

Our Lady of the Portal and St Piran Catholic Church, Truro

Walking Together-Synodal Journey

Celebrate

Summary notes from a zoom session on Tuesday evening, 14.12.21 and a Wednesday morning face-to-face session 15.12.2021

How do I celebrate the presence of God in His Word and the Sacraments?

Participants shared openly how they celebrated the presence of God in His word and in the Sacraments. It was mentioned that we must guard against becoming too formulaic (merely going through familiar routines) in our approach and be continually seeking a proper disposition to receive both the Word and the Sacraments. Some recognised the need to actively engage, and preparation was felt to be key. Praying with the Readings before Mass was frequently mentioned as a way of celebrating the presence of God as was having “open ears” and really listening to the sermon. Listening, reflecting, praying and being attentive were all mentioned as being essential to discerning the presence of God. It was said that the Liturgy of the Church inspired a closer relationship with God and provided a strong sense of encounter. The beauty of the Liturgy was greatly appreciated and valued. Some mentioned the importance of thanksgiving at the end of Mass and of taking God out into the world. There was a clear feeling that our own disposition toward the Mass and all the other Sacraments was a key to celebrating the presence of God. Some stated strongly that the Eucharist was the most important element in their life.

Whilst some greatly valued their experiences of attending livestreamed Masses from around the world, during lockdown, others described how they missed celebrating with other people around them. There was a strong feeling that having a celebrating community was an essential aspect of the Liturgy.

It was said that the Sacraments were “life changing” and examples were given from Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation, Marriage, Holy Orders and Anointing of the sick. There was a stress placed on the importance of the Sacraments to the individual which lent them a personal dimension. It was interesting to note that the Sacrament of Reconciliation was not mentioned in these examples.

Several participants shared with the group their own personal experiences of the presence of God when they had placed all their trust in Him. God had worked wonders for them, and they openly shared that witness. The Sacraments brought people peace and they felt refreshed on

their journey. Prayer, Scripture and Sacrament were all seen as the keys to celebrating the presence of God in our lives.

How does our parish celebrate the Word and the Sacraments?

This strand of the feedback related to the nature of celebration itself. Some felt that there needed to be a more tangible sense of joy. It was asked if someone looking in, from outside, would see the “joy”. It was felt by some that, because of the restrictions due to the global pandemic, there wasn’t much joy in our celebrations just now. However, others felt that there was a greater sense of reverence, reflection, contemplation, and awareness of God’s presence. Some appreciated silence and the opportunity for Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was warmly welcomed.

Whilst some would welcome a livelier celebration, others stressed the importance of the Sacred and the need for reverence. Some said they were not sure about the use of Latin in parts of the Mass whilst others welcomed the use of the traditional language of the Catholic Church because it reinforced a universal character and was a link with tradition. The universal nature of the Catholic Church mattered significantly to some, and examples were given of travelling to other countries and being able to participate in the Mass, even if it was being said in the local language. The shape of the Liturgy and the essence of the celebration was the same wherever you went. This gave people a strong sense of a Catholic identity and belonging. A few expressed a concern that the meaning of some of the words used in the Liturgy were difficult to understand. The word “consubstantial” in the Nicene Creed was given as an example. It was felt that this and other words, not used in everyday speech, needed to be explained or an alternative translation found. Some felt that the former phrase “Of one Being” was easier to grasp. Although, it was accepted that this phrase may not convey the intended meaning.

Music was frequently mentioned as being essential to worship and engagement. It was also stressed that music was essential to celebration and joy. It was hoped that, as soon as possible, congregational singing could be re-established. It was also felt that hymn singing encouraged greater participation, lifted the spirit, and engendered greater devotion.

Some would welcome a more imaginative celebration of the liturgy which might appeal to a younger generation. Examples of liturgical celebrations from other cultures, places and times were cited. A few mentioned a link between culture and liturgy which might be explored. It was felt by some that we could draw from the many cultures now present in our congregation and involve those from different cultural backgrounds, more actively in the celebration of the Mass. The need for a deeper understanding of the Liturgy was clearly recognised and participants would welcome the opportunity for catechesis. Some said that they had never really had the Mass properly explained to them, beyond the basic instruction needed for First Communion and Confirmation.

The need to deepen our knowledge and understanding of sacred scripture was frequently mentioned and it was acknowledged that this had not been a part of our traditional catholic formation. Other Christian denominations had a better knowledge and understanding of the scriptures, and this is an area we need to develop. There was a clear appreciation of the initiatives in recent times to engage parishioners more actively and most participants were actively engaged in some form of study. Many mentioned that the lockdown had made them search online for courses and examples were shared.

Whilst it was clearly recognised that the pandemic restrictions had severely limited community engagement at Mass, it was felt that we should provide a warmer, more welcoming environment as soon as possible. Many mentioned the current restriction on the Sign of Peace and wanted a non-contact form to be brought back. The Sign of Peace meant a lot to most people. It was also strongly felt that we need to be more welcoming of families and more tolerant of children making some noise during Mass. It was also mentioned that parents have a responsibility to ensure their children understand the sacred nature of the Church building itself and of the Sacraments being celebrated. Learning how to behave in Church was seen as an important early step in catechetical formation. It was felt that the reintroduction of a Children's Liturgy of the Word would be a great help to parents and provide young children with a worthwhile opportunity to learn about their faith on a regular basis.

How does the wider Church celebrate journeying together?

As with last week, this section received the fewest comments. There was some discussion of what was meant by the "wider Church". Did it mean the global Catholic Church under the leadership and authority of Pope Francis or the worldwide Christian Church? Both definitions figured in the feedback. There was a sense that we had lost our Catholic identity, post the Vatican II Council, whilst others felt that we needed a clearer understanding of the Council and its constitutions. What does it mean to be a Catholic as opposed to being an Anglican, Methodist, Free Church, or other Christian Church? Some felt that the wider Church was the sum of its parts whilst others strongly felt that the Church was more than that. Undoubtedly, strong parishes would make a strong Church, but it must be remembered that at the heart of the Catholic Church is the real presence of God in the Blessed Sacrament. We are a Church under the authority of the Pope through Apostolic succession and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It was felt that we needed to be more confident in saying who we are, what we believe and what we stand for. Being more confident in our faith meant that encounters with others became more fruitful and opened a channel for the Holy Spirit.

It was also recognised that we could learn from other Christian denominations. Some of these had majored on Scripture, some on Fellowship, some on Social Action, some on Celebration and some on Evangelisation. Catholics could share their knowledge and understanding of the presence of God in the Sacramental and Liturgical life, which was seen as the essence of Catholicism.

It was felt, by some, that the culture of the Church needed to change and become more tolerant of differences. It was said that the Church often gave the impression of being locked in the past. However, it was clearly recognised that this synodal process was a good beginning which would enable the “People of God” to exercise their vocation and play their part in the mission of the Church.