

Pastor's Notes: Clarity is Charity**February 20, 2022**

It is no doubt that we are living in a time of grave confusion. Just three years ago (2019), the bombshell results of a study on the belief of Catholics in the pews shook us into realizing that there is a crisis of faith, even within the Church. In that Pew Research Center study on faith in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, only thirty percent of people who self-identified as Catholic believe in the Real Presence. When it came to those who weekly attend Mass, the number was more along the lines of two thirds. While that is much better, it is still disconcerting to think that one third of the people at any given Catholic church in our country do not believe the most central tenet of our Catholic faith. Luckily, the response to that question is different here at the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul. We just recently conducted a survey as a part of the Synod on Synodality that Pope Francis has called for. One of the questions was about this very topic. When asked about their agreement with the statement, "The Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus (not a symbolic representation of Jesus' Body and Blood)," 95.3% of our parishioners agreed to it, as opposed to 2.6% who disagreed, 2.1% who were unsure, and 9 failing to respond to the statement. This is definitely good news for us here, but of course, these numbers only reflect those willing to participate in the survey.

We have a crisis on our hands. We could debate the origins of this crisis and cast blame upon this factor or that factor, and these tend to end in very negative arguments with high emotions and passions. However, I have a positive solution to chip away at this iceberg of confusion that threatens to sink the barque of Peter. I cannot change the confusion that is felt at the level of the Church Universal, but I am able to preach from this pulpit that which I know to be the Catholic faith. I feel, as a pastor, we have an immediate need to expose, with clarity and conviction, the wisdom that comes to us distilled through the teachings of the Catholic Church. In a series of sermons, I hope to expose this congregation and all who come through our doors to the fullness of the Christian faith as given to us through Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the established Magisterium of the Catholic Church. I have named this initiative "Clarity Is Charity".

Talking about the Synod, there seems to be an impression given or perceived that the Church's doctrines are up for a vote, or that if a certain amount of people believed an error or disagree with a teaching, that somehow this would mean that established doctrine would change. No doubt, there are many opinions about what the Church should be, but one thing that is for certain is that we are not a democratically-run institution. This is because our constitution as a Church has been divinely revealed by God Himself in the person of Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, who established the Church on the apostolic witness of the Twelve and set St. Peter as his vicar, who exercises the role of chief shepherd, high priest, and prophet for our day. The Catholic faith is not an invented religion or man-made. It is revealed by God. The truth has been handed down to us as a gift. It is not a product of committee or consensus. We don't vote on it, whether we like it or not. It is God's Word, and it is our salvation and freedom.

I have never been one to shy away from preaching hard things. This has often gotten me feedback, for good or for ill. One of the things that I have come to discern in my role as shepherd of a parish flock is the lesson that every parent has to learn when they raise their children: Sometimes the truth hurts; it is uncomfortable; it challenges us, and it even makes us upset. But it would be irresponsible of a parent to tell lies to their child. And it would be irresponsible for me to do the same as your pastor. Some people misunderstand my role and the role of any preacher of the Good News of Jesus Christ. I am not here to make you *feel* good about yourself. I am here to help you *be* good. It's not just a matter of pleasantries and nice thoughts. The Gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to radically uproot us from our complacency. But that is necessary if we want to be planted in the vineyard of the Lord.

I anticipate some will express to me that they were hoping I would speak on the Scriptures of any given Sunday instead of a catechetical lesson. I am in my ninth year at Sts. Peter and Paul. I've been through almost three full cycles of readings, and I've preached on a variety of topics exposing the Scriptures. If you are in need of some inspiration from the Scriptures of the Sunday, you can go to our parish Homily archives, found on our website. I would further encourage you to sign up for and utilize the myParish app, where you can find wonderful commentaries on the weekly readings.

As part of the "Clarity Is Charity" initiative, I intend to present basic truths, such as the philosophical presuppositions of Catholic Christian faith; basic human anthropology; the Church's clear expectations of her members, as stated in the Precepts of the Church; the Ten Commandments; the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy; the truth about marriage and the right way to go about it; the truth about the resurrection of the body and what that means for how we treat the bodies of our deceased loved ones; death, judgment, heaven and hell; and many other topics that come through the Catechism. What must we do to be saved? Salvation and justification, and the necessity of baptism; the necessity of belonging to the Church established by Christ; the imperative to evangelize as if people's souls depended on it; the reality of sin and the need for repentance. These are all basic concepts that seem to be obfuscated in our day. I hope through this series to exercise the theological virtue of charity, by exposing with clarity the truth, beauty, and goodness of our Catholic faith.

