

081609 FEELING A LITTLE “ENTITLED?”

(Why is it so clear to us when somebody else exhibits an “Entitlement Mentality” but not when we do?)

Recently I had an experience that I have had at other times. I was returning a phone call I had received not from a parishioner but from an office. The person who had called me was not in and the person taking the call asked me to leave my name and a phone number. When I said Monsignor McHenry, there was this little hesitation followed by, “Could you spell that, please?” I spelled M-O-N-S-I-G-N-O-R for them and when they were finished writing the question came back, “Is that your title?” I must confess I had not ever really thought about myself as having a title, like Prince, Duke, Baron, Viscount or the like but I guess Monsignor would qualify in some circles as a title.

Once upon a time only those who actually had a title were allowed to see themselves as being “entitled.” No one else would dare to presume to be considered entitled. But that has changed. We live in a democratic Republic with no official royalty and hence no official titles of royalty. But a lot of people who have no titles nevertheless will speak out loud and clear on the subject of where and when they believe they are entitled to certain things. For example: it is not uncommon to hear expressions such as: “I’m entitled to say what I want, to do what I want; I’m entitled to go where I want and to wear what I want no matter what.” People say things like: “I’m entitled to be here and I’m staying.” “Aren’t I entitled to a little respect?” “Aren’t I entitled to a little privacy?” Sometimes it isn’t necessarily spoken but it is thought: “I’m entitled to a good education.” “I’m entitled to this job, this bonus, this severance package.” I have heard people say: “I’m entitled to this inheritance or to those items from my parent’s estate.” I am ENTITLED.

Except.... To what are you and I really entitled? Actually very little. We would like to think of ourselves as entitled but often that is as far as it goes. We are entitled to very little. However, there is something to which we are entitled but we just do not think of it in those terms—ever. It is Eucharist. We are entitled to communion with Our Lord. And we are legitimately entitled because Christ himself has made us entitled. Our Eucharistic entitlement came about via the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It means that we are welcome guests at the table of the Lord. Even more than guests we are family, adopted children of our God, baptized into Jesus Christ and thus true children of our Father in heaven. There is a place for us in God’s house and we are entitled to it.

But who ever thinks in those terms. And yet, is there a greater entitlement that we can have in this life? The question is: Am I appreciative of this entitlement of mine? The question is: Is there anything incumbent upon me so that I will receive the entitlement appropriately and wisely? Here we are early on a Sunday morning. How did we get ready for Mass today? Before you came here what were you thinking about? What of yourself did you consciously want to bring here to place before the Lord as your gift to God in thanksgiving?

Have we truly opened our hearts to the heart of Christ as our parish motto says out in the Narthex: “Hic Cor ad Cor loquitur.” (“Here Heart speaks to heart.”) What has been the disposition of our hearts? Are they more set on what we are going to have for breakfast after Mass is over than to what is unfolding right before us? When we entered the Church, and signed ourselves with the holy water that is to recall our baptism, did we recall our baptism? And how was our genuflection before Our Lord present in the Blessed Sacrament? Was it pretty perfunctory? Or was it thoughtful and reverent? Our sign of the cross at the beginning of Mass? Was it purposeful or routine? When I asked us all to call to mind our sins, did you call to mind your sins? Or was your mind simply a blank? As the Scriptures were being read were we truly listening or following along or were they just so many words washing over us?

We are entitled to Eucharist but that entitlement comes with a price tag. No more being a spectator at Mass, we are participants, partakers in communion, in the Body and Blood of Christ. The Lord wants our hearts most of all. And, dare I say it, the Lord is entitled to our hearts as a return for all that he has done for us. We who are here today should grasp this. There is a certain wisdom about all of this. We are not to be fools as Paul says to the Ephesians. We are filled with the Holy Spirit. We are to give thanks. Christ is the life-giving meal of the Heavenly Father placed before us out of love. We are entitled to partake but we must never take this gift for granted.