From the Editor: The human and the holy — hand in hand

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Jesus took part in religious observances. His main interest, however, was in people’s inner relationships with God and with one another. He reassured them that God was not all that far away. He offered them light in their darkness, hope in their despair, courage in their fear and strength in their struggles. He brought God to them.

He was an Easter person. He brought people back to life, he raised them up, he taught them to see God in all that surrounded them — in the crops of the field, the birds of the air, the seasons, the earth and the sky, the day and the night; in their comings and goings, buying and selling, sowing and reaping, fishing and farming, making and mending.

We are at our best as a church when we see life through his eyes: when we value the ordinary and have what theologians call a sacramental outlook on our life, our world, and other people — when we “enter the world of God’s imagination.”

This year the English-speaking Catholic church fine-tunes its language and some of its ritual in the way it celebrates Mass. Not everyone agrees that we need to do this — some of the fine-tuning is further off key than before. But for better and for worse we get an opportunity to go beyond rote recitation to prayer from the heart. Will we avail of this opportunity to remember, to celebrate, to believe?

We remember
When John the Baptist pointed Jesus out to two of his own disciples they left him to follow Jesus. Jesus turned around, saw both of them and asked, “What do you want?” They answered, “Rabbi, where do you live?” “Come and see,” he replied. Later, one of the two, Philip, found Nathanael and talked to him about this Jesus from Nazareth he had met. “From Nazareth?” mocked Nathanael. “Can anything good come from that place?” Philip didn’t argue with him. He just said, “Come and see.”

“Come and see.” They got to know an unusual man — not the typical religious man of that (or any) age. Too ordinary for some, too demanding for others. Yet someone who has haunted millions of men and women, boys and girls for the last two thousand years. A man who raised against the religion of his day and has been an enigma for many of his followers ever since. A man who got under the skin of the religious leaders. A man who spoke truth to Roman power. A healer, a storyteller, a listener, a challenging personality. Someone who left home late in life, and spent only a few years as a public personality — became a public nuisance to the religious leaders, gathered a somewhat motley crew of followers, dared to go to Jerusalem one Passover, was arrested, tried in two kangaroo courts, sentenced to death, publicly paraded through the streets of Jerusalem to his crucifixion on Calvary, died there almost alone — only one male disciple and four women followers had the courage to remain with him. They buried him close by: to all intents and purposes, that was the end of that. A foolish dream. A nightmare ending. And yet … he haunts us still.

We celebrate
Whenever we celebrate Eucharist we celebrate his ongoing presence. We dare to believe he is among us as we listen to the readings, offer the bread and wine, repeat his Last Supper words: “Take and eat … for this is my Body, which will be given up for you.” “Take and drink: this is the chalice of my blood. Do this in memory of me.” We dare to believe he comes to us in Communion.

Then we are sent out — until we come together again: “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord / Go in peace (glorifying the Lord by your life).”

We believe
The Eucharist is a window — through it we get a glimpse of what he was all about; we get a chance to see him in action, in prayer, in listening, in conversation — talking with so many people — telling stories in answer to questions or to make his meaning clear — challenging, encouraging, consoling, seeing life and lives through his eyes, getting a glimpse of how we might be like him.

The Eucharist is a mirror — what we need to put right, to do differently, to let go, to take on. He has no body now on earth but ours (that’s mind-blowing, isn’t it?) — so how are we supporting each other, challenging each other, comforting each other, nourishing each other? How do we “embody” him in our time and place, in our daily lives, in between the last time we went to Mass and the next time?

May our vision of the human and the holy hand in hand conjure up some possibilities.