
CELEBRATIONS OF THE WORD



More and more in our parish communities, Sundays included, celebrations of the Word are held rather than eucharistic celebrations. I want here to talk about the opportuneness and richness of these celebrations, and offer a few guidelines on the subject.

RICHNESS OF THE WORD

One of the most beautiful results of the Second Vatican Council was to make Holy Scripture available to all the faithful. The conciliar document on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* introduces us to the mystery of divine revelation and to its transmission through the ages; it reminds us of the importance of this priceless heritage of the Church's life: *"The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord, in so far as she never ceases, particularly in the sacred liturgy, to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ."* [No. 21]

RICHNESS OF A CELEBRATION

Wherever two or three are gathered in the name of the Lord, the Risen One is in their midst. It is important to become aware of this presence of the Living One, of the wonderful presence of the Word made flesh. It is a Word of Life: *"In the sacred books the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks to them. And such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigour, and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life. Scripture verifies in the most perfect way the words: 'The Word of God is living and active' (Heb. 4:12), and 'is able to build you up and give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified,' (Acts 20:32; Cf. 1 Th. 2:13)."* [Ibid.]

WEEKDAY CELEBRATIONS

If in your community there are times when there are no eucharistic celebrations because of a shortage of priests, I invite you to display as much faith in the celebration of the Word taking place [as you would for a eucharistic celebration]. So as to avoid any kind of last-minute improvising, it is of the utmost importance that the head of the parish anticipate these times of celebration and, better still, that he or she organise a team of animators of these celebrations, and that adequate training be given these animators.

SUNDAY CELEBRATIONS

In his recent Apostolic Letter on keeping the Lord's Day holy, Pope John Paul II, taking into consideration the impossibility of having a eucharistic celebration in every community, recommended the holding of Sunday gatherings in the absence of a priest. In our diocesan Church such celebrations are already being held more and more often, especially in the Southern Victoria Deanery, due to the small number of priests available.

PASTORAL REQUIREMENTS

Such celebrations cannot be improvised. The head of the parish will ensure that they are presided by a pastoral agent or by someone who has been mandated to this effect. Our diocesan Pastoral Formation Service has been authorised to train these celebration facilitators. Care will be taken that a parish not be without a eucharistic celebration two consecutive Sundays. There cannot be a celebration of the Word and a eucharistic celebration in the same church on the same day. A reflection on the Word of God should follow the readings. Every parish should have the required liturgical books which have been published by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

FUNDAMENTAL GATHERING

No one should dispense from the Sunday gathering except for a serious motive. The Church's long tradition indicates that the disciples of Jesus were faithful to such gatherings in order to celebrate week after week the Resurrection of Jesus and to grow in faith, hope, and love as a community. The simple fact of meeting together is already a sign to our world, a great sign of hope. Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, so will we be raised. Together we form the Body of Christ: it is essential that we witness to this regularly.

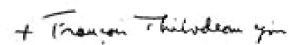
FEELING OF BELONGING

If we review the story of different parish communities we quickly realise that they were not always privileged with weekly eucharistic celebrations. The missionary priest would come once in a while, sometimes two to four times a year, to visit the community and celebrate a Mass with the people; but what fervour there was in welcoming the priest and celebrating the divine liturgy. It was the high point of their Christian life. Such a Mass could be celebrated because on all other Sundays the community had met together for prayer and study of the Word of God either through reading or religious instruction taken from a number of catechisms available.

A PARCHED EARTH

The psalmist stresses that his heart and soul are like a parched land thirsting for the Word of God. Happy are we to hunger and thirst for the Word of God! We have received a precious inheritance: the Word of God. We must therefore discover it and share it. May each of our Sundays be made of welcome and sharing of this Word.

Have a good week!



+ François Thibodeau

Bishop of Edmundston

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