

LIVING EUCHARIST INITIATIVE

“Common Threads” Homily Helps & Intercessions

April 2009

April 5, 2009 – Passion/Palm Sunday

Isaiah 50:4 – 7 – *The Lord has given me a well-trained tongue*

Philippians 2:6 – 11 – *Christ humbled himself; therefore, God highly exalted him*

Mark 14:1 – 15:47 – *St. Mark’s account of the Passion*

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” – HOMILY

The obvious theme of today’s readings is the Lord’s Passion, but the passage from Philippians does offer us a starting point for a reflection on our *Living Eucharist* initiative. In it, St. Paul portrays the Incarnation as a continual act of self-giving. Setting aside his divine prerogatives, Jesus gives himself to the Father as a gift on our behalf. He is obedient to the Father’s will, “even unto death, even unto death on a cross.” Therefore he is exalted and given a name which is above every other name.

In celebrating the Eucharist, we offer God gifts of bread and wine that represent ourselves. We, in fact, offer ourselves as a gift to the Father in union with Christ. In Christ, the Father accepts our gift and transforms the bread and wine we offer into the body and blood of his Son. He then returns our gifts to us as divine nourishment that transforms those who receive it into Christ’s mystical body. United thus with Christ, we are called to exist as he does, as gift to God, as gift for others.

The Passion story teaches us that Jesus’ gift of self was not easily made; indeed, it required great determination and strength of will to give himself completely to the Father. Likewise, our transformation into the body of Christ is not a thing that happens automatically. It is not enough to swallow the host and drink the precious blood; we must actively work to become what we receive.

The ‘Amen’ that we pronounce at the end of the Eucharistic prayer is meant to signify that we are whole-heartedly committed to the process of transformation in Christ. Today, as we recall the example that Jesus gave us by accepting “even death, even death on a cross,” let us pronounce that ‘Amen’ from the depths of our being. Let us give ourselves completely to the Father in the Son so that the Father may exalt us with the Son and give us a share in his glory. That glory, unlike the empty honor the world bestows upon its own, is glorious in that it enriches many. Transformed by the Eucharist, our whole life becomes a gift to God, a gift for others.

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” – INTERCESSIONS

That our participation in the *Living Eucharist* initiative will help us to see Jesus’ Passion as his gift to God on our behalf and lead us to live our lives as a gift to God and to our brothers and sisters. We pray to the Lord.

That we who are nourished by the Eucharist may become nourishing men and women who give ourselves freely to those who hunger and thirst for love and understanding. We pray to the Lord.

April 12, 2009 – Easter

Acts 10:34a, 37– 43 – *Peter gives witness to the resurrection*

John 20:1– 9 – *Peter and John find Jesus' tomb empty*

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” - HOMILY

Jesus' resurrection was not simply his personal triumph over the power of sin and death. It was also the pledge of our resurrection and the promise of a new life in the world to come. Though these things will be granted to us in the future, through the liturgy we begin to experience them here and now. In our celebration of Easter, especially in the baptism of the catechumens and the renewal of our own baptismal promises, we share sacramentally in what happened to Jesus in the past and what will happen to us in the future.

Whether we were baptized many years ago as infants or a few minutes ago as adult converts, we have died and risen with Christ and are now living a new life in him. Just as natural life must be nourished and sustained by earthly food, so this new life needs supernatural nourishment to grow and thrive. This nourishment comes to us in the Eucharist where the risen Jesus gives himself to us as food and drink.

In our Eucharistic celebration, the risen Jesus is as truly present to us as he was to those who meet him on the first Easter day. He is here today because we are gathered in his name. He is here in the person of the priest who is his minister. He is here in his word which is proclaimed to us. He is here in a wholly marvelous way under the sacramental signs of bread and wine by which he communicates his risen life to us.

The Eucharist is properly said to be an Easter sacrament. Though the sacramental signs of bread and wine remind us that Christ's body was broken and his blood poured out for us, it is the risen Jesus that we receive in Holy Communion. He comes to us as he is now, in the glory of God the Father, to continue that process of transformation which he began in us at the time of our Baptism. He nourishes us with the only food that can help us to become more fully what we already are, that is, his mystical body. He gives himself to us not only for our personal benefit but so that through us he can be more fully present to the world. He makes us sacraments of his risen presence for those among whom we live.

Our celebration of Easter should not end when the sun goes down on Easter day nor should our celebration of the Eucharist end with the closing hymn. Both as individuals and as a community, we need to leave the Eucharistic assembly with a sense of mission. We are to continue our celebration of Easter by leading a truly Eucharistic life, a life in which we give ourselves to others as Christ has given himself to us.

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” – INTERCESSIONS

That our participation in the *Living Eucharist* initiative may give us greater insight into Christ’s presence among us and lead us to open our hearts more fully to the transforming power of his grace. We pray to the Lord.

That we may leave this Eucharistic assembly more deeply committed to being signs of Jesus’ presence in our world. We pray to the Lord.

