

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Jul 28th 2017

“Father, I don’t like the way we distribute Communion in this parish.”

“How so?”

“You make us turn away from Christ in order to receive.”

I blinked a couple times, hoping to dispel the mist of my incomprehension.

As we talked the contours of the lady’s concern begin to emerge.

The parish had long had a certain traffic pattern — if one can use that kind of terminology — at communion. Folks came down the center aisle in two rows: one on the left, the other on the right. As they proceeded, they neared the large cross behind the altar. A figure of the risen Christ — who seemed to be breaking free of the cross — loomed ahead. As one came to the front, one would turn to the left or the right, depending on their row. There one would receive the Body of Christ with reverence, and proceed to a cup minister, if one so desired.

”You make us turn away from Jesus,” she said, gesturing to the figure, “in order to receive Communion.”

“Ah, that Christ on the cross,” I sought to explain, “is not the Lord. It is only an image. A moving and evocative one, certainly. Still, it is only an image.

“But the sacrament the communion minister holds before you is the Lord. You aren’t turning away from Him. You are turning toward Him.”

She thought and “hmm”ed for a moment, then thanked me and moved on. I don’t think she was satisfied with my explanation. In fact, I’m pretty sure — I chuckle good-naturedly as I write this — she went in search of the pastor and the chance at a different answer.

Today’s passage from Exodus comes as a reminder, down through the ages.

You shall not carve idols for yourselves

In the shape of anything in the sky above

Or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth . . .

Our images can awaken us to the presence of God . . . we just need to remember not to slip into making idols of them.

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