

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A
St. Michael's All Masses
Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18
1 Corinthians 3:6-13
Matthew 5:38-48
February 13, 2011

Special Homily on the Liturgy of the Eucharist

We have been talking this month about the Mass. We began with the Introductory Rites the first week, and continued with the Liturgy of the Word last week.

Last week, when I spoke about the importance of the Word in knowing God's way, I referred to our reception of the Communion as strengthening us to live according to God's way.

Today we turn to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. While the act of receiving Communion is essential to who we are as Catholics, the Liturgy of the Eucharist is much more than just that act.

Attitude is important. What is our attitude to be as we celebrate the Eucharist? The Greek Word Eucharist means *thanksgiving*.

The Eucharist is so important to who we are that, at times, we refer to the whole Mass as the Eucharist. Since the early years of the church, the Eucharist has been called the "Source and Summit of the Church." Our celebration of the Eucharist is the high point of our celebrations. The Eucharist is also that which strengthens us to go out into the world.

For something so important, it is not just the act of our celebration that is important but the symbolism it represents and the attitude we do it with.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the offertory. From a purely functional standpoint, this means taking up the collection and bringing the bread and wine to the altar. However, the offertory is not simply a functional act. The symbolism is much, much deeper here.

The collection is not just about giving some money. It is not just about “paying the bills.” It is the way we *contribute* to the mission of the church. In the early church, people brought things, whether it be food, clothing, or etc. They brought goods according to the trade they did to help those in need.

The way our society functions has changed so that our collection is done in money. Money is the way we exchange goods and services. The point is not the money. Money is merely a tool.

So, when we contribute to the collection, each according to our means, we are saying we want to help fulfill the mission of the Church. What we give is influenced by the means we have. We can't give more than we have. What we contribute reflects our attitude. And it not only reflected in money but in the other ways we give.

Likewise, the bringing up of the bread and wine is not simply functional. We could just as well begin with the bread and wine on the altar. The bringing forth of the bread and wine symbolize our offering our lives.

The bread and wine begin with natural things, wheat and grapes. Everything found in creation is a gift from God. But then we add our human efforts, taking what God has given us, in the case of the bread and wine, farming the land, and laboring to make the wheat and the grapes into bread and wine.

We take what God has given us, add our human efforts, and bring it to the altar. It is not true of just the bread and wine but of all that God has given us. The bringing forth of the bread and wine in the offertory is symbolic of our attitude and willingness to take everything good that God has given us and use it for the building up of God's kingdom.

Then, as we continue our celebration of the Eucharist, the priest does most of the talking. In years past, it was all in Latin so people couldn't follow along *in the same way*. People would pray the Rosary and the priest would say the prayers. Everybody kind of did their own thing.

We have come to realize that the Eucharistic Prayer is not just the priest's part. For instance, in Eucharistic Prayer III the priest says

“And so, Father, **we** bring you these gifts. **We** ask you to make them holy by the power of your Spirit, that they may become the body and blood of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ at whose command **we** celebrate this Eucharist.”

The priest doesn't say “I” but “we.” It is our celebration together. When I preside, yes it is I who say many of the words but it is not *my* celebration. It is our celebration.

As *our* celebration it is not just about the bread and wine that we set upon this altar. What is it that we celebrate at the Eucharist?

It is the sacrifice that Christ made for us in his Crucifixion but his Crucifixion was not an isolated event. By celebrating the first Eucharist the night before he died, Jesus intimately connected the Eucharist as the sign of his sacrifice on the Cross.

As we celebrate Mass, we remember that sacrifice and give thanks. We also bring forth the sacrifices our lives. Sacrifices like what we might give up for our children or for our spouse; sacrifice in not always getting our way in order to help and care for others.

Jesus' sacrifice is the supreme sacrifice but we share in that sacrifice at Mass in the way we make sacrifices to live as Christ calls us.

It is not that we are perfect. We acknowledge our imperfections in the Eucharistic Prayer. For example, in Eucharistic Prayer III, we first pray that the Lord transform the bread and wine into his body and blood but then we also pray that we all are transformed to become one body, one spirit in Christ.

After the Eucharistic Prayer, we say the Our Father seeking our daily bread. At Communion, we come forth to receive the Eucharist in faith and in humility. We know we need the Lord. May we always be nourished with the bread of life.