

Sunday's liturgy is God's worship not ours

In this year of faith, we have many reasons to examine ourselves and see how we can improve the living out of our faith. In terms of human achievement, when the only "duty" we hold anyone to, including God and ourselves, is that we get all we can, we can be sure that we will eventually lose everything of value. You simply cannot be a friend of God and excuse yourself from offering him the praise that is due by the complete sacrifice of your life. Authentic worship will always reflect that. This seems to be a most important moral matter.

I have an image to plant in your head. It's a TV "unreality" show. It's called the God Show. It happens every Sunday in Christian churches everywhere and the show is all about which of those churches can supply the most entertaining, participative, funny, feel-good experience that one can find. It's all about getting more people and more money, and, coincidentally keeping people from complaining about how boring Mass is.

One of the foundational principles of every religious sentiment is that God is supreme and is to be honored, adored and worshipped. What does worship mean? And why is it necessary? I ask this because it is easy to slip into thinking that God is like a kindly grandfather who would never punish his grand children. In these times, we do not often see God as one to whom profound sacrifice is to be offered. In modern terms, people today tend not to "feel" as though the most profound acts of sacrifice and worship are owed to God. Note, I did just say owed to God. This is a matter of justice and, thus, moral duty. One of the modern and popular errors regarding religion is thinking that religion and worship should make us feel good. Unfortunately, this thinking presents a great obstacle to spiritual growth. This sort of thinking turns the Mass into something we do for us, not something we offer to God and to which He invites us. It means that we will not conform our minds and hearts to God's will, but to our collective view of the "values" we inject into worship at Mass.

When Jesus asks the question, Who among you would give your children a snake when they ask for bread, he turns the world's way of thinking on its head. We cannot say this of anyone or anything else, but we can say it of God: God only acts for your good. If that action of God looks like punishment or penance, and indeed it does at times--even in the case of his dearly beloved Son Jesus--it is always a door opening to supreme happiness. One might not like the taste of the medicine, but in God's way, this medicine always restores to health and always makes you better than you were before.

Authentic worship involves both elements, giving glory to God and the sanctification of believers. What current or trend is it that has virtually removed the Cross from our religious practice? Why has Catholic worship so often been made to try to be a vehicle that for recognizing this thing or that thing? Why do

so many think that the way we celebrate Mass is supposed to be something that makes one feel happy? Are we really supposed to feel like we have had fun when we come to Mass? Or when did preaching in all the Christian communities turn into an ongoing monologue on ways to feel good about oneself?

There is no person's life that will allow them to believe for very long that living a good and holy life will not involve the carrying of the Cross. What a disservice we do to our God and to our faith when we turn Sunday into "The God Show." I do not deny that we can admit a little light-heartedness into our Sunday experience, but I ask you, how is it respectful of the truth of your life, if worship of God does not pull you more deeply into the mystery of Christ's suffering and sacrifice. Shouldn't you leave here understanding that your sorrow over a child's trouble has been taken up into the mystery of Christ's sacrifice? Shouldn't the reality of serious illness, anxiety about one's security, or loss of the love of one's life reflected in not only the way we feel, but also in what we say and do in our Sunday worship?

The person who understands the act of worshipping God will be disposed to finding true meaning in Christ's offer to us to take unto himself the trials and tribulations, humiliations, self-sacrifice, and genuine surrender into what we offer the Father at each Mass. This becomes a way life. Through him and with him and in him, all glory and honor is yours. From the offering of Christ, who takes to himself our sufferings and fears, we leave with an assurance that the week ahead will also be an offering of sacrifice and praise to the Father that leads to true happiness for all eternity. We will see in that week and in each day a preparation for that final day when at last all of our burdens will be laid at His feet. We proclaim your death and profess your resurrection until you come again.