

- Have you noticed how many non-Catholic churches have remained closed, even though here in North Carolina we've been allowed to worship together in person for 4 months now?
- While all of our local Catholic churches reopened their doors to their parishioners and began having public Mass again rather quickly once allowed to do so, many Protestant churches have remained completely closed because of the pandemic.
- I mention this not to judge or pick on our non-Catholic brethren, but simply to highlight a point, which is this: our non-Catholic brethren simply don't have the same impetus to be open as Catholic churches do because they don't have the Eucharist.
- As Catholics, we come to church to worship and honor God – as all Christians do. Yet our worship of God is bound up with a *sacrifice* by which ordinary bread and wine become our Lord's body, blood, soul and divinity.
- Through the sacred ministrations of a priest, Christ, Who is both priest and victim, offers Himself as a sacrifice for us to redeem us and save us from sin. At the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, our Lord's redeeming work on Calvary is made present to us in an unbloody fashion.
- Thus, the Mass is not comparable to a Protestant liturgical service. For many Protestants there is no thought of sacrifice in their worship. Church for them is a combination of prayers, hymns, and a sermon – which typically has pride of place in their worship.
- If non-Catholic Christians do have communion, their bread and wine remain just that: bread and wine – mere symbols of Christ rather than really and truly His body, blood, soul, and divinity as we receive in Holy Communion.
- So for us Catholics, what has pride of place in our worship is the Eucharist. We come to church not only to worship God, but to receive God!
- Even if we don't receive Holy Communion, we Catholics still come to Mass just to be present at this miracle, to be with God and one another, and to revel in the mystery of God's unmatched love and generosity to man.
- To think: when you enter any Catholic Church in the world, you are really and truly in God's presence because of the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle! What graces must be available to the soul who merely enters a Catholic church with a desire to love God!
- As your pastor, I do hope you realize what a tremendous gift we have in the Eucharist. We have God: really, truly, and substantially present to us under the appearance of bread and wine, and we get to enjoy the intimacy of taking Him into ourselves.
- And that's why we rushed back to public worship the first chance we could, despite whatever risks we may incur in this time of pandemic. In the Eucharist we have something that we cannot get anywhere else than here, something worth the small risk we take in being here.
- While it's certainly important that we do what we can to minimize the risks to our physical health, as Catholics we know that we have to be careful that we don't overly prioritize our physical health over our spiritual health.
- In the end, our spiritual life is more important. And for us Catholics, our spiritual life is dependent on the Eucharist. It was wonderfully edifying to me to see how many of you truly hungered for Holy Communion during the time our churches were shut down.
- Perhaps the most edifying moment I had during that time came on Divine Mercy Sunday, when we were having Communion services but not yet able to offer Mass publicly.

- That Sunday I saw a family I didn't recognize standing in line outside the Allen Center, waiting for their turn to go in for a Communion service. When I introduced myself, they told me that they were from Birmingham, Alabama.
- They had driven 7 hours through the night to our parish, simply because they heard we were having Communion services, and they couldn't find anywhere else near them where they could receive Holy Communion. Would you have done the same?
- Because of the preeminence of the Eucharist in the liturgical and devotional life of the Church, Bishop Jugis established an annual Eucharistic Congress in our diocese in 2005, which you may recall was proclaimed the Year of the Eucharist by Pope John Paul II.
- Every year since then, we – as a diocesan family – have gathered together at the Charlotte Convention Center this time of year for a day and a half to celebrate the gift of the Eucharist, to receive catechesis, and to enjoy one another's fellowship.
- Those of you who have attended the Congress know what a magnificent gathering it is each and every year. This year the Congress was scheduled for this weekend.
- Of course, with the coronavirus pandemic this year, the Congress – like so many other events – has been cancelled. Yet, Bishop Jugis has encouraged each of our parishes to celebrate the Eucharist in a special way this weekend.
- And so we've been enjoying 40 Hours of Adoration this weekend, and I'm grateful to all of you who've spent time in prayer with our Eucharistic Lord.
- Moreover, beginning this week, we are restarting our normal Adoration schedule from 8am Tuesday to 5pm on Wednesday. The only difference is that, for now, we will have Adoration in the church rather than the chapel so we can spread out and socially distance.
- If you don't go to Adoration, let me warmly encourage you to start doing so. Going to Adoration is a chance for us to visit with Him Who loves us more than anyone. It's a chance for us to be face-to-face with our Creator.
- Sometimes, when I am in Adoration I think of Moses and the union he shared with our Lord on Mt. Sinai, and of how, after spending time in the Lord's presence, his face glowed such that he had to veil it in front of the other Israelites.
- Or I think of the story of Enoch in the Book of Genesis, which tells us that Enoch walked so closely with God, was so united with Him, that God eventually swept him up and took him to Himself.
- While I've never seen anyone walking out of Adoration glowing like Moses did, it's undeniable that Adoration has a real and salutary effect on us. While I've never seen someone swept up into Heaven like Enoch, in Adoration we can get swept up in God.
- Adoration, more than any other type of prayer, reminds us that prayer is not so much a thing that we do as it is a relationship we enjoy.
- In my own life, being with our Lord in Adoration has been a refuge of peace in times of trial, a place where I could more easily discern God's will, and a time to show my love to God.
- My dear brothers and sisters, we have a gift in the Eucharist that no one outside the Catholic and Orthodox Churches enjoys. It's the gift of God Himself. It's the gift of our redemption.
- May we each truly treasure the Eucharist with an authentic love and devotion, maintaining the proper reverence in His presence, receiving Him with both purity and integrity, and trusting faithfully that the graces we receive from the Eucharist can make us saints.
- O Sacrament most holy, O Sacrament divine, all praise and all thanksgiving be every moment Thine.