

Body & Blood of Christ Homily **Thom Trunzo**

The “Last Supper,” Jesus held up the bread and wine and said, “This is my body...this is my blood.” Then, in the years that followed, on several occasions, Paul states that WE, the church, are the Body of Christ. I don’t think that it’s a coincidence that we, the church and the consecrated bread are both known as the “Body of Christ.” They must be connected and, indeed, they must be the same.

For hundreds of years before Vatican II, we referred to that part of the mass just before the Eucharistic Prayer as the “Offertory” but informally by most parishioners, it was called the “Collection.” For those of us who lived during these times, we may recall that the bread and wine were already in the sanctuary – never in back of the church, when mass began. The collection was taken by ushers moving the wicker baskets attached to long wicker poles from pew to pew. The money was never brought to the altar at all, and so there were disconnects among these processes. The gifts of bread and wine were not viewed or understood as really being from the people and the monetary gifts were thought to have nothing to do with the Eucharistic Table at all! Further, since the bread & wine were already in the front and the money from the collection immediately swooped-out of the church and sent to the office to be counted, we also became disconnected from the altar! But Vatican II tried to change that thinking and move us into a more intimate relationship with all these actions.

The gifts of bread & wine were moved to the back of the church before mass, and then brought through the community to the altar. The monetary collection was also to be brought to the altar since these, too, were gifts of the people. And finally, and perhaps most importantly albeit subtle as it is, this part of the mass was renamed “Preparation of the Gifts”; ALL the gifts!

And so now, since everything that is brought to the table is from the people, we are attached to the gifts in a more visible way. And since we are attached to the gifts of bread and wine now on the altar and in the hands of the priest, when they are consecrated, “This is my Body...This is my Blood,” WE are also consecrated to become the Body and Blood of Christ. This brings to fulfillment what Paul preached in proclaiming that we, the church, are the Body of Christ.

Here in the West where pragmatism rules, we may have a hard time thinking that we can be attached to inanimate objects such as the bread and wine. But I suggest that we have quite a bit of experience with that kind of thinking and understanding. If you ever had occasion to share family pictures or vacation photos with others, the dialog would go something like this:

Q. “Who is this standing next to you Dad?” A. “That’s my Aunt Mary.” or

Q. What is this? A. “This is the Grand Canyon!”

I more than suggest that that picture is NOT your dad and Aunt Mary, but merely an image of them printed on a piece of paper. And certainly, that 4X6 photo paper is NOT the Grand Canyon!

Likewise, who does not cherish or place a much higher value on their wedding rings, or a necklace passed down through the generations from a great grandmother, or a picture of a deceased parent more than the material with which they are made or the paper on which they are printed?

For the vast majority, we ALL do, because each of those objects have become greater than the physical material because each “holds” life experiences and memories that are part of who we are or encapsulates a life. We “attach” ourselves to them and so their meaning and value changes.

No longer is it a piece of paper with some ink on it, but it has become “My mother who died 12 years ago,” or “This is the Blackwater Falls!” And this is exactly what is supposed to happen at the Preparation of the Gifts when the bread and wine move from the back of the church, through the assembly, to the altar. We are preparing ourselves by attaching ourselves to them so that when the priest consecrates the bread and consecrates the wine, we are also consecrated “The Body & Blood of Christ.”

For me, this Solemnity is as much about you and I BEING the Body of Christ out in the world as it is about the mystery that takes place on the altar. It is the continuation of Jesus’ mission as we are sent forth to BE the hands, the ears, the touch of Jesus alive in the world. Because if mass ends and ONLY bread and wine were transformed into Body & Blood and we are left unchanged, then the world is left wanting.

Beth and I had the honor of having so many great facilitators, priests and teachers in the seminary. During mass, one particular priest used different words as each person stretched out his or her hands during communion. He said, “You are the Body of Christ, receive the body of Christ!”

On another occasion, a different priest also changed the words to, “You are what you receive! The Body of Christ!”

Today’s feast is about us, the active Body of Christ walking humbly through our daily lives, stopping to visit a shut-in, or spending some time with a friend in the hospital, or sitting with a dying person and the family, or taking over a meal to someone in need. It’s about us willingly sacrificing our time and resources to simply BE a presence of hope and love for someone where there is little or none to be found. It is about us, spreading joy and allowing the Spirit to move us to song or dance at celebrations. It’s about being God’s instrument in the world in the same way that Jesus was.

And so while I agree that this mystery of bread and wine becoming Body & Blood is central to today’s celebration, I believe that even more so is the mystery of each of us being transformed so that we can “Go forth” as the active and alive Jesus still working and serving in this world today.