

LIVING EUCHARIST INITIATIVE

“Common Threads” Homily Helps & Intercessions

May 2009

May 3, 2009 – Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts of the Apostles 4:8-12 – *There is no salvation through anyone else.*

1 John 1:3-12 – *We shall see God as he really is.*

John 10:11-18 – *The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” – HOMILY

The Good Shepherd is one of the most endearing and attractive images that Jesus uses to describe who he desires to be for us and who he truly is. He proclaims clearly in today's Gospel, *"I am the good shepherd."* But the pictures that abound often make of him a sweet, soft almost saccharine image of a man--unlike the person who links his shepherd's image with his sacrificial death on the Cross: *"A good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep."*

We are in the Easter Season, but the joy and the power of the resurrection always echoes the memory of his death, just as his death always leads us to the hope and the joy of his resurrection. This truth is at the very heart of what we call the "Paschal Mystery." The Passion and Death of Christ Jesus is one saving reality. They can never be separated. This is also borne out in today's Gospel in the words of Jesus, *"I lay down my life in order to take it up again."*

Peter proclaims this truth in the passage from Acts today as well. *"It was in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, whom you crucified, and whom God raised from the dead; in his name this man stands before you healed."*

This Christ proclaimed by Peter is the One whom we celebrate in every Living Eucharist at this altar. He is the same living Christ we receive in Holy Communion. His healing power to forgive and restore wholeness to body, soul, and emotion is the same. Just before we receive the Eucharist, we pray, "Lord I am not worthy to receive you, say but the word and my soul will be healed."

He is the good shepherd who feeds us with his very Body and Blood. However, we must respond with a living faith to celebrate the Living Eucharist. We cannot be passive observers at our celebration of the Eucharist. Christ expects us to hear his voice, respond to his presence and be actively engaged in following him. His words are clear. "I know mine," but he also adds: "And mine know me."

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” – INTERCESSIONS

Lord, may we call to mind the truth that you, the Good Shepherd, laid down your life for us that we may live. Open our hearts to your love which is gentle in mercy and stronger than death. We pray to the Lord.

Lord, grant us the grace to hear your voice and respond with a living faith in you, and a living and active love for you and for the sheep of your flock to which we all belong. We pray to the Lord.

May 10, 2009 – Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts of the Apostles 9:26-31 – *Barnabas reported to the Apostles how Saul had seen the Lord on the way.*

1 John 3:18-24 – *This is his commandment: that we may believe and love.*

John 15:1-8 – *Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit.*

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” – HOMILY

In Acts we hear that even though Saul – later called Paul – was called by the risen Christ in a dramatic way to abandon his persecution of the followers of Christ and be baptized, the disciples were afraid of him. They must have suspected him of being something of a "double agent" still scheming against them. It was Barnabas, whose name means "son of encouragement" who "took charge" of Saul and brought him to the apostles, who in turn accepted him as a true believer who on the road to Damascus had received a powerful experience of the risen Christ. Had it not been for Barnabas and his encouragement, who knows what may have become of Paul.

Barnabas plays a significant role in the early Church, nevertheless, he stays in the background. He is like so many in our parish community. We all have had the experience of a Barnabas in our lives, who has been there at a critical time to make a difference for good. The question arises, "Have we been a Barnabas for others?" Can we be a Barnabas for someone this week?

Jesus says in the Gospel that he is the vine and we are the branches. The image is striking in that it pictures us all as being part of one organic entity. Jesus is the source, but we are joined together as essential for the life giving sap of Christ to flow through us to one another. Barnabas was such a connector of life for Paul. His good judgment, his desire to see Christ's Spirit flow more abundantly, not only in Paul, but in the entire early Christian community, gave him the courage to be a person of action and encouragement.

The next time you hear people cut others down. The next time you begin to enter into the same game of sharp tongues cutting the "vine of Christ" into pieces, call upon Barnabas to help you be a Barnabas. The words of John in his First Letter sum up this truth very well: *"Love one another just as he, Christ, commanded us. Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them, and the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he gave us."*

We cannot simply make good resolutions to live out this truth. We can only be truly alive in Christ when we enter fully into the Living Eucharist which we celebrate today at this altar. Let us draw our strength and our life from Christ present here among us in the Word, in his Body and Blood and in each other.

