



"I Dissent": David Haas on Re-Opening Church

30

May 14, 2020 Other Voices c_after

by David Haas

Not to cause a storm ... well, maybe I am ... but I have to say, honestly, that I am perhaps one of the few who are in dissent in response to the decisions being made to open up our churches for liturgical celebration in the coming days, allowing for more people to gather in our parishes and other faith communities.

I believe that we are playing with real fire here. I fail to see the wisdom in opening the doors to more and more people while at the same time, the number of COVID-19 cases continue to rise at an alarming rate, and the horrific number of deaths are rising right alongside ... to my thinking, this is not rocket-science. It seems dangerous and a bit reckless to be putting the ability to be in the presence of Christ found and shared in the ritual of consecrated bread and wine above the concern,

health, and well-being for the other, yes, "transubstantiated" presence of Christ found in the assembly who not only gathers together for Sunday, but live as pilgrims in the faith day to day in the world.

I mean, I get it. I know people are anxious to "get back to church." I miss not being at liturgy, too. I too, want to be in the same space with the people with whom I feel the deep connection of a Christ-Fatih Community. But we are called on a deeper level, NOT to "go to church," but to BE church, in the places outside of the sanctuary – especially now. This church, the Body of Christ, is already present in the holy people of God in our homes, our families, in our relationships, and those "out there" (who are reachable through phone calls, letters and through the gift of social media), who we can be attentive to, and to honor with the same reverence.

There is also, to my brain, a problem with saying that only a small number of people are allowed to attend in the early "first stages" of this coming together for liturgy, and then, as I have seen in some diocesan guideline announcements, that the next stage should only allow a number of people that would not exceed 30% of the seating capacity in the worship space. While it is sacramentally and bit theologically coercive to "make people" gather for sacrament ... it seems equally coercive to tell people, while opening its doors, to "stay away." Does it not seem just a bit ironic and wrong-headed to have hospitals becoming more and more full than our churches?

Pope Francis has called us to be ministers and servants in the "field hospitals" of the suffering and poor. In our frantic ache to gather back into the church buildings to celebrate the liturgy, to be in the presence of Christ in the sharing at the table of the "liturgical" proclamation of the Word and the resurrection meal of the Eucharist ... should we not first and foremost during these times, be more anxious to be in and serve at (in creative ways) the table of the WORLD? Fr. Kenan Osborne once said: "We must find the Lord not only in the table of the Eucharist, but in the table of the world around us. If we do not see Jesus in the table of the world, we really will not find Jesus in the table of the Eucharist."

The celebration of the Eucharist is most certainly the "summit and source" of our life as members of the Christian clan. But if we cannot first celebrate this presence, and nurture and expand its healing grace in where the Christ is most present and most needed – in the world right now that is suffering beyond what our hearts and brains can cope with at times – then in my mind, our efforts and strategies to come back to the liturgical space while it is considered by experts to be a dangerous proposition – is a grave mistake, and in conflict with the reasons why we gather to celebrate in the first place. The values of "full, conscious, and active participation" of the liturgy begins and always moves toward the full, conscious and active participation in the LIFE OF CHRIST. Out there ... in the world. Not only nor primarily in our lovely and comfortable liturgical spaces (which I believe, will not feel comfortable for many for some time).

There is a story that is told of Mother Theresa of Calcutta that she once allegedly said "when I hold the Eucharist in my hands and when a I hold a leprous person in my hands I am holding the same Christ."

Can we be a bit more patient, calm down, and think through the potential consequences of being too much in a hurry? I know, it is hard. But can we discern and examine where our decisions might lead us, not only in terms of safety and public health, but also possibly putting the gospel cause at peril?

So, I apologize for my rant, and I know many will not like what I am saying here. But in the midst of all that seems to be a driven-centered need to get back to "normal liturgical celebrations" (which they are now, not so, and will not be for some time, by the way), I cannot say silent.

So, I dissent.

**In memoriam:
Geoffrey
Wainwright
(July 16, 1939 –
March 17,
2020)**

May 1, 2020
Editor



**Free Video
Series on the
Mass**

May 1, 2020
Editor



**NPM Moves to
Virtual
Convention**

April 27, 2020
Editor