



VIEWS

From
the
Pews

During 2021 we had the fortune of speaking with a large number of Catholics across the USA who shared their own thoughts on church and their spiritual journey. We have taken the liberty of summarizing a few of their thoughts.

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1. Wrestling with Faith: Can we make wrestling with faith a core part of the homilies and ministries?

Sometimes it feels like nobody else has any doubts about their faith. No obstacles. No ups and downs. The piety that we learn (which is good) can make others feel like they do not belong.

If the role of the parish is to bring everybody a step closer to Jesus, then help us overcome these main obstacles:

- **Indifference:** I am indifferent. I have no real need for God in my life. My life's pretty good.
- **Lifestyle:** My lifestyle does not gel with the teachings of the Church, so I don't belong or don't want to feel that I need to change in order to belong.
- **Piety:** I don't believe in all the crazy things like relics, apparitions, mystics, or modern-day miracles. I clearly am not a Catholic.
- **Angry:** I am angry with the Church. The abuse. The lack of warmth. The judgment. The corruption. I don't want to be associated with any of it.
- **Other Faiths:** If we are the true Church, what about Islam, Judaism, etc. What makes our convictions and faith any truer than theirs?
- **Eucharist:** I find the Eucharist a challenge mentally and spiritually. But everybody seems to "get it" — so I obviously don't belong.

OUR PETITION:

Please make obstacles easy to talk about so that they can be overcome.

2. The Eucharist and Encouragement: Can we stop talking about the Eucharist as though it is simple to understand and easy to accept?

The sky is falling! A large percentage of Catholics don't believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist! So what do we do? We simply repeat what we have been saying and shout louder: "Believe in the Eucharist!" This is not dissimilar to Americans abroad speaking louder when they're trying to be understood. It's not a great communication plan.

If priests take parishioners' belief in, appreciation for, and understanding of the Eucharist for granted, many will continue to struggle to grow closer to its mystery and the miraculous sacrament as a whole. Instead of building an echo chamber for the few whose beliefs and convictions appear insurmountable, try to understand where the rest of ordinary believers are at, and meet us there.

The Eucharist is the spiritual source and summit of our faith, not a membership card. In many ways it is the ultimate spiritual challenge: the Spiritual Iron Man, if you will.

Why? Because it requires so much strength, perseverance, and faith to believe in any or all of the following:

1. There is actually a God (big, scary, loving, all-powerful, who exists outside of time and space). The world laughs at you for thinking this, but your intellect challenges you to fully embrace it. Doing so is not simple.
2. This God can take bread and through some strange words and an imperfect presider manages to change it into flesh. Yep. Flesh. Stop right there and think. You have to accept that God can do that and that God does that every time, all around the world, somehow. Easy to accept? Me thinks not.
3. If that wasn't enough of a challenge, accepting that this bread is now the flesh of Jesus (who lived 2,000 years ago) is even stranger.
4. But this raises the question, why Jesus? Oh man. Now we are into the whole salvation arena. It starts with whether there is a Heaven and Hell. Yikes. That is a thorny one. Do we all go to heaven? Do some really go to hell? How unfair.
5. Then I need to jump over that challenge and get even tougher...Do I need Jesus to get into heaven?
6. So now I have actually consumed Jesus — now what? Is it magic? What do I do?

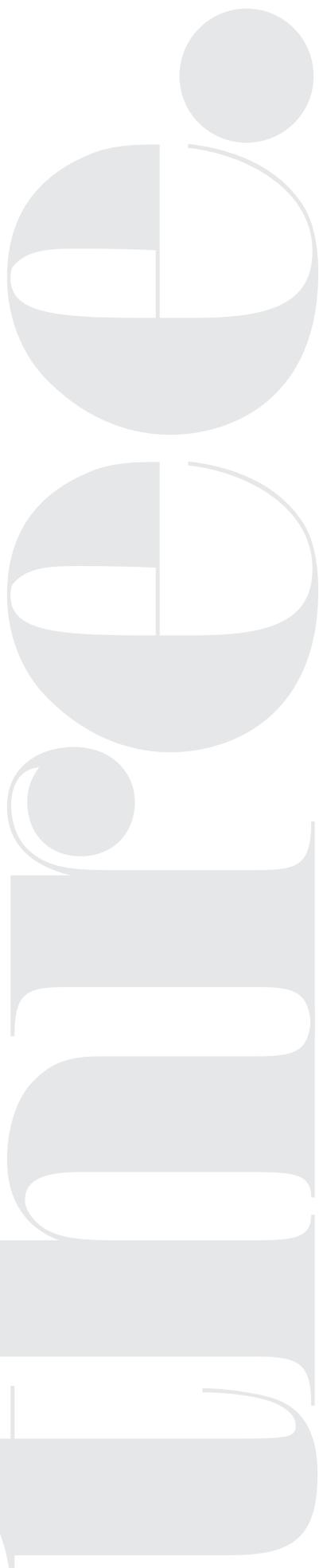
The Eucharist is not simple. It is unbelievably challenging and with that, very exciting. When tackled correctly it brings to mind a massive God who can help us seek humility. But only if the challenge is truly tackled, climbed, and kept real.

The point here is simple: we need to be encouraged, coached, and guided through this challenge. The world out there is telling us it is all nonsense. We are not always sure. The church inside is telling us it is simple and easy. It hangs its head in shame when we say that we aren't sure we believe, when we are honest. Our hearts tell us it is complicated. It is.

If the average age of the person in the pew is 45, then it has been more than 30 years since the Eucharist was explained to that average person. We were children when it was explained. We are now adults with a very different mind, having been much more exposed to the noise of the world. Back then we didn't have the baggage we carry around today. A little help is OK to re-engage with the Eucharist and what it means.

OUR PETITION:

Explain more. Encourage us more. Talk openly about these challenges. Speak into our unbelief, our questions, our doubts, our confusions. And speak with love and patience as we strive to grow in these areas.



3. Our Role: Remind us how we fit into society.

How do we fit into this world? When we are told to “change the culture,” is that even possible when the culture is so huge and undefinable?

Help us to find peace in being a small part of society and not feel that we are wrong or weird for finding it. Instead we need to see ourselves as quite courageous for being willing to think about the world beyond what we see and feel. We need to feel that it takes guts.

Help us to recast our identity as people who swim upstream. Who will always be in a minority.

Help us to be comfortable with the notion of free will and how accepting it is a choice. Help us to know that being a minority is not a sign of weakness, but rather of strength.

OUR PETITION:

Help us to be comfortable being a member of a countercultural minority, to take pride in who we are, rather than shaking our heads and wagging our fingers at the rest of our society.

OTHER SMALLER NUTS AND BOLTS:

Print the Mass:

Why can't we print the whole mass in the bulletin (responses, readings, hymns, etc.)? It makes bringing people to mass easier. No need to have hymnals or carry a missal.

Recognize Lay People:

Why don't we recognize the staff/volunteers more and encourage more people to get involved? A little bit of recognition can go a long way. It's also a good way to build a community!