

Pastor's corner - Eucharist and Common Priesthood - August 28, 2011

From time to time we are reminded in the liturgy of the common priesthood of the faithful. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states in numbers 1591 and 1596: "The whole Church is a priestly people. Through baptism, all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ. This participation is called the common priesthood of the faithful, (or in simple terms) our baptismal priesthood." In the first letter of Peter we are said to become "a royal priesthood (2:9)" and that we are called "to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (2:5)." I often use the expression that we need to nourish each other's faith so that when we leave the church we will try to live our faith in our daily life.

This means that in the celebration of the Eucharist we are all, both the celebrant as well as the baptized, called upon to offer the sacrifice of the mass. The celebrant's ministerial priesthood, based on the baptismal priesthood shared by all baptized, finds its highest expression in the celebration of the Eucharist. And so also the common baptismal priesthood of the faithful finds its highest expression in the celebration of the Eucharist. That is why the Eucharist is the center of Christian living. The crowning priestly action of the baptized is the offering of themselves as a spiritual sacrifice to God in union with the sacrifice of Jesus. That is why Paul exhorts his community in Rome and here at Saanich Peninsula Parish: "I urge you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship (Romans 12: 1-2)." Of course, we need to remember that Paul's Semitic expression "body" means the whole living person in all that he/she does and lives, day in day out, one day at a time.

In the Vatican II documents it is stated that the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful is consummated (consummatur) in union with the sacrifice of Christ through the ministry of priests, who offer Christ's sacrifice in a sacramental manner. The entire ministry of priests is consummated in that action of offering the Mass in which the people consummate their own spiritual sacrifice. The faithful offer their lives as a living sacrifice in union with the sacrifice of Jesus which is made present at Mass through the ministry of the priest. We all enter and become the living sacrifice of the body of Christ.

All that the priest does for the people, all his preaching and teaching, all his shepherding and nurturing, all the celebrations of the other sacraments, lead to and end in the consummating action of the celebration of the Eucharist. This is based on what Christ did himself: after all, the crowning action of Christ's own life and ministry was his priestly offering of himself to God in the sacrifice of the cross. The sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of the mass, one and the same sacrifice, is completed only when the whole people of God, united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, are offered as one sacrifice in union with Jesus.

Ultimately, it is the quality of our daily lives and ministry which determines the quality of our Eucharistic celebration. We come together with all who we are and live (our joys, our pains, our mistakes, our hopes and gifts) and offer that up at the Eucharist as a living sacrifice completing the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. And in turn, when we leave after the celebration, it is the Eucharist which determines the quality of everyone's spiritual sacrifice, the living of our daily lives, day in day out, one day at a time.

Shalom