, but his grace remains to strengthen us in our daily lives.

I wonder if we appreciate the many ways in which Christ is present to us in our parish church. Of course, we know he is present in the Eucharist in the tabernacle. That is why

we genuflect or make a reverence before this place. He is symbolized by the altar, which reminds us of his sacrifice. We listen to the Word of God. We join in singing with the choirs of angels in their heavenly song of praise. We come to the feast ready to adore, love, speak of our sorrow for sin, beg graces and favors we think needed for ourselves and others.

The Mass is the core of our spiritual life. It is never boring for those who approach realizing that a new grace is being offered for each of us, if only we accept it. Perhaps a word from the Scriptures we hear, or even the homily, will be that grace. How should we leave the Mass? [I am tempted to say, when it is over!] But we should leave with uplifted spirits, comforted by those graces received. We should leave with a feeling of regret that we cannot stay. But we leave with faith activated, with hope aroused, and love inflamed.

Yes, the Mass is the center of our Catholic spirituality. Still, there are other prayers we make that do more for us than they do for God. You will know all about these. They are the prayers that come from your heart. Sometimes, you may even recognize them. At other times you should know God is reading the silence of your heart, the unspoken longings of your soul.

November brings us to a realization of an end that is coming. The year grows old. But there is still, some beauty left. The colors of falling leaves may offset the task of raking them up. The colder weather may lead us to appreciate the warmth we have in our homes, a warmth that we bring into our family relationships. Our tasks will be many, as we prepare for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Already the stores are pushing us forward. Yet, somehow we must not forget the reason for these seasons. Let's try to find time to give ourselves the spiritual boost we need. Perhaps an extra Mass or two will be the way to go. I hope so.

Let us not forget that this is the month of All Souls. There are those for whom we must pray, loved ones or those whom we have known as benefactors in our lives. We pray at first for them, hoping that soon these prayers will be directed to them. In the meantime we allow ourselves to see how many people have been gifts of God to us. Each of us can have his or her private list. Mine is very long. And miracle of miracles, the list keeps growing.

There are Saints in this month that we remember as a Church. However, the liturgical spirit is really one of Ordinary Time. It is as if we are to value the ordinary since it makes up so much of our lives, material and spiritual. Some of the ordinary really is of great value. What we often take for granted as ordinary is precious indeed. I won't burden you with my own list here. I hope you stop to think of yours. [I do recall that sometime ago there was a fad of saying: "happiness is...." and you fill in the blanks. Like a warm fuzzy? Like your favorite dessert?] Just a thought – find the ordinary and appreciate it and you will be making progress in living the Spirit.

*God love and bless you always!
Monsignor David Morrison*