

“YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST” - LOOKING BACK TO GROW NOW & MOVE FORWARD

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Most of us have probably heard the line—“If we don’t learn from our past, then we’re doomed to repeat it.” In other words, if we don’t take time to reflect on previous sins, mistakes or problems we’ve made or had, and if we don’t put things in place in our lives that will prevent those from happening again, then we’re bound to fail again. In a more positive light, it’s important for us to understand where we’ve come from (our roots), so that we may better understand our identity now. Understanding things like our family roots, our medical history, our national heritage, and religious origins can teach us a lot about ourselves and how we can become better family members, healthier people, stronger citizens, and more faithful disciples respectively.

Continually reflecting on what Jesus endured out of love for us almost 2,000 years ago—suffering, dying, and rising again—is critical to our growth as followers of Jesus. Without such constant reflecting, praying & participating within the faith community, our spirits can shrivel up and die, due to lack of nourishment. That’s one of the key reasons why Jesus left us the Eucharist—commanding us through what He told the Apostles at His Last Supper: “Do this in remembrance of me.” This past gift remains present with us now as one of the central ways that Jesus calls us to feed our hope for future glory in Heaven with God forever.

The past saints (brothers and sisters in our Christian family tree) still teach us much about who we are and how we are to be. With that in mind, it’s fitting to share some wisdom from these saintly role models for our Christian living today. Consider the following words from St. Justin, who was born around the year 100 (less than 70 years after Jesus died & rose), and became a martyr for the faith around the year 165. St. Justin, whose feast day is June 1st, left us one of the earliest written accounts of how the Eucharist was celebrated in the early Church. From what is known as his “first apology” (a defense of the faith) comes explanations of practices that are still very much part of who we are and what we do as Church today. Here’s what he wrote:

“No one may share the eucharist with us unless he believes that what we teach is true, unless he is washed

in the regenerating waters of baptism for the remission of his sins, and unless he lives in accordance with the principles given us by Christ. We do not consume the Eucharistic bread and wine as if it were ordinary food and drink, for we have been taught that as Jesus Christ our Savior became a man of flesh and blood by the power of the Word of God, so also the food that our flesh and blood assimilates for its nourishment becomes the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus by the power of his own words contained in the prayer of thanksgiving.

“The apostles, in their recollections, which are called gospels, handed down to us what Jesus commanded them to do. They tell us that he took bread, gave thanks and said: *Do this in memory of me. This is my body.* In the same way he took the cup, he gave thanks and said: *This is my blood.* The Lord gave this command to them alone. Ever since then we have constantly reminded one another of these things. The rich among us help the poor and we are always united. For all that we receive we praise the Creator of the universe through his Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit.

“On Sunday we have a common assembly of all our members, whether they live in the city or in the outlying districts. The recollections of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read...When the reader has finished, the president of the as-

sembly speaks to us; he urges everyone to imitate the examples of virtue we have heard in the readings. Then we all stand up together and pray. On the conclusion of our prayer, bread and wine and water are brought forward. The president offers prayers and gives thanks to the best of his ability, and the people give their assent by saying, ‘Amen.’ The eucharist is distributed...”

“We hold our common assembly on Sunday because it is the first day of the week, the day on which God put darkness and chaos to flight and created the world, and because on that same day our savior Jesus Christ rose from the dead. For he was crucified on Friday and on Sunday he appeared to his apostles and disciples and taught them the things that we have passed on for your consideration.” (Cap. 66-67: PG 6, 427-431)

