

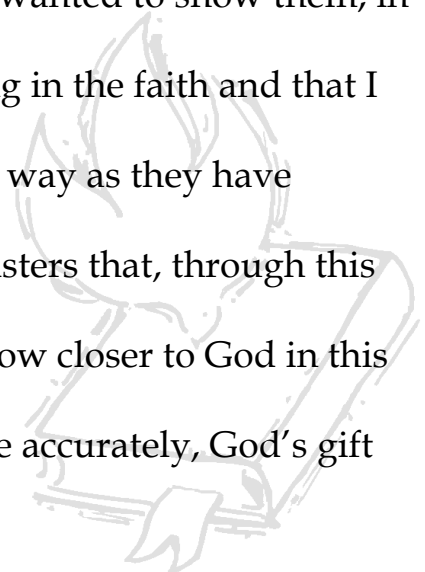
**Homily**  
**Ash Wednesday - B**  
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski  
February 17, 2021

Jl 2: 12-18  
Ps 51: 3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14, 17  
2 Cor 5: 20 - 6:2  
Mt 6: 1-6, 16-20

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On previous occasions over the last couple months, the sisters of the association monastery the core Claire's (The Colettine Sisters) asked me to learn how to pray the Mass in the extraordinary form, which has been exceedingly difficult for me. Learning the Latin Mass is like learning a foreign language, me having to relearn how to celebrate the Mass in a completely different way.

I chose to learn the Mass in Latin for two reasons. First, these religious sisters have been such a holy example of faith to me; they inspire me to live a better life that I have already tried to do. These sisters have few vocations (and none locally); I wanted to show them, in this way, that I believed in what they were doing in the faith and that I would try to sacrifice for them in this particular way as they have sacrificed for all of us. I wanted to show these sisters that, through this liturgy, we truly cared for them. If the sisters grow closer to God in this form of prayer, that this is my gift to them, more accurately, God's gift



to them.

The other reason I celebrate the mass in Latin in the Extraordinary Form is to give me an opportunity to learn a different way to pray and hopefully improve my faith life and my life in general. Like any course a student undertakes, your first step into foreign waters is quite frightening and you tend to make mistakes; Lord, I make mistakes in the Mass! The more I celebrate the Mass and the more I become comfortable with it, the more I truly believe God works through me to offer this grace to others.

Concerning this Latin Mass, besides getting used to a cassock and biretta that I have not worn for almost twenty years, I have come to appreciate two gifts of this Mass that seem applicable to me on Ash Wednesday and the Season of Lent these next forty days. As many of the signs, symbols and rituals of this Mass are different from the *Novus Ordo* Mass in the vernacular to which most of us are accustomed, I very much appreciate how the priest stands *Ad Orientum* (in an easterly direction) in relation to the Eucharist.

At a Latin Mass, the presence of Christ in this Eucharist (body, blood,

soul and divinity) takes the first position at the Mass as if Christ is “leading” us in prayer. During the Eucharistic Prayer at the Latin Mass, the celebrant places the host directly on to the cloth on the altar (called a corporal); at the time what is called “the words of institution” when the priest shows the changed bread to the faithful, both the thumb and the forefinger of each hand touches that consecrated host.

According to the instructions of the Mass (or the rubrics, called so because the text that directs the celebrant is written in red ink – in Latin, rubric), once those fingers are touching the body of Christ, those fingers remain together throughout the entirety of the Mass until those two fingers are washed. From the moment that the priest touches the sacred body, the precious body of Christ until those fingers are cleansed after communion, it is called the custody of the fingers. That is the phrase that’s used in the Latin mass, the rubrics instruct the celebrant to hold reverent what is called, “the custody of the fingers.” Just like one should be diligent in having custody of the eyes, the mouth or the ears, the celebrant is called to be a caretaker of those fingers that touch the precious body of Christ.

I thought about this image in the world of our faith lives as well. As our bodies are a gift from God and a temple that is considered sacred, we have been given the ability to control the manner in which we act and the manner in which we live. The rubrics of this “custody” reminds me that this diligence of bodily control does not just apply at the Holy Mass, but in life itself. I have custody of my own body; my body is the temple in which God resides. God can work through me if I allow God to do that; the temple of my body has the ability to create and the ability to destroy.

Yes, I have control of whether I will have custody in a good way or in a bad way. Do I fast? Do I pray? Do I give alms? What do I do with this gift of life, body, and soul that our Lord has presented to me? Do I give it back to the Lord or do I take it for granted? Do I use my body as a vessel through which the Lord can work through me or do I use it for selfish purposes and therefore defile the body?

The other part of the Latin Mass that really strikes me as important is the amount of *silence* that is offered during the prayers of the Mass. Only one phrase of the Eucharistic Prayer is spoken aloud; the other words

are said in what is called “the quiet voice,” allowing those in the congregation who also are praying to allow God to speak to them in this quiet. As I have preached on numerous occasions, God speaks to us in the silence of our hearts, yet we are a people of noise that shut God out

I notice that in so many churches, God cannot be heard because the air in the church is filled with the noise of talking and laughter and whatever people are doing that is not focused on the divine presence within that room. I often notice that silence is devoid in our places of worship prior to mass because people talking instead of praying to God. We are told that inside the church, in the nave of the church and especially in the sanctuary of the church, the body of Christ. God’s body, soul, and divinity are right before us. Yet, instead of adoring that divine presence, we often turn our backs to it as we fill the air with noise.

Essentially what I have learned, what I have preached over and over again, is that God speaks to us the most in the silence. God spoke to Samuel in the silence of his dreams. God spoke to Elijah in the quiet on top of a mountain. God spoke to Jesus during his temptation in the

desert. The Spirit of God *wants* to talk to us but can only talk to us in the silence. If we allow that silence to speak, if we allow God to speak to us in prayer during that time, great things can happen.

Still, even after preaching about this to folks, they (and I) still fill the air with noise so much that we lose our composure. We lose our focus and we certainly lose the presence of God. During the season of Lent, I implore you – when is the last time you have spent time in silence with God to allow God to speak to you? I ask you to do this for five minutes every day during this liturgical season. That is all I am asking of you – five minutes to allow God to guide us and lead us and show us where we need to go. Hopefully with that guidance we can find God’s love, and embraced that love.

We only can encounter that presence in the silence, in the custody of our own temples. Let it realize the gift of life we have been given; let us allow God to speak through it. Let us share that message of God’s gift in the silence with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.