

Prayer meetings and Mass

by Josephine Cachia

In 1982 I was introduced to the Charismatic Renewal by a co-worker who suggested I attend a "healing Mass." My inclination to attend was somewhat dubious since I was not aware that I was in need of "healing." My understanding of healing was limited to physical healing, mediated by doctors. I was a practicing nurse and although I believed in God's power to heal, my experience of healing was mainly through diagnosis, treatment plan (medicine or surgery) and of course high doses of tender loving care. After experiencing the "healing Mass," a new dimension of faith entered my life. I became involved in the Charismatic Renewal, experienced baptism in the Holy Spirit, and co-founded the prayer group in my parish.

Prayer meetings became a source of life-giving experiences of God. When one of our members was diagnosed with a malignant tumor, we prayed for healing and God healed him. At first our members were fearful and resistant to the notion that God would move among us. Gradually that fear was removed and people were freer to praise God and eager to share their faith. Inner healings were taking place in women who had had abortions. Little by little individual lives were being transformed.

My experience of that first healing Mass brought a new awareness that every Mass reveals God's mercy and compassion and that his healing love is always available if we are open to receive. Our attitude and disposition play an important role in the ongoing process of healing and conversion. Accord-

ing to Vatican II, the liturgy is the "summit" and fountain of the Christian's relationship with Jesus and other members of his body (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, n. 10). As the faithful gather at the table of the Lord, Jesus' saving work is made present and active for all believers through the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit.

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In the fourth eucharist prayer the celebrant prays:

Father, you so loved the world that in the fullness of time you sent your only Son to be our Savior. He was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, a man like us in all things but sin. To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation, to prisoners, freedom, and to those in sorrow, joy.

These words become our testimony for we are indeed being set free and our sorrow is held in hearts that are being transformed with joy. As followers of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist, we, as the baptized, in a special way proclaim to one another that Jesus is alive and his saving action is ever present. Living in unity with the mind of Christ, we serve one another in love.

I recently came across the text of "The Eucharistic Liturgy and Charismatic Prayer," a presentation given several years ago by Father James Wood, now pastor of St. John Nepomucene, Diocese of Rockville Centre, New York. In the introduction, he states, "Even though the church has definitely responded to the call of Vatican II to have the liturgy 'express more the holy things which they signify,' (*Constitution on the Sacred Lit-*

urgy, n. 21) we have in no way exhausted the opportunity that liturgy gives us to grow in union with the Word and the Spirit of God." He continues by stating: "Just as the head and the body are one, it too is the same Spirit that blesses the church with charismatic gifts and liturgical prayer. It is not the role of charismatic prayer to improve on the liturgy; it is not the role of the liturgy to 'legitimize' charismatic prayer."

Prayer meetings prime us to encounter Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the celebration of Eucharist. Our experience of love and fellowship at the meetings opens the heart to embrace more readily those who gather together in our parish liturgy. Prayer meetings can never replace or be a substitute for eucharistic liturgy, but they can be a means to propel us into a greater appreciation of the Holy One who calls us to assemble in his name, to listen to his voice in the proclamation of his word and to share in his body, blood, soul and divinity.

Jesus, present in the Eucharist, gives himself freely and totally to us. He is the perfect gift of the Father. Through this powerful gift of self, Jesus challenges us to be Eucharist for one another. Sharing in his body and blood we are gradually transformed into Christ and are able to continue his mission of salvation.

Eucharist is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, healing for the sick and empowerment for the weak. Our need for Jesus cannot be satisfied by "just" attending prayer meetings. A Spirit-led, Spirit-filled meeting ought to bring us to the table of the Lord. You might call the prayer meeting the "appetizer" to the "main meal." Perhaps due to a lack of understanding of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, some people have mistaken the spiritual "high" experienced at prayer meetings for an end in itself.

In his apostolic letter on the Jubilee Year 2000, Pope John Paul II expressed his desire that this year be "a great prayer of praise and thanksgiving, especially for the gift of the Incarnation of the Son of God and the redemption which he accomplished." He urged that the year be "intensely eucharistic." Ongoing formation and teaching at prayer meetings ought to reflect this exhortation. ▶

**"That Your Joy
May Be Complete"**

John 16:24



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