

## WHO IS THE MOST UNWORTHY PERSON AT EUCHARIST? I AM!

You knew that, didn't you? You knew the purpose of this essay would be to goad you into seeing your own need for repentance this Advent, before deciding on others' needs for repentance. How sneaky of me, and now clever!

Except that it is wrong.

Or to put it another way: the answer is correct; the interpretation is wrong. When I say "The answer is 'Me'" I mean me—Fr. David, the priest at the altar. Why would I say that?

In an essay in the recent issue of *Ministry and Liturgy*, Fr. Paul Turner makes the following observation:

*When the priest washes his hands [during the Preparation of Gifts], he prays for forgiveness ["Lord, wash away my iniquity; cleanse me from my sins."]. He is unworthy to proclaim the eucharistic prayer. Washing helps set his heart and mind in the right place. It stirs up the humility which makes prayer pleasing to God. And it demonstrates that a priest must take seriously this task: He must live a good life, and he must seek forgiveness whenever he approaches this prayer. The eucharistic prayer is holy, and the priest approaches it with some fear.*

This is to say that because at Our Savior parish I am the one that comes closest to the altar most regularly; because I speak the authorized words most fully; because I am charged to stand *in persona Christi* in a particular way; because through my presiding there is made present the Event by which we all are configured more and more to Jesus Christ our Lord—because of all of this, I have more and more need to be aware of my human limitations and personal sinfulness, my defects and failings—and more and more to trust in the mercy and love of God in Jesus Christ my Lord!

If I am truly called, then as a priest I must respond and obey. I must be a minister of God's healing, forgiveness and peace. Now, precisely because I am to be such a conduit, a channel of God's love, I am the more unworthy. But the Good News (to borrow the phrase) is that God does not call those who are equipped; God equips those who are called. And God calls (and equips) ALL of us in varying ways. Like Isaiah (Is. 6) we may feel unworthy; but God's word is spoken to us: "Behold, I make you clean." I, of all people at Eucharist, need to hear these words as God's response to my prayer from Psalm 51 at the hand-washing. But we all need to know that God's love in Jesus Christ calls and equips us.

What will we do with our "equipping"? Will we pretend it is not true, so as to avoid any kind of challenge to repentance or mission? Or will we say, with the prophet, "Here I am; send me"?