

IS OUR COMMUNION HOLY? A VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDE

It's all very well to insist that members of the congregation should be reverent and fervent in their approach to and reception of the Eucharist. But what about the other side of the altar? Priests and deacons (and servers, I might add) need to communicate (pun intended) reverence as well. If we as ordained ministers are dedicating our lives to the ministry of Jesus, including sacramental ministry, what does it say about our sense of ministry and self if we are careless?

This begins at the very beginning of the liturgical celebration. Does the presider sing, or at least pretend to? This is not a throwaway comment. I knew a priest years and years ago in Montgomery who had a terrible singing voice. Yet he would never process to the altar without the missalette in his hand, mouthing the words while remaining silent. It's true that we were grateful he didn't actually sing! But his lesson was one of the importance of participating to the maximum of one's ability for the sake of others.

Is there an attentiveness to the proclaimed Word, or does he seem distracted and far away from what's happening in that given parish church? Is the homily well prepared, in the sense that it suggests he cares about the Scripture and the people to whom it has been proclaimed?

The presider doesn't have to be a Shakespearean actor, but he should be able to proclaim the prayers (especially the Eucharistic Prayer) with conviction and not boredom. There should be a sense that he's really glad to be there celebrating with the congregation gathered at that particular day and time.

If the essence of a sacrament involves encounter with the Lord, it is also true that the minister is a mediator of that encounter. So does his manner of handling the Eucharist suggest there is Someone there for the rest of the folks to encounter? Is there a reverence in the administering of the Sacrament, or is it an experience more like handing out poker chips?

If I tried, last week, to hold a mirror up to folks in their manner of reception of Eucharist, I must hold a mirror up to myself in my manner of presider at Eucharist. Reverence begets reverence, and our behavior both is begotten by and communicates what we truly believe.

May we who preside, and we who celebrate and receive, all proclaim with our hearts and behaviors: Jesus Christ is Lord!