

# From the desk of Fr. Jim

## On the Foundation of the Sacramental Life

### Part 1: Jesus is here

Admittedly, one of the problems of Christianity and every religion is that it is embraced as something that it is not. We may see it as mere social convention, a way to make ourselves and our children more acceptable to our neighbors. Or it may truly be a means of avoiding the reality of our life, our sins and failings.

One of the almost irritatingly constant confrontations with Jesus was by those whom he referred to as hypocrites. They were those who pretended to be holy. We, as well, can find ourselves using our religion as a ruse to protect our true identity.

We will need to set all that aside to get at what the Gospel is truly all about. We will have to uncover our true desire as human beings in order to see the satisfaction that Jesus is to our human quest.

In this series of articles I hope to accomplish two things: first, to see how the sacraments fit into our spiritual life and, second, to provide some guidance in both the proper way to participate in the sacraments and the most productive manner of forming our life by our use of these “gifts”.

To begin, we need to consider the goal or purpose of the Christian Life. It might be helpful to allow St. Paul to answer that question, in the context of his description of his work as an apostle and evangelist.

*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church, of which I am a minister in accordance with God's stewardship given to me to bring to completion for you the word of God, the mystery hidden from ages and from generations past. But now it has been manifested to his holy ones, to whom God chose to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; it is Christ in you, the hope for glory.*

**(Colossians 1:24-27)**

We would probably like to see this described in more mechanical terms. We sometimes are tempted to reduce our participation in our faith to a series of “fix it” statements. And that is more or less true, but the problem that it fixes is similar to that which rain “fixes”.

The most important thing that rain provides is a solution to the problem of the absence of rain. The Christian religion is about the solution to the problem of the absence of God.

Now, you may say to this that there is nowhere that God is absent, but that is only partially true. The expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden was an experience of separation from God. And as much as we have come to intellectually understand that death is a new beginning in a new life, what is basic to our experience of death is that of emptiness and of being alone. This is why the biblical explanation of death is that it is the result of sin; it is separation from God, who is life.

Actually, the solution that the Gospel proposes is rather shocking. It is not merely that the God who creates all things comes back again, ready to take up where we left off as a result of our separation. Even though this might seem entirely satisfactory, that God would simply patch things up with us, in fact he comes to us as redeemer and friend, our savior.

There are untold numbers of ways that we can describe the meaning of this central truth of our faith. What we need here, in reference to the sacramental life, is to understand that our religion has to do with him being here, with us.

While it may seem enormously simple, I believe it is the failure to recognize this truth that is the biggest problem with our ability or willingness to fully embrace our faith. We can reduce our sacraments and worship to a formulaic ceremony that is empty of its meaning and intent. Our need to is to see that what the Christian Life is, what the sacraments are to us, is the filling of our heart with Jesus.

*I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.”*

**(John 14:18-21)**