

“ENTER UNDER MY ROOF”

What may sound like one of the strangest prayers we utter at Mass is actually, scripturally speaking, one of the most human and most beautiful:

***Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof,
but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.***

This prayer comes from the well-known scene in the Gospel of Matthew (8:5-13), where Jesus is approached by a centurion whose servant is paralyzed. Remember that Jews and Gentiles did not socially interact with one another for the most part, which is one of the reasons Jesus was constantly getting into so much trouble with the religious authorities of his day.

Picture the scene: A Roman centurion was a high-ranking officer, who commanded at least a hundred men, yet here he was publicly affirming Jesus’ identity and begging him to help to heal his servant. The idea of a Jewish rabbi going to the home of a Gentile military officer would have shocked and scandalized nearly everyone. The centurion exercised great authority, which is another reason that his proclamation of Jesus’ authority to heal his servant is so impressive.

In addition, the centurion acknowledges his unworthiness for Jesus to enter his house—in the same way we acknowledge in Mass our unworthiness for Christ to enter under the “roof” of our souls in Holy Communion. But, just as the centurion believed Christ could heal his servant, we as Christ’s servants believe he can and will heal us of our unworthiness to receive him in the Eucharist.

St. Paul reminds us that our bodies are “temples of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19). When we receive Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, he is literally coming under the “roof” of our “temples”. As Jesus enters under our roof, he transforms us into living, walking tabernacles to be sent out into the world.

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us: “Before so great a sacrament, the faithful can only echo humbly and with ardent faith the words of the centurion” (CCC 1386).

It might initially feel strange to pray “under my roof” when speaking about our own bodily temples, but this is an opportunity to pray in a more contemplative way. Place yourself within the scene you read about the Gospel. Feel the humidity in the air and the dirt beneath your feet. Listen to the humble boldness of the centurion’s words and the joyful response such humility evokes in the heart of Jesus. Hold on to that image when you pray these words with your whole heart:

***Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof,
but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.***

The more you learn from the “ins and outs” of the Mass, the more it will come to life for you. Knowing what is happening sacramentally might not change your life, but contemplating the prayers being offered within it can.

Remember: The Creator can use all created things to point our minds and hearts back to him.

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