

Homily061922

THE EUCHARIST: THE SAME EVERYWHERE AROUND THE WORLD

Food is essential. Every living thing, in some way, needs to receive nourishment of some kind, or it dies. We know this but it is true of all living things. We have been told that we are made in the image and likeness of God. We believe this. We think of it mostly in terms of intellect and free will. But is there more? Is our need for nourishment part of our being made in the image of God? And if it is, what is there that could possibly be nourishment for God. What feeds the divinity? Well, for short—it is love. The Father's love feeds the Son and the son's love for the Father feeds the Father and this mutual loving is true food for their own Holy Spirit.

On this feast of the Most Holy Body and Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, called Corpus Christi, we are aware that Christ loved us in such a way that he wanted to remain and abide and nourish us forever. He not only lay down his life for us, he left himself as simple, basic but holy food, food that would nourish us on our spiritual journey in this life. We eat the consecrated bread and drink the consecrated wine and they are now changed into the Body of Christ and the Blood of Christ. That is what happens in every Mass we celebrate here together.

A few vignettes from our recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Once in Jerusalem we were very blessed to be able to have our group participate in Mass inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. There are a number of side chapels used for such purposes within the large church. I have been blessed on a couple of occasions to celebrate Mass there. This time however, the Franciscan priest who helped me led me through of maze of construction until I found myself right by the site of Calvary itself. He led me up the stairs and to the Catholic altar. There, on an altar built on the very crag of Calvary, Golgotha, there is an altar. And that is where I led our group of worshippers in celebrating the Mass. In the very place where his blood dripped from the cross upon which he was hanging, in that very spot, I was able to celebrate Eucharist. When I held the chalice with the natural wine and said the words that Jesus himself said at the Last Supper—"This is the cup of my blood, poured out (right here) for you"—it was very difficult to keep my emotions under control. It was a most overwhelming moment for me and all of us. The brilliance of erecting an altar right on the spot of the bloody sacrifice of the cross so that the unbloody sacrifice of the Mass will forever be celebrated there, it is almost too much to take in. The Lord will never depart from Calvary. He will be there always. Just try to take that in. What kind of love is that? And does it not feed something in you at the very deepest level?

The next day we were able to celebrate Mass at the Church of All Nations. It is the site of the Garden of Gethsemane, at the foot of the Mount of Olives. In the main church there is an altar and in front of the altar is a flat stone maybe fifteen feet by fifteen feet. It was on that stone on Holy Thursday night after the Last Supper that Jesus prayed. In Luke's gospel it says that his perspiration became like drops of blood. His passion was beginning. Those in our small group were able to sit on chairs placed around the stone. I invited each person to choose to place on that very stone where his blood first was given, to place there any personal wounds, any relationship, any dashed hope, any son or daughter or spouse or other family member whose care they carried within them. And then we celebrated Mass there. And once again the Lord came to us—powerfully, simply, touching the deepest dimensions of us with his love, with his presence. We were fed by the Eucharist there once again. God's love nourishes.

On the last day before we returned home I was given a surprise gift. One of the pilgrims knew that I had celebrated Mass at what is known as the Ecce Homo (Behold the Man) Arch. It is where Pontius Pilate had Jesus stand before the howling mob after Pilate had had Jesus flogged. "Look at the man! Let him go!" "Kill him!" "Crucify him!" And in that very spot where the crowd yelled for his blood, there is now a pillar on top of which is a small square. On top of the small square is a tabernacle. Inside the tabernacle is the Eucharistic Presence of Our Lord. On the very spot where his death was demanded, his presence is now there—forever. He never leaves this place. Just like his presence is always at Calvary too.

I was blessed to celebrate Mass there as I had 43 years ago as a young priest with four priest companions. It was as if the Lord gave me this great Christmas present in June, I felt a certain culmination in this my fiftieth year as a priest. As I preached I could not control the tears running down my cheeks. I will never forget that moment. Any and all of those moments.

What is the lesson? The essence of Eucharist is presence. And the essence of that presence is love. And Christ left himself to us as Eucharist and in the process taught us a needed lesson. We are each called to be Eucharist. We are each called to nourish those around us and all we meet with our own loving presence. Not only are we called to do this, Jesus himself shares his Spirit with us precisely to enable us to do this. That truth is the heart of today's feast of the Body and Blood of Christ.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.