

Fr Mike's Homily at all Word Services on the Feast of Corpus Christi (June 14, 2020)

Sung: **All that we have and all that we offer, comes from a heart both frightened and free. Take what we bring now and give what we need. All done in his name.** This song would be an appropriate song as we bring forward the bread and wine that is to become the Body and Blood of Christ in the great exchange that we call Eucharist. Today we will not participate in that exchange of gifts of ourselves for the gift of God's self in that way. But maybe today, as we celebrate in a very different way the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, we can recall that, even though we still do not have the opportunity to share the sacred meal that is the Body of Christ, we are, and always will be in the presence of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But that song, "All That We Have," speaks of a heart both frightened and free. That is where my heart has been and is as we have moved through this pandemic and as we now begin the awesome, yet difficult work of rebirth as the Body of Christ.

In a homily on the anniversary of his ordination, St. Augustine said, **"Where I'm terrified by what I am for you, I am given comfort by what I am with you. For you I am a bishop, with you, after all, I am a Christian. The first is the name of an office undertaken, the second a name of grace."** For you, I am pastor. With you, I am Christian and with you I am called to be the Body of Christ.

The song says, "Both frightened and free." Frightened by the responsibility. Free by the amazing reality of God's love present in every breath each of us takes individually as a child of God and every breath we take communally as the Body of Christ.

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Body of Christ in a way none of us would ever ask or expect. But truly what is happening in this celebration is that we are being called forth into new life – we are being asked to give birth to the Body of Christ in our church today and as we move forward. It is so appropriate that we were given the story we heard in the first reading – the same thing is happening for the people of Israel – they are being born and given new life. Their journey in the desert is close to over but they have work to do. Our journey through the desert of corona virus is close to over – well not really, there is still quite a bit of work to be done, but it seems that we can see the first scattered rays of the light of dawn of this new day for us. As they were about to enter the Promised Land, the people of Israel were reminded of all that God had done for them during their sojourn. God brought them out of slavery, through the Red Sea, gave them water from a rock, saved them from serpents and fed them with manna – a gift from heaven. That manna is a reminder to them and to us that we do not live on bread alone but on every Word that comes from the mouth of God.

We are called to listen to the Word of God – to feast on it and let it guide us in our journey of becoming the Body of Christ.

Sometimes there are obstacles to any one of us really listening to the Word of God or really feasting on it. One obstacle is that, as Catholics we were not nurtured on the Word of God and that is a shame. I remember in the seminary hearing students judge faculty who preached in such a way that wanted to help us focus on the Word. They would say things like, "Oh, he's one of those who diminish the sacrifice of the mass." No, he's one who is reminding us that we are called to feast at two altars – the Table of the Word and the Table of the Eucharist.

But there is something else that can be an obstacle for any one of us when it comes to listening to the Word of God and then responding the call of God present in His Word. It is the fact that we all live in a consumer society. Think about it, even during this pandemic we could all go to a McDonald's drive through. And if we don't like McDonald's we could go to Burger King drive through or Wendy's. As consumers we have choices. We want milk and bread - we go to the store. We want toilet paper – maybe that isn't a great example! But you know what I mean and our ability to choose and buy what we want almost whenever we want it has taught us that "I can have what I want when I want it in all aspects of my life."

One summer I covered for a pastor on Long Island while he was on vacation. Not everyone in the parish liked what he had to say, and ironically, he was calling them to live God's call in a challenging time. There was one envelope I saw every week of that month. It had the amount the person would have given, but it said HELD IN ESCROW UNTIL WE GET A NEW PASTOR. In other words, "I want what I want." Consumerism can be an obstacle to listening to God's Word and to following it.

In Montauk I got an email one weekday. A gentleman misjudged the drive time out to Montauk and missed the morning mass. He was wondering if he could come by and "get Communion." Communion is not something you get like a gallon of milk. Communion is an action – or better yet, a STATE OF BEING. By receiving the Body of Christ we are IN COMMUNION with Him and the rest of the church – we are the Body of Christ. But somehow, consumerism, and the widespread availability of Eucharistic celebrations made him think he could come by and get it.

When we allow consumerism to flavor our faith experience, and we all can do it at times, we can approach our faith with an attitude of fulfilling our desires rather than offering our hearts and souls to God.