April 19, 2009 – Second Sunday of Easter/Divine Mercy Sunday

Acts 4:32-35 – *They were of one mind and heart*

1 John 5:1-6 – *Whoever is begotten of God conquers the world*

John 20:19-31 – *Thomas encounters the risen Christ*

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” - HOMILY

The Eucharistic theme in today’s readings is not obvious but it can be found if we look for it. In the gospel, for instance, both appearances of the Risen Jesus take place on a Sunday in the very room in which Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist. This fact sets the story in a Eucharistic context. It is about what happens when we gather on the Lord’s Day to celebrate the Lord’s Supper.

On Easter Sunday, the risen Jesus manifested himself to his apostles and commissioned them to carry on his work. Thomas, who had not been present, could not bring himself to believe that Jesus was alive without seeing the Lord’s physical body. On the following Sunday, Jesus again appeared in the midst of his apostles, this time specifically to nourish Thomas’ weak faith. Strengthened by Christ’s presence, Thomas makes the first proclamation of the Church’s post Easter faith when he calls Jesus “My Lord and my God.”

At that point, Jesus says to him, and through him to us, “Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.” As we sit here in this Eucharistic assembly, we cannot see Jesus’ physical body, but we believe that he is present to us in many ways, most dramatically under the sacramental signs of bread and wine. We believe that, in the reception of Holy Communion, Jesus nourishes our faith as he nourished that of Thomas. By giving himself to us as food and drink, he builds us up into his mystical body so that our unity with him and each other will enable us to give effective witness to him.

The effects of this process are more than obvious in the first reading. There, Luke describes the first Christian community as one with a strong sense of being the body of Christ. By sharing the same spiritual food, they became one in spirit. They were united with one another so that the needs of one were the needs of all. This unity gave great power to their witness and authenticated the message that they preached.

Today’s readings urge us to see the outward sign of our common meal as an indication of our interior transformation into the mystical body of the one whom we receive. If by faith we perceive what the eyes of our body cannot see, and in love cooperate with Jesus’ action in our souls, we will be among those who are truly blessed. We will be one in Christ as the first Christians were and thus able to give strong and effective witness to him in our world.

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” – INTERCESSIONS

That, through our participation in the *Living Eucharist* initiative, we will come to see each Eucharistic assembly as a manifestation of Christ’s nourishing presence among us and cooperate more fully with his transforming action in our souls. We pray to the Lord.

That our participation in the *Living Eucharist* initiative will inspire us to have deeper care and concern for the members of our worshiping community and so make our witness to Christ stronger and more effective. We pray to the Lord.

April 26, 2009 – Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 3:13-15, 17-19 – *Peter's sermon in the temple*

Luke 24:35-48 – *Christ appears to his disciples on Easter night*

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” - HOMILY

Today's gospel story is set on the night of the first Easter. The two disciples who encountered the risen Jesus on their way to Emmaus have just returned to Jerusalem and are telling their companions how they recognized him in the breaking of the bread. As they speak, the Lord appears in their midst. Since they are frightened and think they are seeing a ghost, Jesus has to reassure them that it is really he. Then he opens their minds to the understanding of the Scriptures and shows them that it was necessary for him to suffer, to die, and to rise on the third day.

In this and in the other stories about the Lord's post-resurrection appearances, we see him physically present among his disciples. In each of these stories, he himself breaks either the word or the bread for them. He personally nourishes their minds and their souls. The Church has us read these stories to remind us that, though Jesus is no longer physically present on earth, he continues to nourish us with the word and bread of life in our celebration of the Eucharist.

Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, the Scriptures are proclaimed and, through his ministers, Christ continues to open our minds to understand their meaning. Hearing the word and listening to preaching are vital, if often underestimated, experiences of Christ's nurturing care for us. Through what seems to be an ordinary process of reading and teaching, Jesus himself feeds us with the word of life that strengthens our faith and helps us to grow in holiness.

Our first reading gives us a powerful example of Jesus continuing to act through the preaching of his disciples. In it, we hear St. Peter explaining to his hearers, as Jesus had explained to him, that the Messiah had to suffer, die, and rise again to fulfill the prophecies found in the Scripture. Then he exhorts them to repentance and to conversion. Every time the word is proclaimed, there is at least an implicit call to repentance and conversion. Conversion is, in fact, a continuous process by which we assimilate the nourishing word and are changed by its sanctifying energy. This process is sustained and developed by Christ himself who, in the Eucharistic banquet, nourishes us with his own body and blood.

When he appeared to them on Easter night, Jesus not only opened the minds of his disciples to understand the word of God, he also sent them out to proclaim it. He commissioned them to be his witnesses in Jerusalem and throughout the world and to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins in his name. The Acts of the Apostles, from which we read today, shows that they accepted their mission and put the inner strength he gave them to good use. In the Eucharist, we are nourished with Christ's word and with his body and blood. My we, too, put the inner strength he gives us to good use and carry on his mission in the world today.

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That our participation in the *Living Eucharist* initiative will help us to appreciate the spiritual nourishment Christ gives us in the liturgy and lead us to use the gift we have received to carry on his work in the world. We pray to the Lord.

That our liturgical celebrations might become ever more effective vehicles of Christ’s nurturing power for those who participate in them. We pray to the Lord.