

LIVING EUCHARIST INITIATIVE

“Common Threads” Homily Helps & Intercessions

September 2009

September 6, 2009 – 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 35:4-7a – *Isaiah predicts the eventual restoration of God’s people*

James 2:1-5 – *St. James condemns discrimination*

Mark 7:31-37 – *Jesus heals a deaf mute*

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” - HOMILY

In the first year of our *Living Eucharist* Initiative, we talked about the idea of being gathered into a community for the celebration of Mass. This year, we are concentrating on the idea of being nourished by the celebration of the Eucharist, and next year we will talk about being sent back into the Lord’s vineyard by the Eucharist we have celebrated. This tripartite division helps us to analyze the Eucharist in an orderly manner, but, in the scripture, as in the actual celebration of the liturgy, these themes are mixed together in a random way. Today’s readings, for instance, bring us back to the theme of our first year: Gathered.

The introductory rites of the Mass are meant to gather us into one in the sense that they reassert and strengthen the bonds we share as members of Christ’s mystical body. The letter of James warns us that if, in the way we celebrate the Eucharist, we discriminate against the poor in favor of the rich, we hinder the very unity we hope to foster. No one is to be humiliated because of his poverty; no one is to be favored because of his wealth. To put that in a positive way, we can say that when we gather for Mass, everyone is to be welcomed as a member of the family; everyone is to be treated with esteem and respect.

The unifying power of love and acceptance are demonstrated by the prophecy made in the first reading and fulfilled in the gospel. The Prophet Isaiah, aware that his call for repentance has gone unheeded, foresees a day on which God will punish his people for their sins. He also envisions a day on which God will reconcile them to himself. On that day, he says, “The eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared; then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the mute will sing.”

The deaf mute in today’s Gospel represents humanity alienated from God and therefore unable to hear his word and to proclaim his praise. Jesus puts his fingers into the man’s ears and touches his tongue, thus enabling him to hear and speak. This gesture has been incorporated into the Baptismal liturgy as a sign that acceptance into the Christian community opens a person’s ears to the word of God and his mouth to proclaim God’s praise. This process of reconciliation and empowerment is reinforced in our liturgical assemblies when those who are disadvantaged or disabled are accepted and treated as brothers and sisters. Our kindness enables them to hear the word of God and to proclaim it to others.

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” – INTERCESSIONS

That our liturgical assemblies may always be gatherings in which love and acceptance unite all who attend more closely to God and to one another. We pray to the Lord.

That our participation in the diocesan *Living Eucharist* Initiative may lead us to improve the quality of our worship and assist us in building up our community in Christ. We pray to the Lord.

September 13, 2009 – 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 50:5-9a – *The third song of the servant*

Mark 8:27-35 – *Peter's confession of faith*

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” – HOMILY

The second part of the Book of Isaiah contains four passages commonly called the “Songs of the Servant.” In these passages, Deutero-Isaiah speaks of a servant of the Lord who has a pivotal role to play in God’s saving plan. The first of them defines the servant as one called for the victory of justice and set up as a light to the nations. The second adds that he will not only restore Israel, but will bring salvation to the ends of the earth. The third, from which our first reading is taken, portrays the servant as one who accepts humiliation and suffering because he is confident that God will vindicate his innocence. Indeed, he longs for the test as the vehicle that will allow him to accomplish his mission.

These prophetic texts contributed to Jesus’ self understanding which, in today’s Gospel, he begins to share with his disciples. He first asks them who people say that he is. They answer John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the other prophets. Then he asks them who they think he is. Peter, expressing their deepening yet still unenlightened faith says: “You are the Messiah.” For the first time in the gospel narrative, Jesus accepts this title, but that prompts him to say that as the Messiah, he must suffer, be put to death, and rise after three days.

Despite what Deutero-Isaiah said about the role of suffering in the accomplishment of the servant’s mission, Peter can not believe that the Messiah must be rejected and put to death. He takes Jesus aside and, to use a modern expression, tries to straighten out his thinking. The Lord rebukes Peter, and, turning to the crowd, asserts that anyone who wishes to be his disciple must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow him.

Whenever we celebrate the Eucharist, we experience the reality that Peter found so hard to comprehend. Jesus, becoming the servant of all, offering his life for us, reveals himself to us as the savior of the human race. Going even further, he unites us to himself by giving himself to us as food and drink so that we might become like him. We, like our Master, are called to find the meaning and purpose of our lives in the humble service of God and of our neighbor, even when that service entails hardship and suffering.

