

Here comes everybody

By [Laura Kelly Fanucci](#)

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How could I help but notice? She flapped her fingers in front of her face as the choir sang, waving her hands spastically, tilting her head to the tune. When the singers paused during verses, she stopped and slumped forward, dark hair falling over her eyes. But each time the piano picked up and the voices rose again, she perked up and lifted her gaze in wonder, coming alive as the church sang around her.

It's not polite to stare. We learn the lesson young, in scolding. Yet curiosity captures us even as adults. When someone acts slightly different from the norm, we naturally notice.

But what caught my eye that morning was not the girl lost in her own world in the pew. It was her parents. Not ashamed of their daughter's behavior, not trying to shush her into silence; quite the contrary. Her mother swayed her shoulders to the music's beat, smiling ever so slightly. Her father nodded his own head in time with the singers.

A family in tune, in love.

I used to be embarrassed of my people-watching at church. Noticing who laughed and who cried, who was there and who wasn't. Stealing glances at the lines filing up to receive communion. Sneaking glimpses of cute children in their parents' arms. I chided myself for the lazy habit, distraction from spiritual discipline.

But recently I started to see it as a spiritual practice in itself. Trying to see Christ in the Body of Christ.

I glimpsed the young pregnant woman behind us stifle her laugh as my sons threw books at each other. I saw the middle-aged man in front of me frown and shake his head during the sermon, leaning over to whisper to his wife. I watched a woman on the other side of church weeping quietly during the communion hymn, and no one around her noticed.

I stared after Mass as a woman laid her hands gently on the shoulders of an elderly man and began to speak soft words of blessing over him. I caught a glimpse of a young man scribbling in the parish prayer book. I watched a trio of toddlers splash their hands in the baptism pool while pairs of white-haired couples shuffled into the pews, already early for the next service.

When I wonder what it means to come to church, week after week, I think about people-watching. I love that church makes me jostle up against people who are like me and nothing like me. I love that standing shoulder to shoulder in a noisy, restless, laughing, coughing crowd pulls me out of my solitude of prayer. I love that every time I feel I've got something pegged about the divine – or the church or the world or my own place therein – the Eucharist breaks me open again, in humility and hope. Because of what I see around me.

Maybe my people-watching is simply noticing the nudges from God whispering, *See that? I'm like that, too.*

Maybe this is what means to be the Body of Christ. Unashamed by the differences. A family in tune, in love.

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