

February 5, 2017

Heart of the World IX

Like the heart in the body, the very center and life-moving force of the Church is the Eucharist. All of the other Sacraments and the whole life of Grace and the Church in the world flow from it and lead back to it.

2017 commemorates 100 years since the apparitions of the Blessed Mother to Lucia, Jacinta, and Francisco at Fatima. In this column, we have been discussing how an Angel appeared to them three times in order to prepare them to meet Our Lady. One of the most important things he desired to teach them was the practice of Reverence (or Piety).

This Gift of the Holy Spirit precedes any interaction (prayer) with God and denotes an interior attitude that is also expressed outwardly. The Angel was able to *appear* to bow, kneel, prostrate, etc. but could not actually do so. Angels do not have bodies. The fact that we can worship with our bodies is a source of wonder and amazement to them. (cf. Lk, 15:10; Eph 3:10; Heb 2)

However, Angels, who perceive reality with perfect clarity, have a lot to teach us about Reverence. We become tired, or sore, or sick, or injured and get distracted by the gift of our bodies from what we can do with them.

Last week we began to focus on our behavior in church and how it relates to Reverence. Before we rejoin behavior, let's look at what Sacred Space is. That will go a long way to explaining why our behavior matters.

The Nave of a Church (the part where the congregation sits facing the Sanctuary where the Altar is) has a very specific purpose and is literally dedicated to it when the Church building is first consecrated. It is for worship of the living God. Any other use better have a *very* compelling reason.

This area is where the community gathers around the most physical presence of God in the world. The Sanctuary represents (literally re-presents) Heaven. We as worshipers gather around it (not *in* Heaven, but ever so close and in fact, *looking* in).

In the Sanctuary, the priest re-presents Christ—"the one mediator between God and man".(1Tim 2:5) This means that the priest (by virtue of the Sacrament of Holy Orders) acts in the very Person of Christ. Christ, who *as human* represents all of *us* to the Father and *as God* represents the *Father* to us.(cf Jn 17) Christ, and therefore the priest, is precisely the point of intersection of Heaven and Creation. He faces both directions.

In the Sanctuary is also the Altar, which re-presents both the table of the Last Supper and the Cross. These are in fact the same reality. This is why we bow to the Altar, the priest kisses it entering and leaving the Sanctuary, and why it is *never* used for any other purpose even temporarily. It is the holiest object in the building.

Fr. Michael