Opinion
Spirituality
Soul Seeing



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by Mark Etling

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July 10, 2018
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I love and need the celebration of the Eucharist. It brings me into communion with the universal church and the church of my fellow parishioners. It consoles and

challenges me in the proclamation and application of the word of God, and it feeds me when I receive the body and blood of Christ. The Mass is a positive and important experience for me.

But there's a little phrase in the liturgy that bothers me a lot. It's this: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof." Every time I hear those words, a voice within me shouts, "Lord, why am I not worthy?"

With all respect, I cannot help but challenge the assumption that I or anyone is unworthy to approach the table of the Lord.

First, I look to the Scriptures. The story of creation in Chapter 1 of Genesis offers two foundational affirmations about us human beings. In Verse 26, God declares the intention to create humanity in God's own image, and John 4:16 tells us that "God is love." We are made in the image of Love. The author of Genesis then affirms that everything Love made is good — "very good" in fact. So if we are all created in God's image, and we are all good because we are Love's creations, made out of the same spiritual stuff — how can we be unworthy? Haven't we always been worthy, worthy because God has declared it so?

But what about the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden? Doesn't the stain of original sin make us all unworthy? Is original sin a state of depravity and unworthiness, imprinted on our souls like an ugly birthmark carried from generation to generation, or is it the capability of human beings with free will to do things that are detrimental to ourselves, others and God?

That brings us to the "chicken and egg" question: Are we all basically good people who are capable of sinning or basically sinful people who have the capacity to do good? God's act of creating us in Love's own image must trump our ability to tarnish that image by sinning. We are always worthy in God's eyes, even when we sin.

Jesus spoke with, ate with, healed, fed, raised from death, commissioned, and gave positions of authority to men and women without any regard for their worthiness. Jesus showed God's love and compassion to any and all that needed him. All were worthy.

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Did Jesus die on the cross to make us worthy? Does that make sense in light of everything we know from Scripture? Jesus didn't die to restore us to "worthy" status; he died because we are worthy of his supreme sacrifice. Jesus didn't die to make us worthy, as Anselm of Canterbury said long ago; he died because he knew we are worth dying for.

Then there is the liturgical light. The Eucharist begins with the penitential rite, a public acknowledgement of our faults and failings, the times when we have not lived up to the image of Love in which we were created. But the penitential rite concludes with the assurance of God's mercy and forgiveness. Worthiness reaffirmed.

Finally, there is the experience of the people with whom we come into contact every day: the people we work with, fellow parishioners, neighbors, friends and family. I am forever awed by their generosity, their willingness to serve without need of thanks or recognition, their faithfulness to God and God's people. These folks are not good because of the good things they do — they do good things because they're good people. They're not perfect — but they are very good. Worthy.

So I cannot understand or agree with the words, "Lord, I am not worthy." We do not approach the table of the Lord seeking to be made worthy. We are called to the Lord's supper because God calls us to be what we already are, love and mercy for each other, and because we want to respond to that call as best we can. We come to the Eucharist with joy and thanksgiving to celebrate the bonds of love and unity we share each day.

To realize that we are made in the image of God who is Love.

To acknowledge that we are the children of God.

Worthy.

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A version of this story appeared in the **July 13-26, 2018** print issue under the headline: Lord, why am I not worthy?.