

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2022 C

The Eucharistic Revival has helped me already to be more intentional about Mass and what is really happening here. I admit that the prayers we repeat often can become so familiar that I can go on autopilot. Slowing down and concentrating on what God is doing in our midst mean that Mass can never be boring. Just before the Preface and the Eucharistic Prayer, the celebrant invites: “Pray that my sacrifice and yours will be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.” *My sacrifice and yours* ... what does that mean? In the first place, of course, it means our prayerful union with the one perfect offering of Jesus on the Cross, the redemption of all things to which we become present at every Mass. Already that redeeming love was reflected in Abram’s exchange with God as he explored the boundaries of God’s mercy – *the goodness of even a few could save the many*. When we gather here, mercy is fully revealed, where time itself is changed, so that we do not just remember something that happened 20 centuries ago; it is our reality, here and now. As Jesus offered His life for us, so we too offer our lives through Him to the Father.

But “my sacrifice and yours” also gets very personal, very individual. Over the years of ministry, I have been inspired and truly humbled by glimpses of the sacrifices the members of the Body of Christ offer – and I don’t mean whatever folks put in the collection or donate to worthy causes. These sacrifices go far deeper. Some offer their sorrows and losses; their prayers and anxieties for loved ones; their frustrations at hopes that will never be fulfilled, plans that will never be realized, reunions that will not take place in this world. There are the aches and pains and diminishment of aging; the abilities and opportunities that have disappeared with time; the friendships that are gone, sometimes suddenly and sometimes gradually. Some offer weary hours of work and care for others who may never say thank you; misunderstandings and even lies that have damaged relationships; or the dull routine that seems more like just staying alive rather than truly living. Some offer their struggles with addictions, or habits of anger or impatience or being hypercritical, or just their doubts and questions about a God Who makes us wait, does not seem to answer questions, and sometimes simply says No. Jesus tells us: “*Ask, and you will receive; seek, and*

you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you;” but many of our prayers, even those that are quite unselfish and filled with concern for others, may seem to fall on deaf ears. All of these sacrifices and more are gathered up here as you say: “May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands” ... and I am in awe of the trust and love the People of God bring to the altar. *My sacrifice and yours ... what does it mean to you, today?*

When Mother Teresa was canonized in 2016, one of the folks in a former parish gave me a copy of a small card she had received from Mother Teresa in 1992, when this lady was struggling with some serious health issues. The card encouraged her to pray for Mary’s intercession, and then she wrote: *“She will help you to recover if it is God’s will for you, or else obtain for you the grace to take what He gives and give what He takes, with a smile. For this is real holiness.”* After she died, the world came to know that other than a 5-week respite in 1959, Mother Teresa experienced literally decades of emptiness in her own prayer life. Her spiritual life seemed frozen in that moment of Good Friday when Jesus cried out from the Cross – “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Like Jesus, her solidarity with the suffering around her united her so completely to the Cross that her sacrifice is beyond our comprehension. What God took from her was a sense of His presence in prayer, though she never gave up that search; what He gave her was a heart so deeply touched by suffering that charity flowed out from her spiritual wounds, just as it did from Jesus at Calvary. And all this, she accepted with a smile ... not a grim or ironic surrender, but the unshaken conviction that God’s will leads unfailingly to happiness in the end, even if it is an end we cannot see.

Find some quiet time and place this week, even for a few minutes, and say, like the Apostles: “Lord, help me to trust You, and teach me to pray.” Ask for St. Teresa of Calcutta’s intercession to say: “Jesus, give me *the grace to take what You give, and to give what You take, with a smile ... my sacrifice, and yours.*”