

Corpus Christi 2024 “Beware of Fake Communion”

Bishop Frank Schuster

There is a highly envied demographic in society that is statistically more likely to experience more physical, mental and financial problems than the average American, can you guess which enviable demographic I am thinking of? Survey says: Lottery winners! Yes, it is true. Three to five years after winning a lottery, these so called “winners” will be several times more likely to be bankrupt than the average American with all the stress, heartache, and even physical maladies that can come with this. I don’t even have to cite a study for you. You can easily research this for yourself. When I first learned about this, it made me very, very curious. If winning the lottery will most likely make a person unhappy in comparison to others in society, what kind of occupations make people happier than most? This was easy to research as well, and with all the studies I saw, evidently being a priest or minister is very high on the list of occupations that report the most happiness. That discovery made me smile. I could have told you that. And so, you kids out there, take notice! Religious sisters, priests and deacons are typically happier people than most. Consider that at the next job fair! However, when it comes to happiness, it seems just about any occupation that genuinely serves others, or is part of a team, or makes the community, family or world a better place will make for much happier people than those who go through life seeking personal fame or serving themselves. And I think we all know this to be intuitively true. There seems to be two ways of going about life. There are people who live for “me” and people who live for “we”. The people who live life for “we” tend to be happier than those who live life for themselves.

And this brings us to the word for the day, “communion”. This weekend we celebrate the solemnity of Corpus Christi. It is a weekend to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ freely given to us for our spiritual wellbeing and nourishment. During Mass, we call the time when we receive the Holy Eucharist “communion”. When we receive the Holy Eucharist at Mass, we are communing with our Lord, welcoming his body and blood to be become part of our body and blood. We do this in remembrance of Jesus and his passion, death and resurrection for the sake of our salvation. And we do so not in isolation. When we receive Christ we are to be Christ as members of the Body of Christ. We commune together. As community we are called to be a communion of saints. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God. What this means is: we are in this together.

I think it is therefore good that we are considering this word “communion” on the feast of Corpus Christi, because the culture in which we live, as we all know, promotes a lot of false communions out there. For example, do you want to know what might lead you to depression quicker than winning the lottery? Evidently, too much social media! Again, I don’t have to cite you any studies. They are all over the internet. People who spend more time on social media than the average person tend to suffer from more depression than others and are more likely to engage in self destructive behaviors as well. Why is this? I think it is because social media is impersonal and basically fake. You can’t really commune with someone through a post, or a text, but you can gradually become more and more envious of other people’s lives while becoming more and more dissatisfied with your own. And it is all a lie.

The truth is, when we increase screen time at the expense of real human interaction time, this is a recipe for loneliness. It is false communion. It is too much “me” time when what we really need more of is “we” time. Along those lines, I find it kind of funny when people post pictures of their meals or beverages to their so called “friends”. What they are basically saying is, “Hey, look at this great meal I had...that you were not invited to!” That isn’t very nice at all, is it? If they were truly their friend, what they should be doing is inviting them over to their house or restaurant to have an actual meal or cup of coffee together. That is what being a friend used to look like anyway. Today is different, I guess. I also find it ironic that when I go out to a restaurant with a friend or group of friends how often we see at least one couple or family sitting nearby around a table all staring at their screens all night. I am sure you have seen that too. This is false communion. Turn off your devices and start communing with the people around you for Pete’s sake. You will be happier for it.

This may make me sound like a fuddy-duddy, but growing up, my house had three channels on the TV and rarely anything good on worth watching, so there were a lot of evenings we simply played board games and card games together. And we were better off for it, because we were enjoying each other’s lives instead of staring into screens all evening long. It is amazing how many cable channels people stare dumbly at for hours, the video games people can spend entire nights playing, and all the web sites people addictively surf for hours on end. Instead of seeking holy relationships, people turn to chat threads, blog posts, pornography, and it is all false communion. It is fake, leading people into isolation, loneliness and sin. It is bad for the soul.

And I know you all understand this. Why? Because you are here, you are here this weekend, you came to Church. Your presence here this weekend demonstrates your understanding that a relationship with God can never just be a “me and Jesus” show. Coming to Church reminds us that my life isn’t about me but something bigger. Life is about “we” not about “me”. Life calls us to communion, with our family members, with our co-workers and with our friends, with our neighbors and with our community, not with our devices as useful as they can be. Life calls us to communion with Jesus who loves us in a way this culture never can or ever will. Life calls us to communion with Jesus who never saw his own life as being about him but rather saw his life as being all about us. Don’t believe me, there is the proof. Life calls us to communion with Jesus who gives us his body and blood to nourish us on our journey to eternal life with him. Thank God almighty that life calls us to communion with Jesus, who alone is the way, the truth and the life.