

Archbishop Smith: Clouded from Sight

Recently I had the opportunity to take a drive along a mountain pass highway through the Canadian Rockies. I love the mountains, and was looking forward to the vistas. Unfortunately, the weather did not always cooperate. For one leg of the trip, the clouds had rolled in and covered the mountains. The journey continued, yet the mist clouded from my view what I had really wanted to see. There was no question that the mountains were there, of course; I just could not see them.

I thought of this as I reflected upon what the second reading from Sunday's mass tells us about Abraham and Sarah (cf. Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19). Now, there were two people who had a lot of things clouded from their sight! They were not given to see or understand what they might naturally have wanted to enter their mind's eye with great clarity. Abraham was called to leave what was familiar to him and set out without knowing where he was heading. He and Sarah were told that, in their great old age, they would have a son from whom God would raise up descendants too numerous to count. What was this all about? How are we to understand God's purpose? The answers were clouded in mystery.

Yet, a wonderful line from that same passage speaks of a kind of "sight" that co-exists with obscured natural vision. We are told they "died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them." By trusting in the fidelity of God to what he promised, they "saw" without seeing their future fulfillment.

Faith, Hebrews teaches, is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Much in our lives is veiled in obscurity. It is not always clear how God is at work in our lives, and this lack of sight can weigh heavily upon us, especially if we find ourselves in moments of intense suffering. Faith is the decision to trust in the fidelity of God. His faithfulness to us and to his promises is stronger and more secure than any mountain. And what he has promised, in Christ, is to be with us always. We place our trust in that promise, and know he is there, even though his presence is somehow clouded from sight.

This brings me to some recent reporting in Catholic media that, according to a [Pew Research study](#) conducted in the U.S., only about 30% of Catholics believe in the Real Presence. Apparently, the remainder feel that the bread and wine at mass are only symbolic of the presence of our Lord. Now, I have yet to read the survey, so I am admittedly reacting to a news report. Nevertheless, the statistic is shocking. We are touching here upon one of the central tenets of the Catholic faith and thus the heart of our lives as disciples. So let us be clear. We do not fall to our knees at mass in worship of a symbol. When the priest, acting in persona Christi in virtue of his ordination, speaks over the gifts of bread and wine the words that Christ uttered at the Last Supper, then

by the power of that word and the agency of the Holy Spirit, what were once bread and wine are bread and wine no longer, but the true Body and Blood of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Although this presence is veiled in mystery, nevertheless we know he is there. Here faith trusts in the fidelity of Jesus to his promise: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:51). The Eucharist is the Lord.

I may get to drive again some day through that mountain pass. If I do, there is a chance to do so with clear vision of those majestic mountains. For our life's journey, however, clarity of vision has to wait until God brings us by His mercy to see Him face to face. In the meantime, we live by faith. We know that the Lord remains always faithful to his promise to be with us, especially in the mystery of the Eucharist. Though veiled from natural vision, this presence is a sight wondrous to behold.

