

retreatants, he will say mass for them himself. When he does this, he uses a missal so that his mass appears to be exactly like an authentic Catholic mass. He said that the result is very prayerful and spiritual, and that there is a sense of a spiritual presence of Jesus. But he had a question for me. "Why, when I pray over the gifts, they don't change into the body and blood of Jesus. Yet, they always change when you [a Catholic priest] pray over them?" As I said before, Dr. Davis' religious knowledge is based on his own personal experience, and he is not familiar with the theology of the Church. Yet, here his experience and Catholic theology match perfectly. When one is ordained a priest, one receives the gift of confecting the Eucharist.

We cannot go back to the old liturgy, not even for the sake of Presence. But I do believe that we priests, and you future priests, need to have a keen appreciation for Presence in the Mass. We need to take the words and gestures that are part of the new liturgy that point to Presence and emphasize them as much as possible.

Just as important, we need to love what we are doing. Jack Nicholson said that there were 34 takes before they wrapped-up the courtroom scene in the movie, *A Few Good Men*. When asked if doing all those takes was difficult for him, he said, "No, of course not I love to act." You cannot be a great actor if you do not love acting and you and I cannot be great priests if we do not love the Eucharist and love presiding at Eucharist. And, we cannot love the Mass to the fullest if we do not feel, understand, appreciate and experience in every part of our being the divine presence of Jesus in the Mass.

In other words, we need to experience something similar to what the late Jesuit priest, John Egan, describes in his book, *A Traveler Toward Dawn*. When dying of cancer, Egan was encouraged to write the book. During his life, he had kept a journal. This journal quote is taken from a summer session he attended at Notre Dame:

"On the fourth morning Jim was taking the standard apophatic approach to God. God is simply no thing. He is not a limited essence or a thing that I can get a clear concept of with my mind. He simply explodes all limited categories, all the limited concepts of my mind. So he is the great 'Who Is', incomprehensible to the human mind, the infinite one. He is the only One whose essence is to be. He is simply the one who is all in all, the source, the ground of all being, the fulfillment of all that exist, the one thing that sustains all being in existence and life.

"Nothing that I see or touch or experience is God. God simply exceeds every living creature infinitely. And so I can move through the whole of creation as Augustine did and question each lovely creature, *Are you God?* And each creature, even religious experiences, will answer and say, *No, I am not God, He infinitely exceeds me.* Not God, Not God, Not God. God alone is God. He is no thing. He is the only one who simply is. He is all in all."

I was struck by this. As I went to mass with four-hundred other classmates, this thought was playing in my head like a tape. *Not God, not God, you God, you alone.* As I came to Communion and the celebrant gave me the Body of the Lord and I ate, suddenly it hit me. Yes, finally you God. It took my breath away. God Himself, the great All, was with me. Astounded by the sudden realization, I came back and sat down overwhelmed with the wonder of it all. God who infinitely surpasses all that is, the God who is all and in all, is with me now. I possess the All. Dazed, filled with wonder, conscious of God with me, adoring gratified, my soul wheeled out for him in desire.

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Pamphlet 331

## **Divine Presence**

Fr. Richard Bain

I remember the priest telling my second grade class that our First Holy Communion would be the happiest day in our life; a day that we would always remember. He made us feel special, for we were going to receive our God. We were told that after receiving, we should return to our pews, place our hands over our face, so not to be distracted, and go into our hearts to let Jesus speak to us.

Receiving Communion then was a very special experience for little Dicky Bain. It still is today. In fact, I can honestly say that there is no spiritual experience that comes close to Communion. Nothing makes me feel more intimate with God. To this day after receiving Communion, I return to my place--most often that is the presider's chair, and silently go into my heart, and commune with God in the deepest part of my being. This Communion experience gives me a certain joy that nothing else can. The only explanation for this joy is found in what I am receiving; not a piece of bread, not a symbol, and not spiritual communion with Our Lord, but the body, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ.

When I was in the fifth-grade at Star of the Sea Grammar School, I had the privilege of being an altar boy. The first Mass I served was at the convent. It was early in the morning, around six a.m. We were told that the priest said words of consecration very softly so that no one could hear them. We were not told why. As an altar boy, I found it very special being in such close proximity to the priest as he spoke the words of consecration, because I could hear the words being spoken. This and other experiences I had while serving Mass made me feel very close to God.

When I was nineteen years old, I entered Maryknoll College Seminary in Illinois. It was the custom at Maryknoll for each of the several priests to say an individual private Mass. This was before concelebrated Masses were allowed. I remember

walking back to the sacristy with the priest, whom I had just served. When we walked past a Mass where the consecration was taking place, we would stop to kneel until it was finished. Again, I felt very close to God in these moments.

