

PARTICIPATION AS TRANSFORMATION – John 6:60-69

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

Father Cole Daily

If you want to set your child up for failure, give them a “participation trophy”.

When I was a Cub Scout, I would compete every year in the pinewood derby. Though I was super into Boy Scouts, the pinewood derby was always an epic fail. My last year, I built my car in much the same way, not really putting a lot of effort into it. To my great surprise, at the award ceremony, I was awarded third place for my division. I did it! I was a champion! Then I realized that there were only three people in my division. Needless to say, that trophy ended up in the trash. As much as I wanted to win, I only “tried”; I didn’t *participate* enough because I didn’t care enough. I wasn’t all-in. Someone who wins, or who gives everything while attempting to win, participates more than someone who only tries.

We often hear people say that Mass is about participation; “Full active participation” and all those things. But what does that even mean? Today, in order to wrap up our series of homilies on the Mass and John chapter 6, I wish to speak about our participation at Mass. It is not a participation trophy. It is not a checklist. **Real participation in the Mass is when we allow ourselves to be transformed by the Presence of Jesus.**

The Apostles understood this. We heard the results of Jesus’ dynamite sermon in the Gospel today. Instead of deafening applause, Jesus receives an empty room – empty except for twelve men. What were the apostles thinking? It’s not like they could really grasp how they were going to “eat His flesh” and “drink His blood”. And yet, they were willing to stay with Him. “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Peter,

speaking for the rest, says that he will be all-in. He will not settle for a participation trophy, or a pat on the back. *He wants to be transformed into something new.*

When we think about participating at Mass, I'm afraid that most Catholics have the wrong idea, or at least, not the full idea. We are often thinking too small. We think about becoming a reader or an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion. These things are great, but participation at Mass is something much more demanding and momentous. You can be a reader and an extraordinary minister and an usher at the same Mass and *still* not participate fully. This is because participation is not necessarily having a visible role to play. It's definitely not taking the place of the priest. It's not "getting into the music". It's not about what I "get" out of Mass at all. It's not about gritting our teeth and forcing ourselves to pay attention to every word. All of these are fine, but if we think that any one of them counts for participation at Mass, we would sell ourselves short of the truth.

The bishops of the Second Vatican Council said this about participation: "Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #14). What does this mean? It means that we need to be all-in, like the apostles today. Fully conscious and *aware*, fully *acting* with our heart and not just passive. We need to be with Jesus in everything, not just one thing, not just "trying" to be with Him. **This means that participation isn't just about Mass, it's about life.** Let me give you an example. To participate at Mass, we have to really believe what the Church teaches, what Jesus teaches. For instance: we do not accept the use of artificial birth control or the practice of abortion, and we do not accept the legal fiction of same-sex marriage. Believing falsely prevents us from participating in the life of Jesus. That may be the best

place to start. If we want to participate and be transformed, then we need to be all-in. It is the priest who leads the sacrifice, but YOU because of your baptism, are able to unite your own selves to the priest's offering. When I hold up the paten with the host and say "through your goodness, we have this bread to offer you", I am lifting up each of you and all your intentions, even the whole Church in the world, to be offered up to the Father. You should offer yourself too, all your joys, sorrows, sufferings, difficulties, and victories back to God. *That* is participation.

When we participate this way, the whole world is transformed, beginning with you and me. The fact is, our world and our Church are in desperate need of God's help. Evil is attacking the Church, the Bride of Christ, both from the outside and even from within. More than ever, we need to stand with our Lord and fully participate. Only Jesus is able to save us, and that begins right here at Mass. When I come to Mass, I am offered up to the Father with Jesus, *and He gives me back to myself – a new man, a new creation, a man filled with courage because my heart is one with Jesus.* "It is no longer I who live," says St. Paul, "Christ is living in me" (Galatians 2:20). If we are willing to participate at Mass, to renew our faith and approach God with humility and contrition every time, we will gradually be transformed into new beings, filled with the Holy Spirit and power from on high.

In order to participate in the life of Jesus more fully, Fr. Underwood and I are inviting you to join us in a new gesture of prayer. After we finish purifying the vessels for communion, instead of sitting down and causing a lot of movement and noise, Fr. Underwood and I want to kneel for a few seconds to join you in prayer. We ask that you would continue to kneel with us (or if you are unable, to remain seated). This will not add any extra time to the Mass, but it will extend that sacred silence after communion. Take this

short time to ask Jesus to transform your heart from within. This silence and prayer is *real* participation – the realest thing we can do.

Participation in the Mass is simply allowing ourselves to be transformed by the Presence of Jesus, all of it, not holding anything back. He is about to show Himself to you. Do not let this moment slip by. **“To be a Christian means to participate in the life of Christ—all of it; only the whole brings peace...”** (Romano Guardini, *The Lord*). When you leave today, know that you walk away a new creature, holding in your flesh the presence of God *who cannot be contained*.