

February 26, 2017

Heart of the World XII

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.

There is an ancient saying in the Church: *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*—The Law of Prayer is the Law of Belief. Or in better English: our beliefs are formed from how we pray. Last week we looked at how fashion, and not theology, can affect our worship by effecting our Sacred Spaces. Many things in and of our Church buildings have been shifting like sand for the last 70 years or so. This is why that is a bad idea.

When things change due to fashion or fad instead of theology, it does violence to our souls because: (1) God is *unchanging* and reliable and fads subtly imply that is not true; (2) subsequent to '1', we need stability to be able to relax and to *consistently* connect to our hearts in prayer; (3) we forget and do not appreciate the richness of the Traditions we have inherited and are then deeply impoverished by their loss.

Probably the most symbolic (hot topic) article of this dynamic is the Altar Rail. Altar Rails make the Sanctuary exclusive. It is supposed to be. If the Sanctuary represents Heaven on earth, then no one “deserves” to go there no matter how good we are—if for the mere reason that we are not dead yet. This includes the priests, bishops and even the Pope.

Altar Rails were intended to remind us of that and to take *very* seriously what we are doing by entering. Basically, we are asking to have access to Heaven without dying. As a physical barrier, Rails keep us from cavalierly traipsing around the Sanctuary with not a thought of what we are doing and in Whose Presence we are.

Fr. Michael