

Recognizing Christ in Our Neighbors

Into Your Hands | *Archbishop Robert G. Casey*

I recently traveled to Washington, D.C., to advocate for our Haitian community with members of the U.S. Senate and their staff. Organized by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the day brought together Cardinal Chibly Langlois from Les Cayes in Haiti, Archbishop Wenski from Miami, Bishop Fabre from Charleston, SC, Fr. Jazon, a Haitian priest from Camden, NJ, and me. We spent the day in conversation about the current reality faced by the Haitian community, both here in the USA and in Haiti. Our time together opened my eyes to the important work our Church has been called to do in this present moment. Our daily labor as disciples of Jesus Christ must include providing voice to the voiceless and accompaniment to those who suffer. We must recognize Jesus on his way to Calvary and wounded under the weight of the cross when we look upon our neighbors who struggle to find their way in the world today.

Our Lord instructs us in Matthew's Gospel, "Whatsoever you do to the least of my people, that you do unto me" (cf. Mt 25:40). St. Paul then echoes this teaching in his letter to the Corinthians, reminding us that when one member suffers, all suffer (cf. 1 Cor 12:26). Our discipleship bears fruit when we shine the light of Christ upon the sufferings of our brothers and sisters and when we see the light of Christ shining bright from within them.

This balance, between being Christ for one another and seeing Christ in one another, finds a profound expression in the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. What we do at Mass, in remembrance of the great sacrifice of Jesus, teaches and transforms us. Christ is not simply present in the Host and Chalice but becomes present in His Body the Church. Made one in the Communion we share, our dignity as God's sons and daughters and our unity as brothers and sisters in Christ are revealed.

That day in Washington, D.C., concluded with a celebration of Mass with the Haitian community. That evening, the Lord was truly present in Word and Sacrament. From the wonderful singing to the powerful preaching to the heartfelt praying, there was no doubt that Jesus was with us in that church.

I was privileged to distribute Communion that evening. As the people came forth to receive the Eucharist, I said, as I always do, "The Body of Christ." But in that moment, Jesus was not simply present in the Host that I held before each communicant. As I said those words, "The Body of Christ," Jesus was revealed to me in the men, women, and children who received the Host. My words became a declaration of their identity as a people transformed through the Eucharist. I quickly found myself challenged by Christ, "Do you recognize Me truly present in the people surrounding you?" Like St. Peter, I was asked by Jesus, "Do you love me?" And as the word "amen" was spoken, a deep and abiding "yes" was experienced in that moment of Communion.

What occurred for me that evening with the Haitian community expresses my hope for our family of faith every time we gather for the Eucharist. I pray that the grace of the Eucharist may enter our hearts, inspiring us to see that every person possesses inherent dignity as a child of God. I pray that the nourishment of the Eucharist may strengthen us for our daily labor, knowing that when we help someone in need we care for Christ directly. I pray that our "amen" in that moment of

Communion may be a “yes” to Christ’s call to love our neighbors, including those who are different from us, those who are strangers, those who are outcast, and even our enemies.