

June 12, 2020

This weekend the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ which used to be called Corpus Christi which has had all kinds of rituals and practices and understandings over the course of Church history.

We have no clear understanding of how our earliest ancestors in faith made their way from the historical Jesus to the resurrected Christ to the Church that we are in continuity with today.

There is a big gap of time from the historical events to the written or oral accounts of communities of people claiming to be disciples of Christ who developed rituals around which those communities developed identity and discerned a way forward and what they did in memory of him.

The overall assumption claimed in various New Testament texts in particular was that the Spirit of God was intimately involved but given that, we still have wide gaps of time and text to support the first records of what we call, The Church, found in the various writings some of which came to be called, The New Testament.

My own thinking is that the emerging Christian notion of “sacrifice” was a key to what happened.

Sacrifice had been a staple element of religion not from the beginning but from early on.

From the beginning, especially if you study matriarchal fertility artifacts and make a lot of conjecture as women have never fared well in religion even though it was women who intuited a sense of transcendence in human life because they actually experienced it is pregnancy and birth and this was, I think, the beginning of a knowledge of spirituality not gynecology.

So, I believe “transcendence” came before sacrifice and by that I mean people, people who could become pregnant and bring forth new life, had the insight that we are more than the limits of our physical bodies.

Sacrifice came later when males and patriarchy became the dominant factor in organizing and developing human initiatives that eventually came to be known as religion.

Please note that I am grossly oversimplifying the whole evolutionary processes, but I want to make a point relevant to the feast for this weekend and what it might mean for our faith today.

When men started sacrificing, they did not sacrifice themselves, they sacrificed other human, animal, and vegetable creatures.

Jesus Christ sacrificed himself, no one else.

He inspired no retributive violence or revenge; he forgave his murders, he sent his disciples to be forgivers, he breathed his Spirit of forgiveness.

I think what made the Church so credible and what caused it to be accepted so widely in a relatively short period of time is that it called for, taught, and lived, self-sacrifice. It did not involve sacrificing anyone or anything else.

I realize that the presence of the Catholic Church in this country as we knew it, at least, is at stake as a result of the COVID 19 virus and the ongoing consequences of that, the full force of which remains to be seen.

If the young people of this country are to find any value in the Church's presence in their lives in the future, though, I think they will need to see more than self-conscious efforts to get back to public Mass.

I realize the significance of the Body and Blood of Christ as a central and essential belief and that our celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy is the source and destiny of our lives but the dead, the sick, the grieving, the unemployed, the hungry, the beaten women and children, the abandoned, the lost and forgotten and those marginalized as sacrifices by others for their own sense of identity, safety, and livelihood are, likewise, the body and blood of Christ.

When the minister holds the Bread or Cup up to you and says, The Body of Christ/The Blood of Christ, they mean you and if you, so too everyone as no less a believer than Augustine taught.

There is enormous suffering in our world, in our country, there are serious and extremely consequential conflicts of all kinds but none more potentially destructive than the racial/economic/equality conflicts and issues and the presence of the Catholic Church as a self-sacrificing presence is notable, I fear, for absence and not presence with very few exceptions one notable one being, Martin Gugino, a member of The Catholic Worker Movement founded by Dorothy Day in Buffalo, New York.

I suspect that the presence and absence of the identified Church may be more influential in what the Catholic Church in this country will look like down the road than our prolonged absence from Sunday Mass.

When Jesus said, "Do this in memory of me" he was talking about sacrificing ourselves, and I think to the extent that young people witness that, they will follow or they will not.