

Homily Corpus Christi – Year B
“Living The Eucharist”
(Exodus 24:3-8; Hebrews 9:11-15; Mark 14:12-16, 22-26)

It was mealtime on Calm air. "Would you like dinner?" the flight attendant asked a passenger. "What are my choices?" he asked. "Yes or no," she replied.

How long has it been since you have eaten home made bread fresh from the oven?

Eat the bread, but Live the Eucharist!

On this feast of Corpus Christ, the Body and Blood of Jesus, here is a story about bread that touches on the meaning of this day.

Fiorello LaGuardia was mayor of New York City during the worst days of the Great Depression and all of WWII. He was adored by many New Yorkers who took to calling him the "Little Flower," because he was so short and always wore a carnation in his lapel. He was a colorful character -- he rode the New York City fire trucks, raided city "speakeasies" with the police department, took entire orphanages to baseball games, and when the New York newspapers went on strike, he got on the radio and read the Sunday funnies to the kids.

One bitterly cold night in January of 1935, the mayor turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward of the city. LaGuardia dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself. Within a few minutes, a tattered old woman was brought before him, charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She told LaGuardia that her daughter's husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving. But the shopkeeper, from whom the bread was stolen, refused to drop the charges. "It's a real bad neighborhood, your Honor," the man told the mayor. "She's got to be punished to teach other people around here a lesson."

LaGuardia sighed. He turned to the woman and said, "I've got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions. Ten dollars or ten days in jail." But even as he pronounced sentence, the mayor was already reaching into his pocket. He extracted a bill and tossed it into his famous hat, saying, "Here is the ten dollar fine which I now remit; and furthermore I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant."

The following day, New York City newspapers reported that \$47.50 was turned over to a bewildered woman who had stolen a loaf of bread to feed her starving grandchildren. Fifty cents of that amount was contributed by the grocery store owner himself, while some seventy petty criminals, people with traffic violations, and New York City policemen, each of whom had just paid fifty cents for the privilege of doing so, gave the mayor a standing ovation.

Someone beautifully said, "Sympathy sees and says, 'I'm sorry.' Compassion sees and says, 'I'll help.' When we learn the difference, we can make a difference through our actions.

The gospel for today's feast of the Body and Blood of Jesus, formerly called Corpus Christi, very clearly outlines four distinct actions on the part of Jesus as he celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples, and instituted the Eucharist that is the core of our Catholic faith.

Jesus *took* bread, *blessed* it, *broke* it, and *gave* it to his apostles to eat. Bread taken, blessed, broken and shared, are the Eucharistic actions that we are called to not just celebrate, but live, in our lives today.

First, Jesus took the bread. In baptism, Jesus takes us to himself, chooses us to be his disciples, his Body, the Church here on earth. We have been chosen by Christ himself.

Jesus blessed the bread. To bless someone or something is to acknowledge its value, to speak well of someone, to make it very special. In his love for us, Jesus prays for us, holds us up to the Father, speaks well of us to the Father, desires the fullness of life for us. As we celebrate the Eucharist, Jesus blesses us.

Then Jesus broke the bread. It is our brokenness that Jesus wants, not our self-reliance nor our perfection. Jesus is most at home in the weak, the vulnerable, the marginalized. The way he was in the world then, is where he is most easily found today.

Jesus accepts us as we are, and believes in whom we can become. All we have to do is be humble, honest, open and transparent with him, and let him come into our lives to redeem us and to heal us. That can and should happen at every celebration of the Eucharist. That is why we pray, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come unto me. Say but the word, and my soul shall be healed."

Lastly, Jesus gave the bread and the wine to his disciples to eat and drink, declaring that this was his body and his blood, broken and shared for us. They were to eat this food of eternal life, and be empowered to go out and live it – to be bread for the world. They were to be like the disciples at Emmaus who recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread, realized that their hearts were burning within them as he explained the scriptures to them, were transformed, and found the courage to return to Jerusalem to share the Good News of his resurrection with the others.

This miracle of transforming love happens through the prayer of the celebrant and the faith community, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Just before the words of consecration, the presider prays that the power of the Holy Spirit come upon these gifts to transform them into the body and blood of Jesus the Lord.

What is happening here is very similar to what happened at Jesus' birth, the Incarnation. There, heaven and earth met. The divine Word was made Flesh in a baby born of Mary. Spirit and Love were enfleshed. Matter and Spirit came together.

One saint put it this way: "The divinity of Christ was the face of God before humans, and the

humanity of Jesus is the face of humans before God.” Just as happened at his birth, now after his death and resurrection, earth and heaven are linked, joined together again. Bread and wine from the earth, through the power of the Spirit of Jesus, become food from heaven.

The purpose of all this is to build up the Kingdom of God. The reign of God was the main focus of the preaching and teaching of Jesus. It was what he came to initiate – to make it possible for us to experience a bit of heaven here on earth. The reign of God is the peace, love and joy of the Holy Spirit, as well as a right relationship with God, others, ourselves and all of God’s creation. That is what we are meant to experience, and to live, all the days of our lives.

The early Church was born by the gift of the Holy Spirit on the apostles that transformed them into the Church, the Body of Christ here on earth. They were filled with the Spirit and sent to proclaim the Good News of a new way of life possible through that Spirit, and nourished by the Eucharist.

Candidates for confirmation, it is that same Spirit that you are receiving in fullness today. It is that same Church into which you are being fully initiated. And it is that same Eucharist that you are being asked to live. As you eat this holy bread and drink from this sacred cup, know what you are doing, and who you are – the beloved of God called to be his Body here on earth.

Just as the Spirit empowered the early disciples of Jesus to go out and spread the message throughout the world, so the Spirit is calling some of you today to be spiritual leaders, perhaps even priests who can celebrate the Eucharist with you people. Perhaps the Spirit is calling young men and women gathered here to be religious brothers or sisters, to consecrate themselves to the service of God’s people. It is a life like no other – think about it and be open, and parents, encourage your youth to respond to this special call of God.

The Eucharist, and the feast of the Body and Blood of Jesus that we celebrate today, is a miracle of faith. Through the power of the Spirit, bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus, and we who receive it are empowered by that same Spirit to go out and make a little piece of heaven happen here on earth, by living the Eucharist in our lives.

So: Eat the bread, but live the Eucharist!

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Joke:

HH: Fresh bread?

PT: Live the Eucharist

Story of La Guardia

Four actions of the Eucharist

Incarnational dimension

Role of the Spirit

Vocations

Eucharist

SO: