

Eucharist and the power of personal witness

Do you know what one thing we in the Church often get wrong? We fail to articulate the real and tangible differences Jesus and the Gospel make in people's lives.

At the beginning of the year, I attended a meeting in Chicago with members of the National Eucharistic Revival team. The revival is a three-year effort to help Catholics in the U.S. increase their devotion to the Eucharist. At this meeting, a group of consultants presented the findings from a study commissioned to help the revival leadership team understand the perceptions of Catholics and nonbelievers of the Eucharist. There was a lot of useful information shared in the report. But there was one finding that stood out to me.

The study showed that one of the most important reasons people are not engaged in the Church is that they don't see how the Gospel and the Eucharist improve their lives. In other words, we are failing to communicate what's in it for them.

You may think that such work is not our job or that it is consumerism, not faith. But when I read and reflect on the Gospels, that's exactly what Jesus did. He healed people, he delivered people from their demons, and he helped them walk again, see again and live again. And after doing so, he invited them to be reconciled with the Father. An encounter with Jesus changed their lives. Their lives were infinitely better.

This is the inspiration for I AM HERE (iamhere.org), a campaign of the Archdiocese of Detroit and Hallow to help people see the difference the Eucharist can make in their lives if they have open minds and open hearts. We are using the power of story and personal witness to do this. Rather

than preaching or teaching, we want to show and invite them to “come and see.” Over the next two years, we will share on our website, newsletter and social channels stories from people whose lives have been transformed by their encounters with Jesus in the Eucharist.

In his pastoral letter, “Unleash the Gospel,” Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron of Detroit highlights the indispensable role of personal testimony in evangelization. “Testimony has a unique power to touch hearts since it is almost impossible to ignore the witness of someone who has encountered Jesus personally and whose life has been transformed by him. The townspeople of the Samaritan woman at the well came to faith in Jesus because of her testimony, which eventually led them to encounter him themselves (Jn 4:39, 42).”

Every week, a new feature story and photo essay will be published on our website and social media channels. These stories and photos remind us that we are never alone and that in our brokenness, sorrows and frustrations, Jesus in the Eucharist wants to say to us, “I am here.” In addition to these weekly feature stories, we invite people to submit their own testimonies. Over the next two years, we expect to publish thousands of stories of ordinary people sharing the extraordinary power of the Eucharist in their lives.

But we don’t want to stop at inspiration. We invite people to “come and see,” just as Philip said to an incredulous Nathaniel (Jn 1:46). We want people to experience an encounter with Jesus in Eucharistic adoration. We are also partnering with parishes and dioceses to promote Eucharistic adoration. We want to invite more people to unplug and spend time with Jesus. It doesn’t need to be an hour. Perhaps start with 10, 15 or 30 minutes. For some of us, adoration can be very difficult, and we may not know what to do. Through our partnership with Hallow, we offer free audio meditations to help people experience the closeness and love that Jesus has for them. These beautiful meditations by Julianne Stanz and

Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens are a great place to start.

Last Sunday was the beginning of the National Eucharistic Revival. I am very excited to see the many ways the Church in the United States will respond to the invitation to return to the source and summit of our faith – Christ's Real Presence in the holy Eucharist. I AM HERE is our contribution to the movement. I hope I AM HERE helps people come to know that Jesus in the Eucharist is here, with us, so that he can strengthen us, transform us into him, fill us with his own life and make him present in the world.

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