**THE EUCHARIST INITIATIVE**  Week 2 Homily

Sept. 19, 2021

Homilist: Ver. Rev. Peter M. McGuine

**THE MASS IS A SACRIFICE**

We gather today on the Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time.

In the United States, in 2021, this Sunday has also been designated as “Catechetical Sunday,” an annual opportunity for us to reflect on the role that each person plays, by virtue of Baptism, in handing on the faith and being a witness to the Gospel.

In the Diocese of San Diego, we are engaged in a process of Eucharistic renewal: an opportunity for all of us to come to a deeper and renewed understanding of the gift of the Eucharist in our lives as Catholic Christians.

Last Sunday, we were reminded that **the Eucharist is a direct personal encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ.** In the Eucharist, the body and blood, soul and divinity – really, the whole of Christ – is truly, really, and substantially contained. Christ, God and man, makes himself entirely present to us. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life, which means that everything that has happened in our lives this week leads up to the celebration of the Eucharist, and everything that is to follow in our lives in the coming week flows from our celebration of the Eucharist. Our total existence as Catholic Christians is about this continuing dynamic of our lives leading up the Eucharist and then flowing from it, week in and week out. In this way, we become one with God and are joined together with the whole People of God, on earth and in heaven.

This week, I want to reflect with you upon what it means when we say that **the Eucharist is the Sacrificial Memorial of Christ’s Passion, Death and Resurrection by which we have been redeemed.**

Essentially, when we share in the Eucharist, you and I share in the very sacrifice of Christ and the reality of the Paschal Mystery. That term, “Paschal Mystery,” sounds difficult to understand at first, maybe even a bit mysterious, but it’s not hard to grasp. Simply stated, when we refer to the Paschal Mystery, we refer to the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Through the gift of the Eucharist, God continues to invite us into a deeper relationship with Him in Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit so that we can eventually say with St. Paul: “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” *(Galatians 2:20)*

Even before Christ instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper with his disciples, Jesus was teaching them about the Paschal Mystery. Did you hear it in today’s Gospel? He didn’t explicitly use those words – “Paschal Mystery” – but the mystery is there! Listen again: the disciples were on a journey through Galilee. Saint Mark writes, “He was teaching his disciples and telling them, **“The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise.””** The Scripture scholar Dr. John Bergsma calls these words of Jesus “striking” and “full of curious ironies”. He goes on to say in his commentary on the Gospel passage for today that “For once, Jesus does not teach in parables or figures of speech, but in blunt language he describes how he is going to suffer and die. Despite this, the disciples “did not understand the saying.” How ironic! How much plainer could Jesus be? But they just don’t “get it”. And, as in a classroom, no one wants to raise his or her hand and be exposed as the student who doesn’t understand, so no one asks Jesus what he means. They all just nod [in] agreement and continue taking notes.” *(Bergsma, John: The Word of the Lord: Reflections on the Sunday Mass Readings for Year B, Emmaus Road Publishing, p. 402)*

What was important to the disciples was actually not important at all and was actually a distraction! Rather than trying to understand what Jesus was teaching them, Mark recalls that they were “discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest.” So engrossed were they with their own greatness that they could not see the greatness of the Son of Man in their midst and hear the invitation to live one of many ironies of Gospel living: If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.”

As with the disciples, so to with us. We are invited to live life deeply with God in Christ Jesus, but in order to do so, we must hear the invitation, understand what is being asked of us, and set aside any distractions “on the way” that would keep us from this singular task: to live the Paschal Mystery... to allow the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus – in short, the totality of Jesus – to live in me.

**What does it mean to say that the Mass is a sacrifice?** We hear that term frequently… the “Sacrifice of the Mass”. The Mass is a sacrifice in the sense that when it takes place, Jesus Christ – through the bishop or priest celebrating the Mass – makes present sacramentally his saving, sacrificial death on the Cross by which he redeemed us from our sins. The Eucharistic sacrifice is the memorial of Christ’s redeeming death. The term *memorial* in this context is not simply a remembrance of past events; it is a making present in a sacramental manner the sacrifice of the Cross of Christ and his victory. “When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of her Lord's death and resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present and ‘the work of our redemption is carried out.’” *(Ecclesia de Eucharistia, 11)* The Eucharistic sacrifice is offered to adore and thank God, to pray for all our needs, and to gain pardon for our sins. *(U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults, USCCB, pp. 220-221)*

It would be a mistake, then, to think that every celebration of the Eucharist is a “new” or different sacrifice. In reality, the sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one and the same sacrifice.* The priest and the victim – Jesus Christ – are the same; only the *manner* of offering is different: in a bloody manner on the cross, in an unbloody manner in the Eucharist. The sacrificial character of the Holy Eucharist is manifested in the very words of institution… we hear them at every Mass, don’t we? “This is my Body which is given for you” and “This is the New Covenant in my Blood that will be shed for you.” The sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one and the same sacrifice. *(Compendium: Catechism of the Catholic Church, 280)*

**In what way does the Church participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice?** In the Eucharist, the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his body. The lives of the faithful – our lives! – our praise, our suffering, our prayers, our work, are united to the life, praise, suffering, prayers, and work of Christ. Through the Eucharist, we “learn” to offer our very selves, and so day by day, be brought, through the mediation of Christ, into unity with God and with one another. *(Compendium: Catechism of the Catholic Church, 281)*

You know, the theme of Catechetical Sunday this year is “Say the Word and My Soul Shall be Healed.” These words are so familiar to us, aren’t they? We say them right before receiving the Body and Blood of Christ at Mass. As we hear the words of the bishop or priest, “Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb,” we look at Jesus, we acknowledge our unworthiness, and, realizing we are in need of a Savior and cannot save ourselves, try as hard as we might, we give our entire selves over to Him by saying, “Say the word, and my soul shall be healed.” This is Jesus’ deepest desire for us: that we be healed – saved – freed from our sins by the sacrifice of his Body – indeed his entire being – on the altar of the Cross. To receive the Eucharist is to embrace with outstretched arms the Paschal Mystery – to lose my life so that I might gain it – to be great by becoming the servant of all – setting aside all that would distract us on the way. “In this way, then, Christ’s victory and triumph over death is made present in the lives of those who participate in the Eucharist.” *(U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults, USCCB, p. 224)*

May the Body and Blood of Christ keep us safe for eternal life. Amen.