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” – INTERCESSIONS

That your life giving Spirit may course within each one of us and within our entire community, bringing us into the unity of you, the life giving Vine which bears much fruit. We pray to the Lord.

For the people in our lives who have helped and encouraged us in times of need, give us the grace to encourage others to be aided by your Spirit during this week. We pray to the Lord.

May 17, 2009 – Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48 – *The gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles also.*

1 John 4:7-10 – *God is love.*

John 15:9-17 - *No one has greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* "COMMON THREADS" – HOMILY

The word "love" abounds in today's readings. The word "love" also abounds in popular songs, in novels, movies, lives of celebrities, on TV and in pop-ups on the internet screen. How is one to use this word without it sounding banal?

Christ gives us the essence of love, not in some definition or philosophical concept, but by witnessing who his Father is in relationship with him, and who he is in relationship with us: *"As the Father love me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love."*

John in his First Letter rephrases the same reality: *"In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins."*

But as beautiful as this truth is, it often falls upon deaf ears because it falls upon half dead hearts in regard to the experience of true love. It is possible that our past experiences of relationships in families of origin, among friends, in broken marriages and betrayal wound the heart to such a degree that the love of God is something of a foreign language. Before love can be experienced, wounds often must be healed in our lives as well as sinful attitudes forgiven and purified. Preaching may also include prayer that cries out for healing of the wounds that bind us and softening of the calluses of the heart that blunt the sensitivity and the ability to experience the joy of being loved. The invocation of the Holy Spirit over the people in the Eucharistic Prayers II, III and IV express an effective prayer for such healing of divisions and the power of unity among those celebrating the Living Eucharist.

To address personal woundedness, the homilist may find it useful to include the following prayer by Father Mark Link, s.j. or possibly use a prayer of his own that he finds more suitable:

Give us your strength, Lord,
because sometimes things get tough,
and we lose our way.

Give us your love, Lord
because sometimes people reject us,
and we are tempted to hate.

Give us your eyes, Lord
because sometimes life gets dark,
and we lose our way.

Give us your courage, Lord,
because often we are put under pressure,
and it is hard to do what is right

Give us yourself, Lord
because our hearts were made for you,
and we will not rest until we rest in your.

May 24, 2009 – Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord

Acts 1:1-11 – *As the Apostles were looking on, Jesus was lifted up*

Ephesians 1:17-23 – *God seated Jesus at his right hand in the heavens.*

Mark 16:15-20 – *The Lord Jesus was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God.*

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” – HOMILY

The Feast of the Ascension is not simply a celebration of bidding our Lord farewell to his physical presence among us here on earth. The great astonishing as well as comforting reality in the event that inspired the written word of God in today's readings is this: The eternal Son of God who became man, a human like us, remains forever human in the glory of his risen body. He does not slough off his humanity once his saving work here on earth has been accomplished. No, he ascends into the eternal presence of his Father's glory as a man, with his glorious human body which he cherishes as remaining one of us and with us.

This is described in the Acts as the Apostles where the disciples see the risen Jesus Christ, in his body, ascending beyond their sight. As they look on and search the sky to continue to follow him, the two men in white said, *"Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky: This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven."*

St. Paul expresses this very clearly to the Ephesians and to us as well. He speaks of the *"surpassing greatness of the [Father's] power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might, which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens..... And he, [the Father] put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of the One who fills all things in every way."* Notice the importance of the "body" used here. He focuses on the bodily resurrection of Christ and the power released in that great act of God's might and mercy. And he also says that this release of power in Christ's resurrection transforms and energizes us to be Christ's body here on earth--the church.

