

# *Resurrection*Parish

## CELEBRATE



### **The Way We do the Things We Do: Ritual, Symbol and the Structure of Mass**

The rituals of life help us express our human experience, negotiate transition moments, understand who we are and what our values are. We do this through symbolic action with specific symbols and gestures. We celebrate the human experience of growth as we move from one year to another. As we grow up in our families we learn who we are and what we value as a family not because Mom or Dad or Grammy sits us down and says, “Okay, now, dear child, I am going to teach you what you need to know about our family and what we are all about.” No, we do this through the gathering of the family in the everyday, normal rituals of life getting up in the morning, having dinner, shopping and playing and working. We do it in the special occasions of life too . . . Thanksgiving, birthdays, weddings, funerals and all the rest. These rituals communicate. Rituals are a kind of language and the symbols we use make up the vocabulary of this ritual language . . . birthday cakes, a special plate that the turkey goes on, meal time grace, the blessing of a Christmas tree, the tree’s special and meaningful ornaments, the stories that get told about those ornaments.

There is a pattern to the way we humans do ritual. There is a pattern to the way we get together. Think of gatherings and celebrations with family and friends. The first thing that usually happens is an invitation. It could be a formal one on fancy paper and pretty printing . . . “The pleasure of your company is requested . . .” or an informal one. Great Aunt Martha calls. . . “I’m doing Christmas this year! Let’s all get together about 3:00. You bring the fruitcake.” The invitation is accepted . . . “Thanks, Great Aunt Martha! We’ll be there with the fruitcake.” And then you show up and along with the other folks, you gather at Great Aunt Martha’s house. There are stories told, old memories called to mind and heart, and new memories made. Then the meal . . . we enjoy that essential, defining human action of dining together. We are nourished and strengthened with not only food but with conversation and companionship as well. And after the meal and perhaps some more stories, and of course the cleaning up, and you make your way home. It’s the same pattern for getting together whether it’s a birthday party or Thanksgiving dinner or having coffee in a friend’s kitchen or a big, fancy dinner party. . . we gather, we listen, we do and we go.

That’s the way it is for us as church too. We *gather* as the Body of Christ, not because we think it’s a good thing to do on Sunday mornings, but because God’s gracious invitation calls us together. We *listen* to the stories of our faith. We recall God’s presence and action among human beings not as once-upon-a-time stories, but as the living, challenging Word of God present and active here and now. We *do* the Eucharistic action and are nourished and strengthened by the Body and Blood of Christ. And we *go forth* into the world as faithful disciples and living witnesses of the Gospel. More on gathering and the Introductory Rites at Mass next time.

**Welcome. Engage. Celebrate. Serve. Connect.**