

Father O'Connor Homily for 2 June 2024  
The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ-B  
Corpus Christi

Exodus 24: 3-8  
Hebrews 9: 11-15  
Mark 14: 12-16, 22-26

This weekend the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Feast of the Eucharist.

Our secular society tells us that we are individuals, “autonomous,” that we are not connected with one another. It says things like: “It’s my life and I’ll live it as I please.” “It’s my body, and I’ll do with it whatever I choose.” And, “You are not the boss of me!”

But our faith in Jesus Christ teaches us something quite different: that we belong to a community. We became connected with God and with one another when we were baptized into the family of God, the Church.

When we receive Holy Communion – the Body and the Blood, the Soul and the Divinity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ – we are connected with Him and He with us. He is “really present” to us.

And this means that we are also connected here and throughout the world with those who are receiving the same Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist that we are.

In our Catholic way of speaking we talk about “offering up our sufferings,” don’t we? And it is true – we can. When we unite our sufferings with the sufferings of Christ they take on a whole deeper meaning and value. Since we are part of the Body of Christ, we are connected. We are one family in Christ. And we share right now in Christ’s mission of bringing His salvation to the world.

Is it ridiculous, if you have asthma, to offer up your discomfort for someone who lives in an urban tenement house and is suffocating with the summer heat and allergens? Is it pointless, if you are hungry and can’t get something to eat right away, to offer up your hunger for someone who will go to bed hungry tonight, and maybe most nights? Is it pie-in-the-sky to offer up our headaches, our cholesterol and diabetes management, our fears and our anxieties for others who are struggling with these things too?

Our popular culture says that this is silly: “Why, we can offer you a drug – legal or illegal – for most anything that you find painful.”

But the Christian message is that it is indeed praiseworthy and effective to unite our sufferings with the sufferings of Christ. For we have a Savior who gave His life for us, who has brought us together as members of God’s family through Baptism, who nourishes us with the Sacrament of His own Body and Blood, and has made us into one body – His Body, the Church. We are connected. We are one family in Christ. And we share right now in Christ’s mission of bringing His salvation to the world.

I read a story and I made a note to myself that I would like to share it with you one day. And today is the day. I hope that this story will provide some fodder for your own reflection about how you, right now, are a member of God’s family and a part of the Body of Christ. And, nourished by the gift of the Eucharist, how you share in Christ’s mission of bringing His salvation to the world.

Here is the story.

There was a pastor who invited his long-time friend to his parish. This friend was a permanent deacon. He also invited that deacon to preach the homily at Mass that Sunday. After the pastor had introduced him, the deacon went to the pulpit and began this way:

“My dear people, once upon a time there was a father and a son and his son’s friend. They were sailing off the Pacific coast, and a storm came up very suddenly. The winds got strong, the waves grew high, and the three of them were thrown out of the boat as the boat capsized.

“The father got back to the boat and grabbed on to the lifeline. He saw his son and his son’s friend a ways off, struggling in the wind and the waves. He had a decision to make that was the most critical and painful one in his life: to whom should he throw that lifeline first?

“He realized that his son was a faithful disciple of Jesus. He went to Mass and received Holy Communion every Sunday. He went to Confession regularly. He was always quick to volunteer to help others. He was a cheerful fellow. His son was a fine Christian young man.

“His son’s friend had a ways to go. This friend had not yet accepted the invitation of Jesus to become a Christian, and he had been dabbling in some sinful and dangerous behaviors. They were trying to invite this friend

to consider becoming a member of the family of Jesus Christ, the Church, but he just wasn't ready to say yes.

“So that father, looking at the two boys at that instant, called out to his son, ‘Son, I love you!’ And then he threw the lifeline to his son’s friend. He successfully got the friend back to the boat. But when he looked out again, his son had disappeared beneath the waves.

“That father would reflect upon this experience for the rest of his life. He knew that his son was ready to meet Jesus face to face, but that the other boy probably was not.

“That father believed that this is what God did for all of us: God the Father sent His only Son, Jesus, to die in our place so that we sinners could be saved from our sins and be prepared to go to heaven one day.”

The deacon looked out at the congregation and said, “God wants to rescue us. If He is throwing you a lifeline right now, please take hold of it and accept.”

And then the deacon told them, “Now some of you are probably thinking that this story is pretty unrealistic: that a father would sacrifice his own son in order to save someone else.”

After a pause, he added, “Perhaps it does sound pretty unrealistic. But it gives me a glimpse of what it must have been like for the Heavenly Father to give up His Son for me.

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And then, after another pause, the deacon said, “And, just so that you know, I am the father in that story. And your pastor who is seated over there – he was my son’s friend.”