

# CATHEDRAL FAMILY LETTER

JANUARY 1, 2012

Cathedral of the Risen Christ

## A LETTER FROM FATHER RAYER

During the Christmas season, with the many exchanges of gifts that take place, the question sometimes arises as to whether it is okay to re-gift, that is, to take a gift that one has received and then give it as a gift to someone else. There are multiple reasons why this is done and as many different opinions on the propriety of such an action.

However, there is one place where it is all together proper and is expected that one would “re-gift”. I am speaking of our participation in the Holy Mass. In this case we don’t re-gift to a third party but actually give the gift back to the giver, in this case, God. God is the author of all creation, and creation is not the result of necessity but of God’s benevolence. God did not have to create and He does not owe us anything. All that we have is a gift from God, including our very existence.

In return for God’s gifts to us, God wants our lives and hearts to be given back to Him in the form of love, obedience, thanksgiving, and repentance. One of the ways to show this gift of ourselves given back to God is through the offering of sacrifice.

It is important to remember that what is offered in sacrifice is not to be seen as a

replacement for the giver, but rather is to be seen as a *representation* of the giver offering himself to God. From time to time this was forgotten during the Old Testament time period. We hear the prophets cry out against abuses in the offerings of the Old Testament sacrifices.

For example, because of Israel’s sins of idolatry, Hosea (6:6) rebukes Israel’s lack of the proper interior dimension necessary in offering sacrifice to God, “*For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than holocausts.*”

Hosea is not condemning the offering of sacrifice, but its abuse. God doesn’t need our offerings, but what He wants is our hearts. The prophet’s words remind us that when we gather to participate in the holy sacrifice of the Mass that we are offering ourselves in union with Jesus Christ.

The simple gifts that we bring as an offering to God that represent ourselves are bread and wine. During the Presentation of the Gifts or “Offertory”, representatives of the congregation bring the offerings of bread and wine in procession and present them to the priest on behalf of the whole congregation. The priest takes them to the altar to offer to

God on behalf of the people. The bread and wine are representations of each of us offering ourselves to God.

The blessing prayers said by the priest over the bread and wine remind us that these simple gifts of bread and wine are in fact gifts that God has first given to us and that we then re-gift back to Him.

The new English translation brings this fact out more clearly than the old translation. The priest prays “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have *received* the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life.” A similar prayer is said over the chalice filled with wine.

The addition of the word “received” in both offertory prayers is a small change that makes clearer the reality that the bread and wine offered at Mass is first God’s gift to us, and only second is it a work of human hands.

I am reminded of the words of St. James (1:16-17) in his epistle, “*Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers: all good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...*”



## *The Holy Family*

May we also have the spirit of St. James to recognize that as we gather at the Mass, what we offer is a re-gifting back to God what He has first given to us. Let us see that the bread and wine are representations of the offering of our lives transformed by the gift of God’s grace with a true spirit of humility so that our participation in the Mass may truly be pleasing to our Heavenly Father.