

The former archbishop of San Francisco, John Quinn, loved to tell the story of the arrival of Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity to open their house in the city.

Archbishop Quinn had gone to great efforts to make sure that their convent was, while hardly opulent, quite comfortable.

He recalls how Mother Teresa arrived and immediately ordered the carpets removed, the telephones, except for one, pulled out of the wall, the beds, except for the mattresses taken away, and on and on.

Explained Mother Teresa to the baffled archbishop, "All we really need in our convent is the tabernacle."

Such was the importance given by St. mother Teresa to the Eucharist. Their nuns still give great importance to the Eucharist and Eucharistic adoration. I have some distant cousins who are nuns in this Order, one of them is in Phoenix, AZ. Whenever I call her, either she is working or in the chapel. As she doesn't have cell phones, only after many trials I am able to get a hold of her.

Today's, solemn feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, formerly known as the feast of Corpus Christi, is also dedicated to and highlighting the centrality and importance of the Eucharist in our life. This is to remind us that Eucharist is a source and summit of our faith, for us Catholics. Other denominations may have different emphasis.

This year this feast has extra importance and significance. For past many months we were deprived of participation in the Eucharist in person and to receive the body and blood of Christ. In many parts of the world, the Catholics are still not allowed to celebrate the Eucharist in person. In my home country and home diocese in person Eucharistic celebrations are still not allowed and some priests as well as some faithful have been arrested very recently.

During the full lock down period many of you might have watched the actual celebration of the Eucharist by a priest and possibly a small group of masked ministers through the electronic medium. But observing the celebration by a priest at a distance and physically participating in the Eucharist together are as different as observing a group of friends or colleagues eat a delicious meal in the house while we stand outside looking through the window. We were not celebrating the Eucharist; we were just watching hungry. Even for us priests celebrating Eucharist alone was not the same as with the Congregation., because Eucharist by very nature is community celebration.

After the restrictions were eased a bit, we were able to celebrate the Eucharist in person but with several restrictions like masking and social distancing. Gladly, now we are able to celebrate and participate in the Eucharist in person without mask but still miss the receiving of precious blood in the form of consecrated blood. Of course, it is considered full participation even if one receives the body of Christ in the form of consecrated bread only. In many parts of the world, including India, for various reasons, Catholics receive Holy communion only in the form of bread even in normal time.

Today it is clear that for the good of all of God's people it was necessary that we deprive ourselves of participation in the Eucharist for however long we had to. Other means of giving our lives in service for the sake of "the many" were practiced by those who wore masks, remained socially distant and exercised other required or recommended precautions. Being vaccinated, when health allows it, is one more step toward reverencing the whole Body of Christ. Furthermore, it is the means by which we will be able to be fully restored to the community's practice of the Eucharist by Eating and Drinking that Jesus invited us to in the Last Supper.

So, let us not miss any chance of celebration of Eucharist the source and summit of our faith more frequently, more devotedly and more worthily. This feast invites us to believe, to live and proclaim the Eucharist in our day-to-day life. Who knows if more waves of this pandemic will affect this country? We may again get deprived of the celebration of the Eucharist. At one time India was rejoicing that they got the victory over the virus. And allowed the large gatherings without masks. As a result, second wave came more deadlier than the first one.