



Rejoicing in Communal Celebration

By Jeanne West

Over the past four months, we have had to give up a lot of what we consider normal, routine, satisfying and/or nurturing. That may have included going to our *place of work*, going out to eat, enjoying friends at parties, celebrations or even just having an evening together – anywhere -- with family and/or friends. What has not been talked about very often is the loss that has occurred in our lives as a result of our places of worship/faith traditions being closed to services, which includes weekly worship, weddings, bar mitzvahs, funerals and other special events that were part of “normal” for all of us.

Regardless of one’s faith tradition or the frequency with which one attends routine services or special events, it is true that a faith community is not just a community. In many ways, the faith community can be considered a family, often referred to as a “family of believers.” From a personal perspective, I can honestly say that I do consider the people with whom I have shared the weekly liturgy, my “faith family.”

Despite the fact that many religions have been able to provide services to their congregation via *You Tube*, *Zoom* or some other technological platform, there is nothing like *being present* in the same space with others to share our *one united* expression of faith. One thing can be said with certainty – until you lose such a privilege, you really don’t appreciate how much you will miss the communal experience of your religious tradition.

Speaking personally, how thrilling it was for me to finally be able to gather in prayer in solidarity with our Pastor, Fr. Dan Lackie, in front of the Old Mission Church last Saturday afternoon, along with members of St. Barbara Parish at Old Mission Santa Barbara. Most of the eighty-five people in attendance brought chairs and sat on the paved area in front of the famous Mission steps, while others sat on the adjacent wall or stood in the back or on the lawn that graces the front of the Mission on Los Olivos Street. Portable speakers allowed everyone to hear the readings and prayers, loud and clear. We practiced social distancing, wore masks, enjoyed the sunshine and were able to accommodate more people than would have been permitted in the church.

What felt so special about all of this was being present with others from the Parish that I had not seen in nearly four months. Each routine weekend service seems to have its regular attendees and that is certainly true of the Saturday afternoon 4:00 p.m. Mass. In a way, it felt

like a reunion, right along with communion, as we were able to participate in *sharing* versus *watching* the communion part of the service. It was a way to feel whole again, sitting and standing with those believers with whom we share an incredible bond of faith.

As long as I have been an adult, there has never been a time when I was prevented from going to my place of worship. This made the loss of that privilege quite profound and brought to mind, sadness for the times in life when I chose *not to* participate in Sunday liturgy when it was there and available. Like so much of what we normally experience in life, we don't appreciate what we have until we have lost it. From family and friends, to our daily life and routine, to yes – participating in a religious service – the loss of normalcy has awakened the sense of purpose, gratitude, need for community and importance of faith.

At the moment, with a resurgence of the virus in our community, state, and in various areas throughout our nation, there is not a guarantee as to when our lives will resume in a more “regular” fashion. Notice, I did not say “when we will get back to normal.” As many have wisely predicted, there is bound to be a *new normal*. What that will look like and when it will happen, only time and our behaviors will predict. In the meantime, please ponder this quote:

Faith is like a boomerang; begin using what you have and it comes back to you in greater measure.”

Charles L. Allen

Let us have faith that, in time, and learning from this experience, our lives will be changed in hopeful and positive ways. One does not have to be in a church, temple, synagogue or mosque to have faith or to give thanks – that can happen anywhere. Meanwhile, let us indeed, take a moment to give thanks for what we have learned and how the lessons of these past months will change us in profound and positive ways.

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