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” – INTERCESSIONS

That our participation in the diocesan *Living Eucharist* Initiative will open our eyes to the value of sacrifice, both at the altar and in our personal lives. We pray to the Lord.

That our community may more clearly reflect the example Jesus gives us in the Eucharist by reaching out to serve those who suffer and are in need. We pray to the Lord.

September 20, 2009 – 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wisdom 2:12, 17-20 – *The just man is put to the test by the wicked*

Mark 9:30-37 – *The second prediction of the passion*

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” – HOMILY

Today’s first reading is taken from the Book of Wisdom, which is chronologically the last book of the Old Testament. It was written in the city of Alexandria in Egypt about 100 years before Christ was born, and reflects the historical situation of its day. Jews who had gone over to paganism persecuted their fellow Jews who clung to the traditions of their ancestors. They did so because they perceived the conduct of those who followed the law of God to be a reproach to their own way of life.

In the broader context of salvation history, this passage can be read as referring to Christ. His concern for the poor and the lowly was, in fact, perceived as a reproach by those who thought that their religious practice made them members of an elite social cast. With revilement and torture, they put him to the test, and they did, indeed, condemn him to a shameful death. All of which he bore with patience because he knew that God would take care of him.

In the gospel reading, Jesus predicts his passion, death, and resurrection for the second time. His disciples, however, can not see that his teaching is provoking a violent reaction from those who feel threatened by his popularity. They still think that he will establish an earthly kingdom in which those who follow him will have positions of great power and influence. With great patience, Jesus seeks to correct their mistaken idea of discipleship. “Anyone,” he says to them, “who wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.”

Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we share in the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection. We are nourished with his body and blood and transformed more completely into his mystical body. The more we become like him, the more we face opposition from the forces that oppose him. In the Eucharist, however, he nourishes and gives us the strength to stand up to the opposition of the wicked so that, through us, he can continue to serve those who are most in need.

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” – INTERCESSIONS

That our participation in the diocesan *Living Eucharist* Initiative will help us to stand fast with Christ even when his teachings are opposed and rejected by the society in which we live. We pray to the Lord.

That our reception of Jesus in Holy Communion nourishes us and makes us more like him and more willing to carry on his mission of service to those in need. We pray to the Lord.

September 27, 2009 – 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Numbers 11:25-29 – *The Spirit descends on the 70 elders*

Mark 9:38- 43, 45, 47-48 – *The need to avoid scandal*

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Today’s gospel reading is taken from a section of Mark in which the evangelist presents three groups of vaguely related sayings joined together because each of them contains the same key word. The first group, based on the word “name,” actually began in the passage we read last week in which Jesus said that who ever receives a child *in his name* receives him.

In the opening verse of today’s passage, John says he saw someone casting out demons *in Jesus’ name* and tried to stop him. Jesus tells him not to stop the man for no one who performs a mighty work *in his name* can speak evil of him. He then goes on to assure his disciples that anyone who gives them a cup of water because they *bear his name* will not lose his reward.

The first reading from the book of Numbers was chosen to help us understand Jesus’ reaction to John’s comment about the outsider who was casting out demons in Jesus’ name. It recalls an incident that took place during an assembly in which 70 elders were commissioned to help Moses in his role as arbitrator of the people’s disputes. Two of the seventy failed to show up for the commissioning but nonetheless received the spirit and began to prophesy where they were in the camp. Joshua urged Moses to stop them but Moses replied: “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the people of the LORD were prophets! Would that the LORD might bestow his spirit on them all!”

Moses’ reply to Joshua and Jesus’ reply to John warn us against an elitist attitude that could harden our hearts and prevent our Eucharistic assembly from being an authentic expression of Christian fellowship. God’s gifts to us, especially the gift of Christ’s body and blood, are not meant to close us in on ourselves, but rather to open us to others. We are not members of an exclusive club, but missionaries sent to unite all people in Jesus’ name. We must carefully avoid the scandal of arrogance and cultivate a welcoming spirit in our personal lives and in our worshipping community.

- *LIVING EUCHARIST* “COMMON THREADS” – INTERCESSIONS

That our participation in the diocesan *Living Eucharist* Initiative may help us to appreciate others’ gifts and lead us to collaborate with them in building up the Body of Christ. We pray to the Lord.

That our reception of the Eucharist may equip us to carry on Jesus’ mission and help us to share our gifts with those outside the Church. We pray to the Lord.