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We do what we can; Jesus does the rest

by Thomas Gumbleton

The Peace Pulpit

Later this afternoon, as Father [Don] Walker announced last Sunday, this parish, together with Our Lady of Grace will have a procession with the Blessed Sacrament and celebrate Benediction at the end of that procession. Many of us, I'm sure, remember days long ago when this was very common: Corpus Christi, the Peace of the Body and Blood of Jesus, where we have outdoor procession and we walked around in the streets, publicly acclaiming our belief that that piece of bread was really and truly the body and blood of the Son of God.

That, of course, is a very good thing -- that we acknowledge our belief in what we call the "real presence." But if we listen to the Scriptures today, and even the eucharistic prayer that we use to spring back and remember ways that happened at the Last Supper, we discover that the Blessed Sacrament, what we celebrate today, is not just a sacrament in which we focus on the presence of Jesus in our midst under the form of bread. It's much more than that.

If we really listen to the Scriptures and to our eucharistic prayer, we discover that the Blessed Sacrament is something you do: "Do this in memory of me," Jesus said at the Last Supper; "do this." So it isn't just a matter of worshipping Jesus, the Son of God, under the Eucharistic form of bread and wine, no, it's taking seriously his words, "Do this in memory of me."

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Genesis 14:18-20

Psalms 110:1, 2, 3, 4

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Luke 9:11b-17
Full text of the readings

We might ask ourselves then, of course, "Well, what does he want us to do? What does he want us to do?" Well, if we go to our second lesson today, which is, as I mentioned before, the first time there's a recording in sacred Scripture of what happened at the Last Supper, we hear Paul quote the words of Jesus: "This is my body, which is broken for you."

In the same manner, taking the cup after the supper, he says, "This cup is a new covenant in my blood. It will be poured forth for you, and so drink it in memory of me. Whenever you eat of this bread, drink of

this cup, you are proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes." What the Eucharist is is making present once more what Jesus did for us on Good Friday, when his body was broken, his blood was poured forth, out of love for all of us.

We capture that somewhat in the eucharistic prayer when we say, after we have repeated the words of Jesus, "This is my body, this is my blood," we say, "Therefore, Holy God, as we celebrate the memorial of Jesus, your son, whom you led through his action and death on the cross to the glory of the Resurrection, we proclaim and carry out the work of your love." We pray also, "Look with favor on these offerings of your church in which we show forth the Easter sacrifice of Jesus that has been handed on to us."

The whole thing is about doing, acting -- Jesus takes the bread and breaks it, gives it, takes the cup, pours it forth and he drinks from it, and it's all a sign of Jesus pouring forth his love as he dies on the cross. We make that present when we celebrate the Eucharist at this altar. The death and resurrection and everlasting life of Jesus become present for us. Then when Jesus says, "Do this in memory of me," that means we have to somehow enter into this giving of Jesus of himself for us.

We have to be people who begin to give for others, and that's, in fact, what was not happening at that church in Corinth. This is the passage when we go back to the beginning of the incident where we find that St. Paul is very angry with the church in Corinth because they're desecrating the Eucharist. Here's why: He says, "I cannot praise you for your gatherings that are at the Eucharist because they are not for the better, but for the worse. Here's why: As I have heard when you gather together, there are divisions among you. You make different groups among you so that it becomes clear who among you are favored.

"Your gatherings are no longer the supper of the Lord because each one eats his or her own food while others are hungry. Do you not have enough houses in which to eat or drink? Or perhaps you despise the church of God, desiring to humiliate those who have nothing. What shall I say? Shall I praise you? I cannot praise you for this." You see what was happening: They celebrate the Eucharist in the home, of course, and they gathered together and separated the rich from the poor, and the rich ate a very full meal.

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This is a common way to celebrate the Eucharist -- you share a meal, then they recall the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in the form of the Eucharist -- but they have separated the rich from the poor, and the rich had all they needed and wanted and more than enough, and the poor were left without even a nut. So Paul says, "That's not the Eucharist; that's not what Jesus came to leave with us. His body was broken, his blood was poured forth out of love for us."

If we're going to celebrate the Eucharist, it's not just a matter of worshipping Jesus, the son of God present under the form of bread and wine, but it's also recognizing Jesus in our brothers and sisters, especially the poor, the oppressed, those who are violated in a variety of ways, especially to violence. We have to be mindful of them, and if we're going to do this in memory of Jesus, we have to give of ourselves for others. We have to find the way that we can drink ourselves, in a sense, so that we give of ourselves. We have to pour forth our love for others as Jesus did.

Now some of us, I presume, might be thinking, "Well, what can I do? We know there are millions and hundreds of millions of people who are starving, who are in desperate need. We know even in our own country there's a greater gap between the rich and the poor. We also know that there's violence going on in our country. We live in a culture of violence where people want to arm themselves to protect

themselves all the time with a gun. We live in a world where there's war and countries are being torn apart, and we continue to be waiting more ourselves after so many years. What can I do?"

Some of us probably even feel somewhat helpless. We're a lot like those disciples who came to Jesus and said, "Look, all these people are hungry. Do something." He says, "No, you do something yourselves." "We only have five loaves and two fish." "So what? Do what you can and God will fulfill the work that you're doing because it's a work of love." Each of us, as we celebrate the Eucharist this morning, I hope will not be like those disciples and say, "What can I do? I only have this much."

No. Think about whatever you have and share it in some way. Find a way to bring about change in our world so that there won't be such a gap between the rich and the poor; find a way to enter into efforts where people are doing this. Find a way to end some of the violence in our world. Join people who are working to overcome and end war as the Holy Father, Pope John Paul, begged us, "Never again war." Join with groups who are trying to bring about less violence in our society. Do what you can, and God will do the rest.

That's the promise of the Holy Eucharist -- that if we do what we can in pouring forth ourselves for the love of others, then the love of Jesus will come to fulfill the little bit that we can do, just as he did on that deserted plain near Capernaum. He took those five loaves and two fish, the little bit that the disciples had, and he made sure everyone had enough; and so, if we do what we can, Jesus will do the rest.

[Homily given at St. Hilary, Redford, Mich. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. **Sign up here** to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

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