



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



The Mystery of the Eucharist Homily for 32nd Sunday of the Year

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Both the Gospel and the time of the liturgical year turn our thoughts to the future, the afterlife. We began this month by remembering those who died as saints and then by praying for those who died in need of some purification before entering the presence of God. We think also about our own end and how to prepare for it.

Jesus tells the Sadducees there is a resurrection from the dead: men and women “deemed worthy” will rise as “children of God,” alive to him forever. The way to this eternal life was his own resurrection from the dead: his risen Body is the “way” to the Father and to eternal life. We have to be built into it. Jesus said, “In my Father’s house there are many mansions.” His own body was the Father’s house, the temple in which God dwelt. In that risen body there are many mansions, many spiritual dwelling places, places for each of us.

The purpose of the sacraments, and in particular of the Eucharist, is to connect us to that body of the risen Lord, to give us our place in that Temple. As food, the Eucharist nourishes our belonging to Christ, deepens it, strengthens it. It makes us branches on the vine, drawing life from the risen Christ and receiving the strength to act more like him, to be, as Saint Paul said, “strengthened in every good deed and word,” our “hearts directed to the love of God and to the endurance of Christ.” The Eucharist gives us the courage to adhere to the faith like the Maccabean martyrs of the Old Testament, as attested by countless men and women who have cheerfully laid down their lives for Christ and thus shared fully in his paschal mystery.

If all this is true, why would a Catholic ever abandon the Eucharist? Yet in once Christian Europe, Christianity is widely dismissed as irrelevant. In our own country Catholics have been drawn to the new non-denominational “mega-churches,” which offer dynamic preaching, a host of spiritual, social, and study services, a sense of fellowship and caring. But in spite of all these benefits and gifts, which are clearly filling a need, these churches lack the supreme gift of Christ, personal contact with his risen body and blood in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The purpose of Christ’s preaching was to draw people into the mystery of his death and rising, our only hope of salvation. Everything in his life led up to that final hour of self-giving to the Father on the cross for the salvation of the human race. And the night before he died he made sure that his followers would have a way of renewing that sacrifice, of making it present down the ages in every corner of the world so that all people could touch it and be incorporated into it. It is the Eucharist that makes the unity of the people of God. It is the Eucharist that makes us divine, alive to God with a divine life.



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What can we do about this drifting away from the Body of Christ? According to the Holy Father we need a “new evangelization”, a rediscovery of the wonder of God’s self-donation to humanity in the incarnation and resurrection of his Son. We need to be on fire with this message. The Good News of Christ should fill our hearts with awe and joy and thanksgiving that our saving God has come so close to us, has given us an infallible way of tasting him. We have nothing to fear. They will say to us, well you don’t look divine. I don’t see a lot of joy in your assemblies, you aren’t exactly the epitome of virtue. And we can freely admit that and express our sorrow– that’s why we have the sacrament of penance, which communicates to us divine forgiveness and empowers us to start again to live the Gospel. As Bishop Hermann has said, it is we who have the full menu.

Pope John Paul has declared this year from October to October the year of the Eucharist. He wants Christ’s people to rediscover the power of the Eucharist to transform lives, to transform the world. It is the power of Christ himself and his Spirit, acting through humble signs of bread and wine. Let us find ways to deepen our understanding of this great sacrament, talk about it, study it, pray for greater openness to its power. May it become the dynamo of our lives, individually and as a parish. The Gospel of the love of God in Jesus should fill us with joy, make us want to praise God, offer ourselves to him with Christ, and live his gospel in love as members of his Body.