

In the spring of 1982 I decided to drop out of college and backpack through Europe alone. I had no planned itinerary. I just took the money I had saved, bought a Eurail Pass that would allow me to travel on any train in Europe without having to hassle with buying tickets, and then took along plenty of time. In fact, I didn't know when I was coming back.

This turned out to be a great adventure, but it was not restful or relaxing time. There was a certain amount of stress involved. Imagine, every day, or two, or three I entered a new foreign town or Metropolis by train (Amsterdam, Milan, Athens, etc). And I was then faced with an immediate task: FIND FOOD AND SHELTER FOR THE NIGHT. That is, find a youth hostel and reserve a bed for the night, and a place to eat (all in a language I didn't know, in a city I'd never seen before). I did have a guidebook called "Let's Go Europe." It was written by American students and had tips in it about where to find cheap, but good, places to sleep and eat throughout Europe. These are the necessities. Once I had them I could relax and turn to the business of seeing the sights, meeting people and having fun.

Last October and this past April (excluding Easter) we at Holy Family did a "mass count" along with all the parishes in the Archdiocese. This was meant to be, in part, a way of measuring the effects of the Catholics Come Home Project. There was a slight increase from 1970 – 1994 people per weekend.

But what stood out for me is that this number is out of 1600+ registered households, not individuals! People are staying away in droves from the Eucharist.

As your Pastor I feel called, for my own sake, as well as yours, to state clearly that there is a grave moral obligation on pain of sin for every Catholic to participate in the Eucharist EVERY Sunday and Holy Day of obligation.

I know, put that way, this "precept of the Church" sounds legalistic and harsh – it gets our backs up, leads to resistance. And it's not only that we're independent-minded Americans who don't like to be told what to do. We don't see the need. Why should we go to Mass so often? What's the big deal?

Today, wanting you to keep this precept, I want to try to help you see it in a different light. This is the feast of Corpus Christi, hence the Gospel. The Feeding of the Five Thousand is a foreshadowing of the Eucharist. Here we have a large crowd. The people are hungry. Jesus first teaches them about the Kingdom, then takes what they offer (bread and fish in this case), blesses the gifts – and changes them into – SOMETHING MORE. The Disciples distribute them. "And all ate and were satisfied." Here Jesus provides an overabundance to feed the great, threatening, human hunger. Echoes of the Mass should be obvious in this miracle because this is also what happens at Mass. Jesus feeds us – with knowledge of Revelation and the Kingdom, but especially with His Body and Blood. That is why we must come to the Eucharist.

God's Commandment to participate in the Eucharist should not be seen just in legalistic terms, but in what might be called "organic terms." The Mass is a matter of life. We need it (HIM) to live spiritually. That is where we receive the Lifeblood of God.

I discovered on my European trip that I needed to take care of the necessities first, before engaging in the “fun” of the world. So we should do with the Eucharist. We often want to skip mass for what seems more “fun.” But we’ll actually enjoy life more – live more fully – if we take care of our spiritual nourishment first, before we head out for the rest of life.

So how are we to make sure we get our soul’s food and drink every Sunday and Holy Day? Make it the first priority. On that trip to Europe, when I started a new adventure in a new city, the first thing I did was find the basics of life. So, the first thing we should all do every week is to figure out where and when we’ll attend Mass. Are we intentional about this? This includes vacations. The Catholic Church means the Universal Church. It’s a good description. There are Catholic churches almost every place. And the internet means that saying, “I didn’t know where the church was,” is not a valid excuse anymore. And the same goes for those long soccer weekends when your child’s select team plays in that tournament out of town. We will certainly figure out on those trips where we will eat and sleep – how we will take care of our bodies. What about our souls?

Where will we receive the Body and Blood of Christ this weekend? That is our question. These are necessities! That is why God and His Church say, “Go to Mass every Sunday – or even every day!” So we can stay alive, and grow in life. The Eucharist is necessary for our souls’ health. There is a deep hunger in us that will only be satisfied by God Himself. Once we have our hunger for God satisfied, then we can turn to our other needs – and find even greater pleasure and joy in His creation. Just as I once experienced the joys of the great cities of Europe once I knew I had a warm meal and bed to retire to, so after we’ve been fed by Jesus Himself we’ll be more alive in the strength and peace that comes with being connected to God, being one with Him.

“[T]hey all ate and were satisfied.” Life in this world of ours is rarely restful and relaxing, but it is an adventure. And we need food for that journey. The Mass is where we will find it. Christ has given Catholics His very Body and Blood in the Eucharist. What greater adventure is there than growing in that divine life?