So let's listen to some of the Word of God so that we can enter the feast. One phrase of the Word of God comes to us in the prayer Jesus taught us: **THY WILL BE DONE**. Here, in our life as church, we are called to let go of our wants and to focus on the will of God. The will of God is spoken to us in the Word of God. The will of God is spoken to us from Jesus every time we gather at the place where heaven and earth meet – **DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME**. That is a call to the table but it is also a call to a lifestyle – one in which we all wash feet, one in which we accept his challenge to his disciples at the multiplication of the loaves and fishes: **YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT**. The Word of God that feeds us is also a call to action – **FOLLOW ME**. This means I must allow Him to lead.

There is a song in our music books called, "Change Our Hearts". I have heard it sung in other parishes. I am learning that the words to this song are slightly misleading when it comes to listening to and responding to the Word of God. The song is asking God to change our hearts. But Jesus began his ministry calling us to change our hearts – to what is called *metanoia* – in Greek this means a radical re-focusing of our hearts – on God alone! **It is God's will, proclaimed in His Word, that we do the work!**

During this pandemic I have asked, and I have heard others ask, "When will we get back to normal?" The truth is, we won't. Instead we will build a new normal. If we choose, that new normal can include new hearts for each one of us. The Word of God speaks of taking our stony hearts from us and replacing them with hearts made for love. As that happens, we become more and more the Body of Christ.

Think about this: many of us have found ourselves more and more appreciative of the things we have and the people who walk with us – from the heroes in the medical field to the heroes who pack the shelves and ring up our groceries. Something new is being born in us – our hearts are being renewed. **WE HAVE TO NURTURE IT!**

There is another challenge we face as our new reality is being born – the challenge of racism. I saw a picture of two signs face to face – one saying Black Lives Matter and the other saying All Lives Matter. Both statements are true. Yet in the context, the people holding the signs were confronting each other.

Maybe the best way to grow in this situation is through the Word of God – "Whatever you do for the least of my brothers and sisters, you do for me." It seems to me that some of our black brothers and sisters right now feel like the least of His brothers and sisters. So maybe, as the Body of Christ, we ought to listen to that and give them a little extra attention until the day when everyone's sign and everyone's heart will speak and live in a way that says, "Your life matters because all lives matter."

Years ago on an Unbound Awareness Trip in Guatemala, the closing celebration continued for about three extra hours with guys singing old songs together. Bob Hentzen, the CEO, was sitting there typing up his report on the trip, but every so often, he would pick up the guitar and sing with us. The next morning as we were getting ready to leave, he said to me, "That was a great eucharist last night, wasn't it, Mike?" You see, Eucharist is an action of Thanksgiving. That celebration was eucharist. And those who shared that celebration were being the Body of Christ.

I spoke to a friend of mine about mass without sharing Communion. She said, "There have been times when I have gone to a celebration and the food was disappointing, but I found that I feasted on the people I shared it with."

Let's talk about our feast – we are called to feast on the presence of God in one another, and in the Word, and, as the Church says, "in a most excellent way in the Body and Blood of Christ."

Let's talk about how the Word of God instructs us regarding our Eucharistic Feast. Jesus, the Son of God said, "Take this and eat it." He did not say, "Let someone place it on your tongue." We are not allowed to forbid you from receiving on the tongue, but there are people in the community who are appropriately frightened about the spread of corona virus because others will receive on the tongue. So what do we do?

In April of 1982, at St John's University, on my 20th birthday I received Communion in my hand for the first time. It was a decision. It was a step in my growth as a disciple. I am not saying that I'm a better disciple than anyone because of that choice. I am saying that I grew as a disciple that day. Maybe you can too. Maybe this pandemic can be a call to take and eat for the sake of the rest of the Body of Christ. I will tell you this, when we start having mass with Communion – and that begins this Wednesday, June 17, at 8:00 AM – our new schedule – we will instruct anyone who insists on receiving Communion on the tongue to wait until all others have received, and after each one, we will stop, put down the Communion bowl and sanitize our hands before the next person.

Let's get back to St Augustine who I quoted early on. Regarding the real presence and the reality of what Communion does in us he said, "**Believe what you see, see what you believe and become what you are: The Body of Christ.**" That means when we say, AMEN, we are saying, "Yes! I believe this is the Body of Christ and I will choose to grow as the Body of Christ for others."

One last thing. We blessed our Paschal Candle this weekend because we missed the opportunity at Easter. We are now in a completely different season of rebirth. So we will light this candle at all our Sunday Celebrations between now and October 4, the feast of St Francis of Assisi who was called by God to rebuild the Church. Today, and going forward, we are called to rebuild the Church. When we say, "Let us build the City of God," we are saying, "Let us help a rebirth to happen in us so that we become the Body of Christ." God bless each one of us and all of us as a community in this challenging but sacred time.