

Listening to a podcast from the [Conversatio Fide](#) site, in a presentation by [Rose Madrid-Swetman](#) on a generous community, I was touched by the (com)passion of the speaker in a way that broke down an old reserve. I have always been afraid of the church becoming more or less indistinguishable from a social service agency if we became too involved socially. At least in my understanding of the recent history of the American church, social involvement all too frequently led to dilution and/or loss of some of the distinctives of the Christian message. That need not necessarily follow, but how do we avoid it?

If salvation is primarily the restoration of relationship with God, who reached into our lives until we responded to him, is that not what we should be about for others as well? The clear message of a generous community is an uncompromised 'yes.' That is what Jesus did; he was integrally, caringly involved with others. He didn't heal with dispassion; he deeply loved those that came to him. That was the message and life of the first Christians. How then in that do we avoid a loss of integrity of representing Jesus, without diluting our morals, our ethics, our message?

Today it occurred that the centering essence of who we are as a sacramental community is the Eucharist. It is there that we most clearly present our distinctives to others, and to ourselves. It is there that we return again and again to the re-statement of what defines our *raison d'être* as the people of God.

A presentation of the Gospel to 'get someone saved' seems more and more to fundamentally miss God's involvement in our lives. He came that we should be transformed in every area of our lives as those realizing, actualizing, the ethic of the 'already/not yet' kingdom of God. That is what he calls us to with others; as we are transformed, we can in turn transform.

As God involves himself integrally in our lives, so he will send us to be integrally involved in the lives of those he wants to touch. That is in its essence a community response, in which we form relationships without agendas, without ulterior motives, except that we have been transformed by the very Spirit of God to live toward others as he lived toward us, in the power and witness of the Spirit. Some may not get it, some will oppose us, now just as then; so what? As Jesus sent out the disciples, the blessing of peace when entering a house was unconditional. Whether the blessing remained or not was not up to the disciples; theirs was but to speak the blessing.

In that encounter with the world we can be easily deflected, sometimes subtly in ways we do not at first know, sometimes thrown off in a hard clash; we must be called back constantly to Jesus. The Eucharist is where we all are leveled before he who gathered us, and it is for the Eucharist that we gather again. As we understand the Eucharist, as we live centered around it as the distinctive celebration of God-become-man, we best maintain an integral, uncompromised witness of who we are, who we are about, and for whom we live.

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