

St. Anthony of Padua R.C. Church

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Traditionally Speaking by S. Casarotto, CS 7/5/09

Community of Faith?

Parishes are often defined as "Communities of Faith". In the mass (*a.k.a.* liturgy), we are told that the "community prays together." We often hear about making our churches "friendly" and "in-viting". Good homilies are supposed to make people "feel good about themselves," without pointing the finger at anything or anybody. After all, God loves everyone.

Unfortunately, the term "community" is seldom defined and the source and nature of the Christian community is often ignored or undermined. Granted, there might have been too much individualism in the past. Rituals had often become rigid and unintelligible and unity inside the church was followed by fights in the parking lot.

At the Last Supper, Jesus prayed: "*May they be one even as you and I are one.*" He also said: "*I am the vine, you are the branches. You can not bear fruit unless you are one in Me.*" (Jn. 15, 5-60).

A Catholic parish does not consist simply in a number of closely knit individuals who do certain things together or just have common goals. Catholic worship is not a happy social hour among friends nor a group action motivated by philanthropic concerns.

Nowhere in the NT do we find the commandment "Love the community". Christ did command: "*Love one another*" (Jn. 13, 34) and "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" (Mk. 12, 31). The original Greek word for "neighbor" (*πλεσιον*) is in the singular and indicates a love which is direct and personal. God does not love in a bulk. He loves us personally. We do not love people en masse, but we love a mass of people by loving many individuals.

There is also the mistaken notion that in the liturgy "we gather together". This is idolatrous if it reduces Christian worship to the act

of man rather than the action of God who calls us together and makes us one with Him through His own Son Jesus. The "divinization" of man (as Eastern Churches call it) is the work of God in the crucified and risen Christ and not the work of the self-made and self-glorified man.

The Christian community materializes in our relationship with Jesus, the Word of God and the Bread of Life. It is not tied to the number of people attending mass as if the more people there are or the more people clap hands together the more of a mass it is!

The ultimate goal of the mass is not to celebrate the human community but our communion with the Father through Jesus in the Holy Spirit. It is not the community which makes Christ present, but the existential presence of Christ in his followers which makes a vibrant and apostolic community.