From within the very heart of his Father's power and glory, Jesus now becomes, as a human being, the universal Lord of history, empowered to work throughout all the earth, for all time for the entire human family--even to this very day--in the *Living Eucharist* which we celebrate at this very moment. In Mark's Gospel, after Christ's ascension to the Father's right hand, we hear of the reality of the power of the risen Christ active in our midst: *"But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs."*

If we truly could grasp a spark of this reality, what a great new and comforting awareness of grace would begin to transform how we regard the risen Christ alive in our midst, in our hearts and in our lives. This power of Christ is released within us by the fire of the Holy Spirit which the Lord Jesus asks the Apostles and us to pray for in the passage from Acts today. The time between the traditional Ascension Thursday and Pentecost Sunday is nine days. This is the

origin of the novena which is derived from the Latin "novem" which means "nine." How many novenas are popular among us? This original Novena for the coming of the Holy Spirit is commanded by the Lord himself. Let us heed his command and pray for the Holy Spirit to stir up the fire of his love during this coming week until Pentecost which we will celebrate next Sunday.

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* "COMMON THREADS" - INTERCESSIONS

That we may find comfort and inspiration in knowing that Jesus Christ, in his risen flesh and blood, as one of our human family, is alive, and that he intercedes for us before the Father in glory. We pray to the Lord....

That we may become more aware that the Risen Christ, at the right hand of the Father, is active within our hearts to transform us ever more intimately with the Father through the working of the Holy Spirit. We pray to the Lord.

May 31, 2009 – Pentecost Sunday

Acts 2:1-11 – *They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak.*

1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13 – *In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.*

The Sequence – *Come, Holy Spirit, come!*

John 20:19-23 – *As the Father sent me, so I send you: Receive the Holy Spirit.*

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” - HOMILY

Using one of the great symphonies as an image of the Liturgical Year – for example, Tchaikovsky's 1812 Symphony – Pentecost Sunday, which is the grand culmination of the Easter Season, could be likened to that symphonic finale with canon booming, bells ringing, and violins and brass ascending into a climactic crescendo with the drums and cymbals raising our spirits within us to a grand "A HA" and an ALLELUIA!! Does this sound too dramatic? If the victory over Napoleon could so excite Tchaikovsky, then we who have been transformed by God in Baptism and Confirmation and we who are constantly being transformed by the *Living Eucharist* and the “fire” of the Holy Spirit – how could we simply take this feast as simply an ending of another liturgical cycle or as shutting off the lights at the end of the day as we extinguish the Paschal Candle?

There is so much to express today that one finds it hard to focus on any one word, event or image. However, one striking event that draws our attention is when the Risen Lord breathes on the fear-ridden Apostles who locked themselves in the upper room. The Hebrew word "ruah" can mean spirit, breath, as well as wind. So as Jesus breathes on them he is saying "Receive the Breath of God"--breathe now with my breath, live now my risen and glorified life. This image takes us back to the very beginning of the Book of Genesis where *"the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."* This very strong symbolic and descriptive action of our Lord conveys that by breathing the very Breath of God into us, we are being re-created, transformed into a more glorious image and union with him and his Father in their common Spirit of life and love.

This new existence in the Spirit is personal, yes, but Paul in 1 Corinthians reminds us that breathing with the breath of Christ, we are united into one body, the Church. *"As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...and we were all given to drink of one Spirit."*

This reality is illustrated by the descent of the Spirit on that first Pentecost Day. All the various peoples are brought together to understand the one "Good News" of Christ's resurrection and to experience the power of his presence in the fire and wind which manifests the unifying and vivifying power of the Spirit. The Sequence of this feast has many stirring invocations which the homilist may use to conclude the homily – praying a few selected lines slowly and meaningfully. This ancient hymn is devotional as well as rooted in the rich tradition of the *Living Eucharist* of Mother Church.

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” - INTERCESSIONS

That we may heed the Lord Jesus' command and pray for a deeper outpouring of the Holy Spirit who desires to enkindle within us the fire of his love and to bestow upon us the gifts of joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We pray to the Lord.

For those who serve this community in a wide variety of ministries: May the Holy Spirit inspire all of us to place the gifts we have received at the service of the common good and be Christ in the world. We pray to the Lord.