



Lenten

Reflection Series

One Church, Many Voices

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First Sunday of Lent - February 21

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Why Do I Love Being Catholic?

I'm so happy to be invited to consider this question. A lifelong Catholic and a priest for nearly 31 years, I sometimes take this great gift for granted. As we walk our Lenten journey, reflection on important things helps us to prepare for the Paschal Triduum. Three things come to mind as I reflect with gratitude on my membership in the Church of Jesus Christ.

The Eucharist. The universality of the Church. And the option for the poor.

Ever since I was young, I felt a real connection to the Eucharist. When I was a boy at Saint Giles in Oak Park Illinois, my mother taught eighth grade. She offered to give us a ride to school. Even though it was less than a half mile walk, I liked that option. The deal made was that any of her nine children who chose to ride to school would spend the before school time, when the teachers had their preparation time, attending daily Mass.

That's where it started. I went to daily Mass pretty regularly. I felt strengthened and emboldened by the Eucharist. The peace of daily Mass and the faithfulness of the regular congregants inspired me.

Daily Mass became part of my adolescent and young adult life. I attended daily Mass at Fenwick High School and Marquette University. The Eucharist was food for my journey, fuel for my soul. It still is. The Real Presence of Jesus gives me what I need.

Our Church, so intimate and rich, spans continents. Wherever we are, we can find a Catholic Church that is celebrating the same mysteries, listening to the same readings, praying the same prayers. Although the language may be different we are united by the faith we share.

One of my favorite places to experience this universality is Lourdes France. In Lourdes many voices blend to create the one Church concert. Every night, from May to October, pilgrims from all over the world pray the torchlight Marian Rosary Procession. In word and song, in languages too numerous to count, they hope and pray. This procession, that has been happening since 1858, comes in response to the Virgin's request to a poor little girl, "Tell the priest to build a chapel here and to come in procession." My words don't suffice to describe the beauty of our universal Church on display at Lourdes. I echo Mary's invitation and encourage all who are able to make a pilgrimage to Lourdes, and those who are not able to travel to make a virtual pilgrimage to the shrine.

Lastly, I love being Catholic because our Church follows the example of Jesus and has a deep concern for those who are outcasts, poor and sick. One of our Eucharistic Prayers states about Jesus, "He always showed compassion for children and for the poor, for the sick and for sinners, and he became a neighbor to the oppressed and the afflicted."

Later in the prayer, the priest implores, "Open our eyes to the needs of our brothers and sisters; inspire in us words and actions to comfort those who labor and are burdened. Make us serve them truly, after the example of Christ and at his command. And may your Church stand as a living witness to truth and freedom, to peace and justice, that all people may be raised up to a new hope."

I love being Catholic because we have the Eucharist, because we are many voices in one Church and because, despite our imperfections, we strive, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to raise all people to a new hope.

Personal Reflection Questions

Lent is a time of self-examination and renewal. Consider using the reflection prompts below to help further your contemplation and open your minds and hearts during the 40-day journey of Lent.

- **When have you felt the power of the Eucharist?**
- **What was a time when you experienced the universality of our Church?**
- **What will you do this Lent to follow Jesus' example of outreach to and love for the downtrodden?**