I left the seminary in 1963, not because I did not want to be a priest, but because I felt that the seminary was too restrictive and that I would get better formation by going to college and learning about life before submitting myself to such repression. I went back thirteen years later. In the intervening years, I lost my faith. I was not an agnostic; I was an atheist. If there was a God for me, He could only be far, far away and had no interest in me.

During this spiritually dry period of my life, I was working as the assistant corporate secretary of a utility company in downtown San Francisco. Every morning, I would park my car above the Broadway Tunnel and walk to work.

One morning, for no particular reason, I stopped into Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. It was an old, beautiful church with lovely statues and stained glass windows, very conducive to prayer. Yet, on this morning, the surrounding beauty did nothing for me. I looked at the tabernacle in the center of the old marble altar and thought, *“At one time in my life, I believed that Jesus was there. For me now, there is nothing in the tabernacle but a round thin piece of unleavened bread.”* Despite my unbelief, I said a prayer. *“Jesus, if you are really present in the tabernacle, let me know.”*

My journey back to the faith is an interesting one, at least to me, but that journey is not what this talk is about. So let’s fast-forward to a particular day a year or two later. I was in Old St. Mary’s Church at the noon Mass. The priest had just said the words of consecration and was elevating the host. On the evening before, I had been prayed over by a member of a local Charismatic prayer group for “the baptism in the Spirit.” As I knelt at the noon Mass, something happened. In years past, the consecration of the elements at Mass would

cause me to think something like this: *“The priest has just confected the Eucharist. Therefore, that is not bread that I am looking at; rather, it is the body, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. Christ is God. Therefore, that is not bread in front of me, but God.”*

Sometimes, this thought process would lead to fervor; often it would not. However, on this particular day in Old St. Mary’s Church, there was no thought process in me. On this day, the moment the priest held the host; there was warmth in my heart. It was my heart that was speaking, *“Jesus is as present on the altar right now as He was when He walked the face of the earth.”* In fact, my whole being knew that fact better in that moment than I knew my own name. I could not have been any more moved if I were to have seen Jesus’ actual body. My faithless prayer from the morning that I happened into Our Lady of Guadalupe Church was answered, loud and clear. *“Yes, Dick, I am here; body, blood, soul and divinity”*

I am sure you have heard often that Mass was celebrated quite differently before the close of the second Vatican Council. Before that time, the Mass evoked silent adoration. The focus was on the Divine Presence. For example, when Communion was taken, the host was not touched by the communicant, but was received by having it placed on the tongue while kneeling at a long rail, which separated the sanctuary from the assembly. During Communion, a white cloth was pulled over the rail and the server would hold a paten to catch any small pieces that would fall from the Communion host. When Communion was over, the priest would rub his fingers over the paten and then scrape the tiny white particles into his chalice. These particles were considered just as sacred as the full host from which they had broken.

In the February 12, 2005, issue of *The Tablet*, Eamon Duffy wrote, “Any social anthropologist will tell you that in fact the reality can’t be the same: meaning is not some immutable substance floating above and beyond the forms in which it is

expressed. Change the rituals, and you do change the beliefs, or at any rate, radically refocus them.”

The old liturgy emphasized Presence at the expense of community, anamnesis, the Word, and the whole dynamic of proclamation and response. The new liturgy unfortunately emphasizes these important aspects of the mass at the expense of Presence. Today, some surveys indicate that more than fifty percent of Catholics do not believe in the Real Presence. They believe what many of our separated brothers and sisters do, that the host becomes a merely symbolic presence, or at best a spiritual presence of Jesus. Has the change in the ritual changed the reality?

When I was stationed as an associate at St. Anselm’s Church in the early nineties, it hit me that too many of us in the Church were not showing proper reverence for the Sacred Species. You could see this from the manner in which Communion was received and the lack of devoted attention during the Eucharistic prayers.

A former parishioner of mine, Dr. Bruce Davis, had been a “New Age” minister in Marin County for ten years. Prior to coming to my parish, he had been pastor to a congregation of more than three hundred people. At Assisi, one of the most holy places in the world for New Age seekers, he was converted and baptized a Catholic. All of his faith comes from experience. He knows little or no theology. His pitch to his former New-Agers is, “What we are looking for in various forms of spirituality, eastern, western or New-Age, we will find best in the Catholic Church. Why? The Catholic Church emphasizes the Real Presence in the Eucharist and devotion to the mother of Jesus. These two devotions best bring us close to God.” After hearing this from Dr. Davis, some of his friends have become Catholic, too.

Dr. Davis is very famous in certain circles, especially in Europe. He has written several books on prayer and spirituality and gives retreats and workshops all over the world. He told me that when there is no mass available for him and his