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Jesus is not only present in bread and wine, but in God's word

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The Peace Pulpit

I'm sure all of us, from our earliest understanding of The Feast of Corpus Christi, the Body of Christ, have a strong recollection of being impressed with the truth that is proclaimed so strongly in today's Gospel that Jesus really is present in that bread and wine that is transformed into his body and blood during our celebration of the Eucharist. The real presence of Jesus, in a very mysterious way, is there in the bread we eat, the cup we drink.

St. Paul, in our second lesson today, emphasizes the same thing. "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a communion with the blood of Christ? The bread we break, is it not a communion with the Body of Christ?" Jesus is really present then in the bread and wine. We reverence, we adore, we receive the Eucharist and present in our world. Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a Psalms 147:12-13, 14-15, 19-20

We never want to lose that sense of conviction that Jesus really is present there. When we eat that bread and drink of the cup, we are participating in eating and drinking the very body and blood of Jesus and that draws us together and makes us one body. But as we listen carefully to our lessons today, I think it's important for us also to understand that there are other ways that Jesus is present in our world right now, in our midst, here in this church.

The lesson from Deuteronomy reminds us of the long tradition of the chosen people, about that manna in the dessert. Moses teaches them that their ancestors ate that manna and understood that it was to show them that we do not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Jesus again makes it clear in the Gospel when he tells us, "I am the bread of life. Whoever eats my body and

drinks my blood will have everlasting life. Though your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, they died, but here you have the bread which comes from heaven."

Again, this bread is the word of God. Jesus is the full communication, self-communication of God to us, so Jesus is present in this word of God. Just as we reverence the Eucharist, we must reverence the word of God. Most of all, reverence it by listening to it deeply every week as we come together for the Eucharist. Listen, reflect, and draw into ourselves this word of God because it is truly the presence of Jesus, who then becomes our guide, becomes to us the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus is not only present in the forms of bread and wine, but also in God's word.

Now there's also another way in which Jesus is present to us. That's what Paul was emphasizing again in our second lesson today, when he talks about the one bread and the one cup and we become one body in whom Jesus lives. Remember in the Gospel, Jesus said, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, I'm in their presence, I'm in their midst." Jesus is present in all of us as a community of disciples of Jesus. Paul says that should make us understand how important it is to have unity within our church.

But also it should help us understand how we should reverence one another, respect one another, reach out in love to one another because in each other, we find the very presence of Jesus. In a way, Pope Francis is emphasizing this -- how Jesus is present in the whole community. As you probably are aware, he has called together a Synod of Bishops that will meet this year for the first time. There's going to be two sessions -- one this year and one next year.

The Synod of Bishops coming together of leaders of our church from around the world will be trying to carry on discussions about families, family life, marriage and so on. Pope Francis did something that hasn't been done in a long time. Before the bishops come together to discuss in the synod, he wanted to hear from the people. There's a long tradition in the church that we call the *sensus fidelium* -- the sense of the believing people. Jesus lives in us.

Jesus speaks through all of us, and Pope Francis is helping us understand that by calling us to share our understanding about family life, the blessings that come from it, and the requirements that are necessary to live it well -- every kind of teaching that bears on family life. Pope Francis wants to develop an updating of that teaching, but he wants to hear from the people of God in whom Jesus lives. We have to keep in mind always that Jesus is present in our midst as a community of God's people.

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Finally, as we reflect today on the real presence of Jesus in our world in the Eucharist, in the word of God, in one another, there's one final way that Jesus is especially present in our world. Maybe you're aware that yesterday, Pope Francis made another trip, this time within Italy itself. He traveled to the southern part of Italy, the area called Calabria -- one of the poorest parts of the country of Italy. Maybe you've heard about it because it's been on the radio reports already and will be in the paper, I'm sure, today. Francis shows us in this trip, and he's shown us this before where Jesus is especially present in our world.

After he got off the helicopter in Calabria and went into the city, the first people he went to visit were in the jail. He went to visit prisoners. Remember Matthew's Gospel: "When I was in prison, you came to visit me." Jesus was there among those people that we would often push aside -- the no-goods of society -- but Jesus is present in them. Pope Francis recognizes that.

When he had lunch, you probably can guess with whom he had lunch. It wasn't the leading figures of the civil authorities. It wasn't the most important members of the clergy. He had lunch with the poor, with the homeless. "When I was hungry, you gave me to eat. When I was thirsty, you gave me to drink." Jesus is among those who are hungry and poor. Pope Francis goes to them first, and then he also visited with the sick. "When I was sick, you came to visit me." He went to a hospice after lunch.

Also, Francis, in this trip and especially the one previously, wanted to visit with those who are refugees. "When I was a stranger, you took me in." That's where Jesus is present -- among refugees, people who are fleeing situations of violence or economic deprivation. When we think about this, and it's all in Matthew's Gospel, we're very familiar with that parable about the last judgment. "People say, 'But when did we see you hungry? When did we see you thirsty? When did we see you sick? When did we see you in prison?' 'Whenever you saw the least of my brothers and sisters in prison, sick, homeless, poor, you saw me, and if you visited me, then blessed are you.' "

This may be the hardest place to see the presence of Jesus, in the poor, the homeless, the sick, the prisoner, the refugee, but it may be the most important because Jesus, in that parable in the 25th chapter of Matthew's Gospel, says our whole final destination depends on this ability of ourselves to seek him in the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless, the refugee and the prisoner. In our country, we don't have a very good record on taking in refugees.

When Pope Francis went to the Holy Land a couple of weeks ago, one of the first places he went to was Jordan, where they have taken in hundreds of thousands of refugees, one of the poorest and smallest countries of the world. They welcome these refugees from violence. What do we do? We push them back. Even children: There are tens of thousands of children now trying to cross our border and we're trying to do everything we can to push them back.

If we really hear the word of God and hear what Jesus teaches us as the word of God, wouldn't it be important for us to try to change some of these things, and especially our welcoming of the stranger, the refugee? Wouldn't it be important for us to be more careful about trying to make sure we visit the sick, those in prison, and those who are poor and homeless? All of our teaching today in our Scriptures and in this feast we celebrate teaches us about the presence of God in our midst through Jesus.

Yes, we really must reverence, adore the Blessed Sacrament, and receive Holy Communion with great fervor and a great spirit of thanksgiving. We also must recognize the presence of Jesus in one another as a community of God's people, recognize Jesus in the stranger and the refugee, and recognize Jesus in all of those who come into our lives in any way each day of our life. That's how we celebrate The Feast of Corpus Christi, the Body of Christ, the presence of Jesus in our midst, in our world today.

[Homily given at St. Philomena Church in Detroit. 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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