

A Deacon's reflections

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What are the desires and needs, both expressed and unexamined? What are the gifts in sacramental theology and ecclesiology that are being uncovered at this time?

After four months in a Eucharistic “fast” or “famine,” several things come to mind, some of which are contradictory. It is important to recognize that COVID-19 *does* expose liturgical theological and social ‘challenges’ that one does not attend to in “normal” times.

Some context: my grandfather was Deacon of St James Cathedral from 1937-61. My father was a Renaissance scholar focussing on Milton. He attended St Mary Magdalene (High Church). I was taken to church every Sunday and twice a week when in the choir. I was ordained a Deacon (vocational, not transitional) ten years ago and serve in a small parish as well as Coordinator of Deacons for the Diocese. After four months without the Eucharist I am missing it, but not with the same intensity as some friends and colleagues who are lobbying for the resumption of the Eucharist or at least for Spiritual Communion.

Spiritual communion is not to be confused with ‘ocular adoration’: how do we keep the focus healthy?

My wife and I often watch three online services on a Sunday: our local parish, St James Cathedral in Toronto, and Washington National Episcopal Cathedral. Only the last has a Eucharist—after the Consecration, and the Prayer for Spiritual Communion, the camera focuses on the unconsumed Elements on the Table, for a very short time. This is followed by exquisite music, as the camera shows the interior and the windows of the Cathedral. When the view returns to the Altar, the Table has been cleared. No one is seen receiving or clearing the Table. My bishop has been concerned about Zoom Eucharists being “voyeurism,” but I

do feel fully engaged in Washington Cathedral's, especially since it is streamed live.

Should priests refrain from receiving Holy Communion in sacrificial solidarity with the vast majority?

Or, is the priestly role presiding at the eucharist more importantly about mediation and sacrifice of prayer offered, and an obligation? Clerical privilege or clericalism?

At Washington Cathedral no one is seen consuming.

In the Guidelines for Reopening of the Diocese of Toronto in the "Eucharist" section (page 13) it says: "The presiding celebrant stands alone at the altar, and prepares the altar for the Eucharist. There is to be no passing of vessels. Only the presiding celebrant is to handle the elements."

As a Deacon I appreciate the symbolism of servant ministry inherent in the deacon setting the Table and cleaning up, so I am uncomfortable that this is gone for now.

The Guidelines also say: "The presiding celebrant will consecrate both the bread and the wine, and consume in both kinds, but will distribute only the consecrated bread to all others." A clear distinction is made between priest and people. Since the Guidelines are a set of directions, there is no discussion of why the priest consumes in both kinds.

I am interested in "open table" from reading Sara Miles *Take this Bread*. In the Eucharist it is important to bring the People of God together, and I am uncomfortable with distinctions and separating people into those who can and those who must not receive. If the Eucharist is the People of God together, how come at "Celebrations of Life" often less than 1/3 of those present take Communion? That divides and sets people apart just when all should be together.

Two important Eucharists for me:

1. 1989: 150th Anniversary of the Diocese of Toronto at the Skydome. Our parish sat in the 500 level...so almost in the "gods," and hence a wonderful perspective on the Liturgy below.
2. Christmas Eve, after the Pageant. The Incumbent brings out a coffee table from her office and all the children gather around her. They have helped set the Table, and all are deeply focussed.

Something else concerning the meaning of "bread" and "wine" in the Eucharist: my Spiritual Director is a Major in the Salvation Army, and

he joked the other day that “maybe we’ll make a Salvationist of you yet,” as he gave me this hymn for reflection:

*My life must be Christ's broken bread,
My love his outpoured wine,
A cup o'erfilled, a table spread
Beneath his name and sign.
That other souls, refreshed and fed,
May share his life through mine.*

— Albert Orsborn, 6th General of the Salvation Army 1886-1967

There is “Matthew 25” work to do, and I am called to support and encourage others to carry out their Baptismal Promises, that they may “seek and serve Christ in all persons.”