

The Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time August 1, 2021

Over the next few weeks, our gospel readings will be taken from the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Saint John. This chapter is often called the “Bread of Life Discourse” because Jesus speaks about Himself as the Bread of Life. It is a time for us as a Church to reflect on the marvelous gift of the Eucharist - that profound truth revealed to us by Jesus that simple bread and wine become His very Body and Blood. We should never fail to thank God for this miracle of Jesus’ presence in Holy Communion and to meditate on its power to transform our lives.

During these weeks, let us pay close attention to Jesus’ words and reflect together on what the Blessed Sacrament means for us as a Church and for each of us as Christians.

The Second Vatican Council called the Eucharist “the source and the summit of the Christian life”. What do we mean by “source and summit”?

First of all, the Eucharist is the “source” of our life. As a Church and as individuals, we draw life from the presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. In today’s gospel, Jesus says, “Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life.” Just as regular food sustains our physical bodies, so the food of Holy Communion nourishes our souls. Through it, Jesus gives us His very life. It is like a blood transfusion that restores us to health and makes us strong again.

That is why, whenever we gather as a Church, we celebrate the Eucharist. It is the meal which identifies us as believers in Christ. Just as a family gathers around the table for a meal and for special occasions, so, we gather around the altar for an intimate meal with our Father, with Jesus our Brother, and with the Holy Spirit. At every Mass, then, we are brought into the love relationship of God Himself.

We are a Church because God gathers us together and nourishes us. Without the Eucharist, there would be no Church because Jesus would not be fully present to us. That is why we say that the Eucharist is the source of the Christian life.

Secondly, the Eucharist is the “summit” of the Christian life. The word “summit” means “height” and also “goal”. Because we are made in the image and likeness of God, we are made to be in an intimate friendship with Him. In the Eucharist, we achieve this friendship in a powerful and meaningful way. Jesus Himself comes to enter our very bodies under the appearance of bread and wine. We enter into a “Holy Communion” with Him; that is, we are united with Him in a real and intimate way which is unlike any other relationship we can have with another person. In the Eucharist, Jesus comes to live within us.

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The Eucharist is the summit of the Christian life because there is no greater expression of what we are called to be. We were created to be united with God forever. In Holy Communion, that is exactly what happens.

In the Eucharist we are given a wonderful gift. We should treasure it and rejoice in it. At the same time, this intimate communion with Christ should change us. If we are truly receiving Jesus Himself, then we cannot leave here the same way we came. We must be different and it must show in the way we live our lives.

In today's second reading, Saint Paul urges us with these words: "You must no longer live as the Gentiles [unbelievers] do." He then says, "...you should put away the old self of your former way of life... and put on the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth." This "new self" is ourselves transformed by our communion with Jesus.

So, how do people who have regular contact with Jesus in the Eucharist behave? Well, they carry themselves with a certain dignity and reverence because they are aware that Jesus Himself is living within them. Mindful of Christ's presence within them, they are careful about what they say and speak in a way pleasing to Jesus. This intimate communion with Jesus also makes them able to see Jesus in others and want to serve Him in them. Recognizing how generous God has been to them, they strive to show that same generosity to others. Because Jesus humbled Himself to feed them in the Eucharist, they humble themselves to serve others.

If we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, then we should strive to become like Jesus. Of course, none of us is perfect. Even if we receive the Eucharist every day, we will still struggle with sin and failure. That is why, before receiving Holy Communion, we should examine our consciences to see whether or not we are measuring up to our calling as Christians. And, if our sin is serious, we should wait until we have gone to confession before receiving Our Lord in the Eucharist. Just as we wouldn't approach a friend we have hurt without apologizing first, so we shouldn't receive Jesus in the Eucharist without first approaching Him in the Sacrament of Reconciliation to express our sorrow and receive His mercy.

Jesus is the bread that comes down from heaven to give life to the world. Just as a baker gathers many grains of wheat together to make one loaf of bread, so Jesus gathers many diverse peoples together to create one family - the Church. We draw our life from Jesus' presence in the Eucharist and we experience the union with Him that our hearts desire. And that intimate friendship with Jesus transforms us so that we can feed others with the love of God just as we have been fed.