

Still Catholic after all these days

BY ANNE SAMSON

Why am I still Catholic? That question has floated to the surface of my mind lately on a number of occasions. As we move into another Lenten season, it's a good question to ponder.

To be sure, I meet God in Mass. Even when I attend in a different country where I don't speak the language, I feel God's presence.

The Eucharist is nothing short of a miracle every time I experience it. I am profoundly moved whenever I hear the Word proclaimed in an assembly of fellow Catholics. Sometimes I feel transported by the words of the ceremony, because they are so beautiful and ring so true to my spirit.

I love church buildings, too. I am deeply saddened at the possibility that the church where I have worshiped for the past 20 years may close its doors. It is not an old church, but it is very special to me.

The old churches are especially magnificent — you can almost

feel the prayers in the air when you enter. I like to think of all the elbows that have leaned on the backs of the pews as people poured their hearts out to God, of all of the hands that have dipped into the holy water basins, of all the knees that have knelt on the kneelers. It takes my breath away sometimes.

I am having a hard time lately with a lot of things going on in the Catholic Church — on many different levels. Sometimes I disagree. But I try to do it quietly because I believe that words have power and can do great damage. So I speak in the company of trusted friends, or better yet, take my disagreements to God in prayer.

At Mass when we pray for more young men to enter the priesthood, I don't pray that prayer. I pray for wisdom and enlightenment for our leaders and for changes in the bigger church so we can have different kinds of priests.

For the sake of my emotional well-being, I have to feel my sad

feelings. And when I am ready, I will try to find the good in all of this. Experience has taught me that there is usually some good that comes out of hard times, but I have to search to find it.

When my son was sick for years with a life threatening illness, I grew my faith by being grateful for each small gain and looking for the gifts of every day. There were wonderful people and blessed situations and holy moments.

In our current situation's there will also be wonderful people and blessed situations and holy moments. I will make new friends and find new ways to worship and enjoy new experiences. I will remember that my faith is not defined by the practices of the leadership and it is not the building where I worship that makes me Catholic.

So, today, I am still Catholic.
(Anne Samson is a parishioner at Our Lady of Mercy in Colonie, and on the committee charged with examining blending OLM with St. Francis de Sales.)