

[If they only knew...](#)

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Bishop Ricken

You may have heard my story of the French priest in Paris who had just finished explaining the architectural beauties of the neo-Gothic church where he served to a group of tourists. He had explained all of the theology behind the various architectural forms and shapes in the post-medieval church and explained the art work and the stained glass as the group was departing.

A young Muslim man was standing several feet from the group during the explanations and approached the young French priest to ask a question. "What is that gold box at the front of church?" he queried. The priest answered that that is what we call the tabernacle which is the place where we keep the Eucharist.

The priest told him that this special box is to reserve hosts to take to the sick during the week. It is actually the presence of Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus Christ is present body, blood, soul and divinity in the Eucharist. The consecrated pieces of bread are transformed into his body and reserved in the tabernacle.

The young Muslim looked with total incredulity at him and said: "Sir, if I believed that, I would be walking on my knees all the way to that golden box to adore and worship the Lord God."

We claim that we believe that, but most of us give only a notional assent to something we are supposed to believe. If we believed that in such a way that we personally knew it to be true, we would be changing our behavior in church and walking on our knees of faith all the way to the tabernacle.

We would be preparing ourselves for the Sunday celebration, not just to fulfill our obligation of attending Sunday Mass, but in coming very well prepared. This is done by going over the readings during the week, by praying throughout the week and by really looking forward to Sunday when we can worship the Lord from the bottom of our hearts and with full and active prayer and participation.

If we really believed in the real presence in such a way that we knew it, we would be recruiting others who have fallen away to join us at Sunday Mass. (By the way, if every person going to Sunday Mass now invited just one person who has not been coming to join them every Sunday in 2012, we would double our Mass attendance by 2013.)

Perhaps the reason that Mass attendance has decreased is that people have not believed in such a way that they know. Maybe they have become very lackadaisical or take the Eucharist for granted. Perhaps this is the reason our attendance has been decreasing until this last year.

Perhaps this "take it for granted attitude" has led to the priest shortage in the diocese and throughout the nation. If the Eucharist is just a symbol, then why bother to give your life to it in such a radical way? One cannot see the glory and the splendor if one does not believe in such a way that he or she knows the reality. If we really believed in the real presence in the Eucharist, there would be no shortage of priests. A belief that knows always bears good fruit.

Without the priesthood, there is no Eucharist. Without the Eucharist, there is no church. Without the church, there is no splendor of the anticipation of the Kingdom of God.

I can only assume that many do not know this. If they only knew.... there would be no priest shortage.