

“YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST” - THE LAITY - Fr. Steve Lape

As you may know, there are 4 ways that Jesus Christ is present to us at Mass: through His Sacramental Body & Blood offered from the altar, through the Word proclaimed from Holy Scripture, through the presiding priest who acts “in persona Christi” (in the person of Christ) at Mass, and through the faithful people gathered to worship. Today, I wish to focus my remarks on the lay faithful (non-ordained people of the faith).

Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), there has been a greater spirit of empowering the laity to take on more responsibilities in the Church’s mission to promote Christ to the world in His love and His truth. A number of the documents which came out of this Council speak about the importance of lay people in not only actively participating in the Mass and other liturgies, but in their promoting & living the Catholic faith in their everyday roles and activities, whether with other people or alone.

One of the most important documents from the Council concerning the laity is titled, “Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People.” (The word “apostolate” means religious work and activity which carry on the legacy of the sacrificial, loving work begun almost 2,000 years ago in Jesus’ name by the Apostles of the Lord.) Consider these words that are central to the meaning and tone of this document: “The laity accomplish the Church’s mission in the world principally by that blending of conduct and faith which makes them the light of the world; by that uprightness in all their dealings which is for every (person) such an incentive to love the true and the good and which is capable of inducing (people) at last to go to Christ and the Church; by that fraternal charity that makes them share the living conditions and labors, the sufferings and yearnings of their brothers (and sisters), and thereby prepare all hearts, gently, imperceptibly, for the action of saving grace; by that full awareness of their personal responsibility in the development of society, which drives them on to perform their family, social and professional duties with Christian generosity. In this way their conduct makes itself gradually felt in the surroundings where they live and work.” (#13)

St. Paul sums this understanding up wonderfully in his letter to the Colossians: “Whatever you do, in

word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (3:17) So, practicing our faith is not just for when we come to Church for Mass. It should pervade our whole life. Spreading the faith isn’t only for priests, deacons, nuns & monks—it’s a mission for all those baptized into Christ!

At Mass, the lay people who gather for worship aren’t to just sit back passively and watch the priests, deacons, and other liturgical ministers “do their thing.” As the Council affirmed, all are called to full, active participation at Mass: joining in with the responses and hymns, reflecting on God’s Word proclaimed & the homily spoken, praying with great focus and enthusiastic care, and serving as role models of active engage-

ment to inspire others around them. Coming to Mass on time and remaining to its very end are also important ways to show that full, active participation.

In having just celebrated Pentecost, recalling the Holy Spirit’s coming upon Mary & the Apostles to

empower them to share the Good News, lay people are called to consider how the same Spirit is calling each of them to share their unique experiences, gifts, talents, strength, and time to enrich the greater community in the love and faith of Jesus Christ. Our faith community is certainly blessed right now with many lay men, women and children who are serving the People of God in many wonderful capacities for our liturgies: as lectors, Communion ministers, altar servers, greeters, ushers, choir members, musicians, church decorators and cleaners, and maintenance workers. We have many people who have stepped in to help on committees & in programs such as Parish Council, Finance Committee, Community Table, and Faith Formation. We are always looking for more people to come forward and offer to share their gifts with our community. Thus, we should constantly be seeking direction from the Holy Spirit in prayer as to how God is inviting us to share more of what God has given us for the betterment of our faith family. Whether ordained or lay, we are all co-workers together in God’s vineyard!

