

Beyond the fears of the absolute unknown, fed as continuously as it was harshly by the news of each passing day, one of the hardest moments to overcome in the midst of this pandemic was missing mass and service attendance for Holy Week. One of the most transformative moments of my life came from the first attendance of the Easter vigil mass five years ago, with the following pillars that held up each week in community relationships and ritualistic transcendence being within the sacraments and mass of the weekend held at St. Cecilia Parish outside of Portland, Oregon. From experience in the social outreach ministry in the corporal works of mercy, to giving within the team leadership for the course within the Rite of Christian Initiation, there is a bond of spiritual community within the parish and in lessons for what frames the outside world. The religious connection found within the sanctuary during the mass, keeps eyes up towards and focused on what is considered to be the summit of Catholic ritual life, the Eucharist.

It's in this summit that we call to mind in how we view ourselves, our natural world and our relationships with the community. Working with those that sought to convert to the faith brought a sense of joy and hope for the future, not only for the growth of the spiritual community, but in the struggle amidst the growing dyad of American public life. The RCIA course for those bonding on this journey, would take approximately a year, with the end being the ritual sacraments of initiation at the Easter vigil mass on the evening of what is previously Holy Saturday. This is the moment we all work towards, in celebration during what is considered to be the most sacred time of the year for Catholics. The time when the pandemic struck and quarantines occurred came within the time known as Lent, which is meant to be a time of sacrifice in preparation for this most sacred time of year.

With each passing week, with limitations and notifications from the state government and the Archdiocese of Portland about how the virus was spread in groups or how many should gather, the concern grew greater in this Lenten season. Gradually the initiation group had to adapt. The parish was streaming the mass online through feeds on the church website, creating zoom calls for group lesson information and questions, as well as chat lines for community support. While homilies can be transmitted, readings can be shared, and lessons passed on, what can't be substituted in a time of pandemic alternatives are the sacraments. These elements are localized to an altar, they are localized to the church and they are in need of a functionary priesthood to administer in person. What can't be substituted is what all catechumen have been hoping to prepare for on the day of Holy Saturday, the baptism, confirmation and first communion of the vigil mass. The chance to pass beyond liminality of initiation and into the fullness of the religious body they have been growing into over the past year.

To be personally denied that fullness of ritual in the sacraments of the mass has been a profoundly wounding obstacle, but to see those initiates come so far and be denied the same fullness in a world increasingly filled with hopelessness and uncertainty, has been entirely devastating. As time has passed in this quarantine, it has reframed my traditional understanding of sacrifice to extend beyond the material, but in

what is lost spiritually and communally. In what has tested community faith, I've found in the dark of communal loss that it has also brought out a greater sense of charity for those in this time of hardship. It's in this charity for one another, and the hope of healing, both physical and spiritual, for this world that I find my personal anchor in the storm.