

## A View from the Pew

I attended Mass in Jasper, Georgia, just outside Atlanta, recently. It was the first time I attended Mass in almost twenty years. Since then, many things have changed especially with the advent of Covid and its implications.

The last time I attended my niece attended with me. I don't remember a whole lot from that attending, except for just one thing. She turned to me and asked, "How long more are we going to be here?" I answered her simply, "Not too much longer! They will be finished soon." She was relieved at my response.

I found attending this Saturday evening Mass in Jasper, interesting. The Vietnamese pastor announced before Mass that the Mass would be celebrated by one of the auxiliary bishops of the archdiocese – a Vietnamese bishop.

Shortly afterwards, the strains of the organ began to vibrate as a reminder that Mass was about to begin. From my vantage point at the rear of the church, I gazed around the church to get an idea of the profile, especially the age, of the worshippers. Dispersed around the church were mostly older couples, with a sprinkling of one or two families. Suddenly, I caught the glimpse of a robust young altar server, dressed in a black cassock and white surplice passing down the aisle. He was followed by a permanent deacon, fully vested; followed by a white hatted figure that seemed to bob up and down. The hat was more obvious than the rest of his miniature body frame.

A cantor, clad in a full length robe, began to bellow out the opening song in unison with the organist as the majority of the congregation remained silent. The auxiliary bishop began with the usual greeting including how privileged he was to be able to celebrate the liturgy with the folks at that particular Mass.

A reader stepped forward from the side, clad in a black flowing robe that resembled that of a college professor and began to read the scriptures, being scrupulously careful to pronounce and enunciate each syllable. The Responsorial Psalm was led by the cantor and organize. The deacon stepped forward to read the gospel, while chanting the opening and ending greeting.

Now, it was the turn of the bishop. He must have felt a bit like Zaccheus, in the gospel, being small of stature, as he indicated that if he stood behind the lectern, people may not be able to see him so he decided to preach in front of the altar.

I remembered that, many times, when priests concelebrated with their bishop, invariably, they would time the bishop's homily, by default. In this case, the auxiliary bishop spoke for sixteen minutes.

The Prayers of the Faithful followed. Basically, they were generic but topical and timely. At the end of each prayer request, the response prayer was chanted.

A couple brought the offertory gifts to the altar during the song. Eucharistic Prayer number three was used with the usual chanting at the appropriate places.

At communion time, the bishop and deacon participated. No cups were offered as an option. What I found interesting about approaching the Communion altar was that the bishop and deacon stood behind kneelers. As Communicants approached, most knelt and received on the tongue while, on either side of the bishop and deacon, two gentlemen, dressed in flowing gowns, pushed a paten in front of each chin. Very few received in the hand and declined to kneel.

Following Mass, ushers – men – dressed in full business attire, handed out bulletins. Of course, I took one, for viewing and evaluating. The cover educated me on its schedules and services. It contained the daily and weekly Mass schedule including a later Saturday evening Spanish Mass; Sacrament of Reconciliation times, Eucharistic Adoration, and office hours. It also included organizations, such as St. Vincent DePaul, Knights of Columbus, Legion of Mary, Hispanic liaison, Men's Club, Women on the Vine, Respect Life Ministry, St. Monica's Altar Guild, Grief Support Group, American Heritage Girls Troop.

Interesting also is that most priests when visiting another parish, usually rate the parish by its weekend collection. I noted that last Sunday's collection was just over \$12,000; half of which was through online giving.

Following Mass, I went out to eat with my host couple. There, I was able to get their perspective on the pastor and parish. They were able to enlighten me with their input and evaluation.

As I reflected on my experience of attending Mass, I realized that all of us, priests, should, from time to time, if allowed, attend a weekend Mass rather than celebrate one. It would give all of us a different perspective from the pew where the people we celebrate with and for, can enlighten us on how sometimes, we bore; sometimes, we encourage; sometimes, we challenge; sometimes we inspire; and sometimes, even surprise ourselves; all because we took the time for a view from the pew.