

## Homily for Sunday, June 11, 2023



There are at least two, if not three, acts of faith we are called to make every time we share in the Eucharist. The first act of faith is to believe that these simple, unassuming materials of bread and wine have become the Body and Blood of Christ. This first act of faith leads to the second act of faith which asks us to believe, that in receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, we are to become Christ's Body more and more. The third act of faith is to believe that we are not just *individually* the Body of Christ

but, more importantly, *collectively* we are called to be a Eucharistic people. If we don't believe the first one, the next two have little hope of taking root in us.

Perhaps St. Teresa of Avila said it best when she said, "*Christ has no body now but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. You are the eyes through which Christ's compassion must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now.*"

The whole point of becoming a Christian, if we take our baptism seriously, is to become part of a Eucharistic people. To be a Eucharistic people is to see ourselves as Jesus saw himself---as food for the world. He told us in today's gospel, "***The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.***" It's not just the bread for Catholics. It's not just the bread for Christians. It's the bread for the life of the world. What he has to offer is necessary and intended to feed the deepest hunger of every person who makes up this world. His life is as essential as food itself.

The spiritual master and great teacher of non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi, once said that "if Christ ever comes to India, he'd better come as bread." Gandhi also said something to the effect that he would have seriously considered become a Christian had the Christians he met been more Christ-like. This wonderful Hindu spiritual man reminds me that Christ has no physical body but mine and yours.

Becoming a Eucharistic people, that is, becoming food for the world as Jesus was, actually begins in baptism. After the pouring of water at a baptism, the priest then anoints the newly baptized with oil using these words, "*As Christ was anointed priest, prophet, and king, so may you live always as a member of his (Christ's) body, sharing everlasting life.*" We are missioned, from that moment on, to be Christ's body in the world. We are also invited to a share in "everlasting life." To share in Christ is to share in everlasting life here and now. Material food, as essential as it is for our bodies, cannot hold out that promise. A few hours after eating material food, you will begin to become hungry again. However, true food (the flesh of Christ) and true drink (the blood of Christ), stay with you and nourished you forever.

Jesus asks us to come to Eucharist not understanding what we are receiving but trusting. This combination of "not understanding yet trusting," presents itself daily for me. Every time I turn on the computer is an act of trust in something I don't understand. Seek to understand Eucharist more and more in your life but just know, at the end of your life, it will remain as much a mystery as it

was on the day you made your First Communion. All you can do is bow before a mystery that came “to do you good” (Deut. 8:16) and say, “Thank you.” As this Mystery feeds you, it asks you to do the same. Eucharist, in the end, is ultimately a gift. Or, as Jesus says, “What you freely receive, freely give” (Mt. 10:1).

The Hebrew people, in their experience of hunger, are invited to think differently about their lives and the world around them. It says in that first reading, from Deuteronomy, ***“He (God) humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted with.”*** This is a different perspective than the one we get in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. In Genesis, we hear that we are created in the divine image and likeness, and God gave us dominion over nature. We were sanctioned, permitted you might say, with subduing the earth and having dominion over it.

However, our ancestors, traveling through the desert, in the Deuteronomy story, are given another way of thinking about their relationship with the earth and nature. This new way of thinking was very humbling to them. When you are starving, like they were, and there is no rain, you’re not in charge. You do not have dominion over nature. Nature has dominion over you. And when food shows up mysteriously and “free of charge,” you know that it’s not really yours.

Before you worked hard for everything you have, there was a moment of sheer givenness. During Eucharist, immediately after the bread comes up, the priest lifts his eyes to heaven, as if speaking to God directly, and says, *“Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands...”* Before we worked with it, with our human hands, it was already the fruit of the earth, a gift from God.

*“Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have receive the wine we offer you: fruit of the vine and work of human hands...”* Long before it was the work of human hands, it was already the fruit of the vine, a gift from God.

The gospel passage we heard today, where Jesus tells us he is bread come down from heaven, comes just after the story of the feeding of the multitude. This is John’s gospel. The feeding of the multitude story is featured in all four gospels (six times!), but it is only in John’s gospel where Jesus himself passes out the fish and the loaves. It’s as if he is saying, “I have given you an example, now you go and do the same.” Everyone we interact with should be able to tell who has fed and nourished us.

I end with a quote from a Jesuit priest, Fr. Pedro Arrupe, who said, “If there is hunger anywhere in the world, the celebration of the Eucharist is somehow incomplete everywhere in the world.”

Fr. Phil