

Fr. John's Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Easter, April 23, 2023

CHS MJJ

Several years ago an organization called *The Pew Research Group* did a survey which claimed that Catholics don't believe in the Eucharist as much as they used to. Well, this was shocking news. The statistics were quite alarming. But, why would that be? How could that be? And it certainly wouldn't be true here at Holy Spirit. Maybe somewhere else, but not here.

Well, whatever the case, it apparently moved the bishops of the United States to do something about it and so they began to plan for re-catechizing the flock on this question of Christ's *Real Presence* in the Eucharist. And next year we will have a *National Eucharistic Conference* in Indianapolis that will address the issue and hopefully find ways to re-inspire some non-believing Catholics to reconsider and give Jesus another chance.

Here in the Lansing Diocese beginning in June on the feast of *Corpus Christi*, we will embark on a year-long pilgrimage through time in which we will address this most important topic. Bishop Earl will teach, and the local pastors will preach and I'm sure there will be many interesting articles and exhibits that will help us along the way.

Close to 60 years ago the *Second Vatican Council* called the Eucharist the *Source and Summit of our Faith*. That was a recognition of the The Real Presence of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine and an important piece of information that should guide our entire life. And furthermore, it's the fulfillment of the promise made by Jesus before He left us. He said, paradoxically, "*I will never leave you or forsake you. I will not leave you orphans. For, behold, I am with you all days, even to the end of the age.*"

OK, that can be understood in different ways, but the most important way, of course, is the most literal and obvious way. It's something that we can experience with our senses. Something we can see, and taste, feel, and maybe even smell. Again, consecrated Bread and Wine. The Sacred Host and the Precious Blood of Jesus. It's the *Body and Blood, Soul, and Divinity* of the Lord. John, the beloved disciple, put it best at the very beginning of his first letter when he said, "... *that which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, and which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at, and our hands have touched. This we proclaim concerning the Word of Life.*"

Now, we want to be intellectually honest, so we would have to admit that it has always been kind of difficult to believe this teaching, and so we must always go back to the origins, to John chapter 6. Here we can reflect on the passage that first speaks about the Eucharist. (This incidentally comes up every third year in cycle B, for the whole month of August.) But this chapter considers those words where Jesus told us of something in the future. And they were hard words to hear, and their meaning would

remain obscure for some time to come, but would become clear later, at the Last Supper. It would be there that Jesus would speak those words that we still say at Mass: *This is my body, Take and eat. This is my blood. Take and drink. Do this in memory of me.*

But what was it He said that was so challenging? He said, “I am the living bread come down from Heaven. *“He who eats this bread (and I think He must have pointed at Himself), he who eats this bread ... will live forever. And the bread that I will give, is my flesh, for the life of the world.”* And He repeats Himself several times and in different ways. He wants to be perfectly clear. This sounded like cannibalism to some of His disciples and so many left Him. But He doesn’t back off. He doesn’t call them back.

His closest friends, however, stuck around. And Peter, speaking on their behalf, and maybe not that confidently, said to Jesus, *“To whom shall we go? Only you have the words of eternal life”* Maybe he did not yet fully understand, but he believed what Jesus said. *“He who eats this bread will live forever.”* Who knows, maybe he said a silent prayer. *“Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.”*

So belief is a big part of it. Jesus certainly wants us to believe in Him. He wants us to trust in Him. We look at the totality of His life. All those words that were spoken about Him in the Old Testament, and all those words that were spoken by Him in the New Testament. That, in combination with all of those incredible signs and wonders, makes Him worthy of our belief. And so, when He speaks, even if they are hard words, we should be resolve to accept them.... as truth.

Certainly one of the things that should help us in our belief in Him was today’s Gospel reading. Is the beautiful story of the two disciples on the *Road to Emmaus*. They were brokenhearted. They were crestfallen. They had pinned all their hopes on Jesus, and look what happened. His life came to a tragic end.... on a Roman cross. To them, He was defeated and they were defeated as well. But Jesus, *incognito*, appears to them along the road, and enlightens them to the truth of all that had happened. And their hearts began to burn within them. They invited Him to stay with them at their destination where they would break bread together. He was honoring His promise – they had not been abandoned; they were not orphaned; He was still with them. He had risen.

So then, this beautiful story should be an inspiration to us in the here and now. As we read it, as we listen to it, hopefully, if there is any lingering doubt in any of your hearts, we, your friends, pray that it might be lessened and that you too might be able, once-and-for-all, to *Recognize Him.... in the Breaking of the Bread.*

~Fr. John