

Corpus Christi (A)

The first thing that caught my attention in the today's Gospel is that Jesus doesn't back off. He doesn't tone down his message. He keeps challenging his audience, even though he knows they might walk away. He invites them and us to accept Him as the bread that gives life to the world. Some of his followers complain: What you say is too hard to believe, it's too demanding, how can you give us your flesh to eat? Do you remember how Jesus responds? "Amen, Amen, Truly, Truly, I say to you," (this means a teaching of great importance follows) "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you do not have life in you, I am the living bread from heaven." Right here, right now, Jesus is saving us, his people, giving us life that lasts forever. In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. The total gift of Himself to the Father and to us on the cross, is present here and now in this sacrifice of the Mass. And what a precious gift it is! I can't explain it all to you, because it is too great a mystery. But let me lift a corner of the veil to this sacrament. You will need to make a leap of faith to understand.

Here is an analogy that might be of some help:

I'm wearing something that is very important to me, something that my Mom made for me, while I was studying to be a priest at the seminary. It is this stole that encircles my neck. It symbolizes the yoke of office that priesthood imposes. Jesus said: "My Yoke is easy, my burden light." This piece of material was sewn by my Mom and designed by her and she gave it to me after my ordination. So, you can see why it is important and dear to me. It reminds me of her and her love and prayers and sacrifices that kept me faithful in service to Jesus and his people. It makes her present and near to me and reminds me of my Mom and her love.

Will someone else tell us about a gift that you received that is important to you and why it is special to you? Anyone like to share? Anyone else? I realize that this is personal; but it will re-enforce the point that I want to make about the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is the Lord's parting gift to us. It is the gift that helps us remember Him. It is the gift that makes him present and near to us. It isn't something. It is someone! It is Himself. Jesus gives us bread that he referred to as his real flesh, and wine that he referred to as his real blood, to the amazement of us all. He wanted to stay close and remain with us for all time, so he found a way by asking his friends to "Do this in memory of me." So that, by sharing in the bread that is broken and the cup that is poured out, Jesus would be with us, his friends forever. As we gather and remember Jesus and do what he did, he is once again with us, feeding, guiding and loving us by giving himself totally in the sacred sign of the Eucharist. His body and blood is a total gift of himself for us. The truth is that Jesus loves us and loves the world so much that he died for us and for the world. There is life for us and for the world in the kind of death Jesus died. His total gift of self out of love, his sufferings nourish compassion in the world and give life to the world. That is way he said: "The bread that I give is my flesh for the life of the world!" If we are one with Jesus in Holy Communion and in loving and sacrificing ourselves for others, the life Jesus longs to give the world, will come to the world thru us, thru our compassion and forgiveness. There is so much hate, sorrow, war and violence in this world, which is the work of human hands, that it can be frightening; but let's also be

aware that there was resurrection and transformation for Jesus and there is life and hope for the world and us thru Jesus, the bread of life in the Eucharist. What an important and precious gift the presence of Jesus is in this sacred sign of body and blood given and received. This is how Jesus makes his presence felt among us and in the world. It is thru this sacrament that he gives life to us and the world, life that last forever!

I will soon celebrate my 40th. Anniversary of Priestly Ordination, and it seems that the words of Moses in our first reading today, are meant for me personally: "Remember how for forty years now the Lord, your God, has directed all your journeying in the desert, so as to test you...He let you be afflicted by hunger, and then fed you with manna, a food unknown to your fathers." Holy Communion is really food for our journey, our daily bread and nourishment for today. When you come up for communion and are waiting in line, focus your attention on the fact that the Eucharist sustains you for the journey God has in mind for you, and you'll want to receive this unbelievable gift of Christ's flesh and blood, so you'll be strong enough to meet the challenges that today brings, because you are taking Jesus within you and with you. What a simple; but profound mystery!

Centuries ago, in Carthage, a group of Christians were taken by surprise on Sunday as they gathered to celebrate Eucharist in the house of Octavius Felix. They had defied the emperor's orders, so they were arrested and brought before the proconsul, who asked them why they disobeyed the emperor. The answer given by one of them is significant: "We cannot live without joining together on Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist. We would lack the strength to face our daily problems and not succumb. Christ is truly present among us in the Eucharist. It is a dynamic presence that grasps us to make us his own and to make us assimilate him. Christ draws us to himself and makes us come out of ourselves to make us all one in him. Communion with the Lord is always communion with our brothers and sisters. He is the same Christ who is present in the Eucharistic bread of every place on earth. That means we can only encounter him together with all others. We can only receive him in unity. The consequences are clear: we cannot communicate with the Lord, if we do not communicate with one another. If we want to present ourselves to him, we must take a step toward meeting one another." I hope this profession of faith helps us all understand why the Eucharist is the source and the summit of our Christian life.

In place of the creed today, we will renew our baptismal promises called for by our Diocesan spiritual renewal program: "Spirit Alive."