

WHERE ARE THE CROWDS?

By Fr. Franklyn M. McAfee

One day while the saintly King Louis of France was at prayer in his private chapel before the Blessed Sacrament an excited aide ran in and, grabbing hold of him, began to shout "The people are saying that Christ has appeared in the courtyard down the street. You must come and see Him!" Without losing any of his prayerful composure the monarch replied, "Let those whose faith is weak run to see Him there, as for me I know that He is present here in the Blessed Sacrament even though I do not see Him."

We Catholics believe that Jesus Christ is present body, soul and divinity within the Eucharist but is our faith as strong as St. Louis'? Imagine the pandemonium that would break out if a leading rock group announced that they would be available at a local gym for personal conversations and autographs, or if President Carter announced that anyone who came to the White House would be given a private audience. And yet our churches are empty most of every day and often this has led to them being locked. Yet we believe that Jesus is there—God Himself. But where are the crowds?

Why are we failing to appreciate this tremendous mystery of our faith today? We fail because we lack two qualities needed in faith—simplicity and poverty. To really behold Jesus in the sacrament of the altar, to come to know Him as the Divine Lodger within our soul, we must become both child and beggar.

The people who are simple of heart and single-minded have always been rooted in their faith even despite the threat, at times, of "fire, dungeon or sword." Was it not simple children who flocked to Jesus, sat at His knees, reclined on the ground as so many petals, to hear His words? Their elders meanwhile were standing at a distance objectively pondering whether to accept this man for Whom He claimed to be. But the children knew! Have you ever looked into the eyes of a child about to make his first Holy Communion? Did you not see eyes of joy, of expectation, of love? Did you not see there the eyes of faith? Jesus the Lord had come to

earth in the silence of mystery to walk with him soul in soul. Together they share each other's thoughts, call out each other's name, and in a world marred by war, greed, and lust this young child dances for a moment in the sunshine presence of his Lord.

We must also become poor. "*O res mirabilis manducat Dominum pauper servus et humilis.*" "What a wondrous happening it is that a wretched and poor slave should feed upon his Master!" So says the great mystic and renowned theologian, Thomas Aquinas, about his feeling for the Holy Eucharist. We cannot see Jesus in the Eucharist unless we make ourselves poor. The satiated have no need of food, only the hungry do. Today we fill up our lives with material things and disregard all else. We can amass the wealth of this world and still feel empty for it cannot satisfy the deepest hunger, the hunger of the heart.

Jesus Must be First

"Less and less importance is being given to the Eucharist." These words of Our Lady at Garabandal are sadly proven true in many places day after day. It is one thing to move the Eucharist to some insignificant place in our churches and another to move it to an insignificant part of our lives. Jesus must be first always in our life or He is not there at all. He will not take second place. And yet that is how we treat Him. Many people who supposedly profess a belief in the Eucharist will receive that Eucharist and then leave before the celebration of Mass is finished. They have to be the first one out in the parking lot.

But what of Jesus Christ Whom they have received? And there is an increasing number of Catholics who do not genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament, who are far from attentive at the Consecration, or who receive the Eucharist dressed immodestly or in the state of mortal sin.

And, how empty the churches! Where are the crowds for the daily sacrifice of the Mass? How many people pass by a church and do not stop in to greet our Lord and keep Him company for even a few moments? How He treasures these visits and counts these moments when someone kneels in prayer before Him and allows Him to autograph their heart with love. How He yearns to be told your problems, to share your sorrows, to weep at your misfortunes and also rejoice in your successes. "Come to Me all you who find life weary and burdensome and I will refresh you." If Jesus meant what He said, why then, do we refuse to take Him at His word?

Today there is another important reason for visiting Our Lord and attending Mass—we must make reparation, not only for those who do not visit Him and do not attend Mass, but also we must make up for all the sacrileges that occur when priests and people subvert the liturgy to their own ends and foster disrespect and irreverence and even disbelief toward it. We must give more and more importance to the Holy Eucharist. It must be central to our lives and that of the Church because a life not anchored in the Eucharist is a life lost at sea.

Once God walked with man in a garden. Once God pitched His tent in the desert and lived there with His people, Israel, as they made their way to the Promised Land. God has once more pitched His tent among us—the word "tabernacle" means tent. What greater love or promise? Jesus Christ yesterday, today and tomorrow in the delicious silence of bread. □

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