

- This past week I got to spend some time with my 24-year-old godson, Christian. Just a little over a year ago, Christian was in a terrible motorcycle accident that took off his entire left arm. For the past year, Christian has been learning to navigate life with just one arm.
- To his credit Christian has maintained a great attitude about it all, ever ready with self-effacing jokes to combat the sad and dark feelings that naturally arise when something so traumatic occurs.
- He even went back to his bartending job that's helping him pay his way through school, and he's started a Tik-Tok channel showing how he plies his trade with just one arm.
- Christian now has thousands of followers, including many folks who've also lost limbs, who are inspired and encouraged by his cheerful example of making the most of a bad situation. Hopefully, Christian's story inspires you too.
- As I've said before, while we cannot always control our circumstances in life, we can determine how we're going to respond. We do not have to be held hostage by our negative emotions. We can choose to remain positive and hopeful in the shadow of the cross.
- Speaking of crosses, no doubt you are aware now that Bishop Martin is banning the use of altar rails in our diocese. This policy must be implemented in every parish by January 16<sup>th</sup>.
- His reasoning is based on the fact that the US bishops made receiving Holy Communion while standing the norm for Novus Ordo Masses in our country some 24 or 25 years ago.
- To give you a little history in this regard about our own parish, when we renovated the church in 2008 and 2009, we already had the Latin Mass in place.
- Thus, I asked for permission to include an altar rail in our building plans to accommodate the requirement of Latin Masses to receive Holy Communion while kneeling. This was granted.
- Once we got into the renovated church, many of you began asking if we could use the altar rail at all of our Masses, and permission to do so was granted to me by Bishop Jugis *ad experimentum*.
- So, in Lent of 2010 we experimented using the altar rail at our weekday Masses. Because that experimental period went well, we began using the altar rail at all our Masses in March 2011, and we have continued using the altar rail at all our Masses ever since.
- In the years that have gone by since we implemented the use of an altar rail, several other parishes in our diocese have followed suit – either by building a permanent altar rail or by providing moveable communion rails and prie-dieux for the faithful to use.
- Those of you who are familiar with my vocation story know the pivotal role of the Eucharist in finding my way to seminary. I am a priest today because of the Eucharist, pure and simple. The Eucharist is the very center of my priesthood.
- As a priest I have always tried to deepen people's devotion to the Eucharist, most especially by offering Masses that are beautiful, reverent, and leave no question that the Eucharist is really and truly the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ.
- I've encouraged you to exercise the proper decorum and respect for the Eucharist as well.
- While national surveys done in recent decades show that well less than 50% of US Catholics believe that the Eucharist is really and truly the body and blood of Christ, the survey our parish did this past year reveals that nearly all of you believe it.
- In short, the past year's Disciple Maker Index survey has vindicated our liturgical practices here at St. Ann's. Our traditional practices have strengthened our belief in the Real Presence.
- Yet, now we are being required to abandon one of these practices in the name of greater uniformity with the larger American church. So, how are we to approach this?

- Well, we're going to be faithful, hopeful, and charitable. Again, while we cannot always control our circumstances, we can control how we respond.
- For months I've been both praying and doing all I can to preserve the use of our altar rail. My prayer has been simple: "Lord, if the use of our altar rail is pleasing to You, then save it."
- In the meantime, I've had numerous conversations with our bishop asking him to reconsider. What I can tell you about our bishop is that he truly believes this is the right thing to do.
- While you still have a right to kneel for Holy Communion, he feels that using an altar rail goes against the spirit of the US norm of standing for receiving Holy Communion. This is why he's issued this directive. He wants all parishes to be in conformity with this norm.
- With that being said, let's go through some principles about how best to respond.
- When things like this arise, we must: 1) pray fervently, 2) do all we can within the bounds of the law to remedy the situation, and then 3) wait for God to act.
- While there is still some recourse that can be taken, at this point we also have to prepare to implement the bishop's directive. Yet, allow me to share what I've gleaned in prayer thus far.
- As our Lord has not answered my prayer yet or blessed my efforts to prevent this ban on our altar rail, then I have to consider the possibility that – just as with the taking away of the Latin Mass – our Lord is asking a sacrifice of us. At the very least, He's asking us to walk in faith and trust Him.
- If our Lord is asking us to bear with this spiritual deprivation, we should make an offering of it: for the reparation of sin, for the conversion of sinners, and for a greater love and belief in the Eucharist amongst all Catholics.
- While our outward actions, like receiving Holy Communion on our knees, help inform our interior beliefs, what matters most is not the outward action itself but the interior belief. If you're not able to kneel without the support of the altar rail, you can kneel in your mind and heart.
- Even though authority figures can often force us to do things we don't want to do, or to give up things we don't want to give up, no authority on earth can control our minds or our wills.
- With regard to our Catholic faith, they may be able to control how we physically express our faith at Mass, but they cannot rob us of our faith.
- Moreover, know that our Lord is not going to be upset with us for following the norm for receiving Holy Communion lawfully set by the American bishops.
- The last principle to keep in mind is the most important: humility wins every battle. If we are humble in our actions, with faith that God will do something powerful with our offering, with hope for God's will, and with charity for our bishops, God's will *will* be accomplished, and we will be all the holier for it.
- Of course, many of us have pretty raw feelings right now. No one is more devastated by this than I am. I've just had more time to process it and to move through most of my own anger. While I'm still very sad, sadness and anger are not going to have the last word because they don't win the day.
- I invite you to have the same response, and I invite you take some simple steps.
- First, become even more intentional when you receive Holy Communion. Prepare yourself more thoroughly, and nurture that interior faith you have in Our Lord's Real Presence. And make a more fervent thanksgiving after you receive Holy Communion.
- Go to Adoration. Make holy hours praying that this situation changes. Pray for our bishop and for all the bishops of the Church. And if you feel the need, write letters – but do it respectfully.
- There's still a lot to figure out with this situation, and I don't have all the answers yet. So please be patient with Fr. Jones, the deacons, and me as we work through this.
- This situation is going to require lots of grace on the parts of us all, but as our Lord's grace hasn't been lacking as we've dealt with the loss of the TLM, I am certain that God will walk us through this trial as well.

- With His grace, we can respond to this situation in a manner that glorifies Him and makes us holier. Please pray for me as I continue to navigate these difficult waters.