

Dear Parishioners,

It was 5:15 on a Saturday morning in Rome and we walked from our hotel to the Vatican to celebrate Mass with Pope John Paul II in his private chapel. Who pulled the strings to arrange this, I do not know. I am, however, grateful, because this simple experience of Daily Mass turned out to be one of the most spiritual, and meaningful events of my life.

We waited outside of St. Peter's Basilica as the sun rose on that beautiful late spring morning. There were about 25 or 30 other people from all over the world waiting outside that door for one of the Swiss Guard to let us in. Once we were allowed to enter we got into an elevator, walked up stairs, down long corridors with marble floors. Lay people went into one room, and we priests went into a sacristy to vest. We were given albs to wear, mine went about as low as my knees (which means it was way too short) and I thought, I'm going to Mass with the Pope and I look like an idiot!

Pope John Paul's private chapel was extraordinarily simple, and beautiful. The entire ceiling was made of stained glass, I don't know who the artist was, and I can't remember what the art portrayed, but I was struck by the brightness of the colors. There were no pews in this chapel, but little white stools without backs to sit on. They were very comfortable. At the front of the chapel Pope John Paul II sat with his back to us; he was in prayer. It must have been what the Benedictines call *Lexio Divina* because after we got seated his secretary removed his lap desk, and took the book he was writing in away and helped him vest.

At this point, Pope John Paul II needed a great deal of help with everything he had to do. He was no longer able to move about, get himself vested, or do anything without assistance. And we sat and watched this man, the most powerful man in the Church, receive such tender care because he was unable to do the simplest things we take for granted all the time.

The celebration of the Mass was nothing extraordinary. I don't think it was a feast day of any significance, and the Pope didn't even preach a homily. The only challenge for me was that it was in Italian, and I do not know that language very well. Pope John Paul, with his Parkinson's disease, could not announce very well, and we had to listen very carefully. What struck me

the most was that I was there at the Eucharistic Celebration with about 30 other people from all over the world. We were there together to receive the Body of Christ in this profoundly important moment. It was all so simple, though. At the same time, it is a moment I will remember for the rest of my life.

Now four years later, I look at our celebration of the Mass each day and I realize that it is just as profound, simple, and moving here at St. Catherine of Genoa Parish as it was that day in Rome. Daily Mass becomes routine, but it's the same Mass, the same Eucharist, the same Body of Christ we receive and share at this sacred meal. I don't think any one of us who attends daily Mass remember anything of great significance from day to day. Some folks might wonder if my allergies are acting up on a particular day. What moves me, though, is that those who come to daily Mass find something of real importance in their lives: maybe it's the community at prayer, maybe it's the quiet of the early morning, maybe it's the liturgy or receiving the Eucharist or maybe it's all of the above.

For me the significance of Daily Eucharist is the unity it offers. We all receive the same Body of Christ, and we share it in communion with the Church throughout the entire world, we share this heavenly banquet, so simple and yet so profound, with the angels and the saints, and our loved ones who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith. What has drawn me to be a priest is the Body of Christ alive and present in the world broken open in this sacred meal and active in those of us who receive him. What draws me to the Mass is the unity we share as members of the Body of Christ.

Isn't it nice we don't have to go to Rome to receive this miraculous food which unites us forever in his love?

In joyful hope,

Fr. Tim Seigel,
Pastor