

Mass of the Lord's Supper – Cycle C

April 1, 2010

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Good evening. When you read the ritual, the ritual in the Sacramentary teaches us what we are allowed and what we are not allowed to do. The reason it does this is to keep us faithful to what Jesus did. Just to keep us faithful and keep us focused. Not to take things in our own direction. One of the things the Sacramentary says is, "The priest is to preach on three things tonight: the institution of the Eucharist, the institution of the Priesthood, and the command of love, of brotherly love is what it says, but love of everybody. So those are the three things the Church asks the priest to preach on tonight to again keep us focused. When you take those three things that the Church is asking us to preach on every one of those things has to do with one word. Well it is a hyphenated word but still only one - self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice. When we come to the Eucharist it is Christ giving Himself for us. When He institutes the Priesthood it is priests, men giving up their lives for others. And when it is talking about love it is laying down your life for others. It is all the same thing. So whenever we come to the Mass we are to be reminded this is what you are called to do to give it all away; to be a person for others every day. That is the point.

So when you look at the Eucharist, I can't imagine life without the Eucharist. I just can't. It completely blows my mind when people think they don't have to go to church. I love to talk about Jim McCarthy. Some of you might know Jim McCarthy. Jim McCarthy was one of the biggest pagans I knew. Good guy. He is one of my best friends. Good guy. He is from Cleveland. His wife and I made TEC fifteen, twenty years ago, about 18 years ago in Cleveland together. I remember his wife saying, "Oh Father you have got to pray because my husband is never going to make TEC. She kept getting on his case, getting on his case, getting on his case. No, no, no I don't need that stuff. Then finally he made TEC. I will never on the Saturday night of TEC when I went back, I didn't do that one, but I am up there and he is just standing there and everyone is greeting each other, and I said, "So, how is it going?" "UGH!!!!" You could just tell he was not a happy camper which happens a lot with people who go to TEC. But then what happens during that time is he was transformed and now he is a daily Mass goer. He loves it when he gives a talk he will say, "You know before TEC I had to go to Mass." You know you went to Mass on Sunday because why, you have to. He said, "You know what happens now is I have to go to Mass every day." If you ever seen him, he was here last week for my birthday party, if you ever see him go to Mass lots of times tears are running down from his eyes on his face because he realizes this is God and this God just keeps giving Himself for us.

So tonight we have to start focusing on the first Mass. We are focusing on what Jesus gave us. Jesus gave us Himself. He has nothing else to give us as we talked about last night at the Passion Talk. This Mass will cost Christ His life. If Christ is giving us His life everyday at Mass, everyday, He is giving you everything, how is it that we keep thinking of all the other things that more important than being with the Lord who every Mass costs Him His life and He gives His life for you and me. So we should yearn to be in His presence. We should yearn to go to Mass as much as possible. That is a call to go beyond a Sunday Mass person. To try and go to Mass more often if you are able to in Erie everyday which is quite easy in Erie. To do it a couple of times a week whatever it is. You know so often so many people do it for Lent and go, "That was my Lenten thing for Father. I did it for Lent." But then after Lent what happens,

well I don't have to do that anymore. That was a lot of problems. Uh huh, why? You do things for Lent so you can learn new practices for life. So that is a little "umph." If Christ is giving His life for you and me today, and He does it every day, should I not want to give my life every day if at all possible?

We focus on next the people that bring forth the reality of God in the most Blessed Sacrament, the priest. You know vocations are on the rise people they are not on the downfall. People think that they are. That is not true. Where ever I go I do a big push for vocations. I am a big pusher for vocations as you would know by now. There isn't one boy that comes by me when I am doing a parish mission, when they walk by me I go *WHACK!* if they are in high school and say, "You be a priest." So often when I do this one of the kids after I hit him and said, "You be a priest son." And he goes, "Oh no Father." And I said, "Oh what are you going to be?" He said, "I am going to be a doctor." "WOO HOO, a doctor! Well isn't that something." I looked at him and I said, "Why go half way." He said, "What?" I said, "Why go half way. If you are a doctor, good doctor, and you are the best doctor around if you are lucky you will be able to keep people around for 100 years. I can keep people alive forever. Go ahead. You go be a doctor." The gift of priesthood is a gift that Christ gave the Church. I am not just saying this because I am a priest. I remember when I was a little boy in second grade the thing we were given by our priest, Fr. Bob, God bless him, was everyone in First Communion, after their First Communion they got The Imitation of Christ. Remember The Imitation of Christ book those who are older than me, the little blue book? I read that every single day from the second grade on. I remember looking at the back and there is a whole section just dealing with the priesthood. It would talk about the glorious thing of the priest, that the priest gets to hold in his hand the God of the Universe. Of course this was way before lay people could receive communion in the hand. St. John Vianney says, "If the priest realized how glorious his vocation was, he would die of joy." You do realize the priest, and again I am not the person to be saying this I am just talking about objective, the priest at the Mass becomes Jesus Christ even if it is a sinful person like Fr. Larry or a holy person like Fr. Wright, he becomes Jesus Christ. That is why at Communion when we say the consecration we say, "this is my body" because it is Christ saying that. That is the whole reality, the greatest thing. So the call for all boys, when you think about vocation to the priesthood, that what a great gift to give. Today the Holy Father is being tortured if you will. Priests again, the scandal is exploding again and some of this we need to deal with it. Absolutely, positively. I got a great call yesterday from a great priest, the vocation director of the Diocese of Lafayette, Indiana, Fr. Brian Doer. He calls me and says, "Now Father, you have a lot of connections," oh dear, and he says, "You know what we need to do?" I said, "What is that?" He is a very holy, young priest, and he says, "We as priests need to sit there and we need to go and do fasting and praying." I said, "We need to get some Bishops involved. We priests can go do a month of fasting and prayer and penance for all of the priests who have done harm to the Church." That our priests will sit there in all humility and say yes these things have happened, these abuses but we want to do reparation. We want to do penance for our brother who went the wrong way. Because no matter what, you know you the 12 Apostles, you still had Judas. Judas was there at the last supper and yet Judas became one of the most evil people we can talk about and yet God still founded the Church. In our own times we can focus on the evil that is there because of the humanity of men or we can look at the holiness of most people. In the scandal of the church it has been less, statistically, less than 2% of priests. Less than 2% and yet to listen to the news or everything else it is everywhere. The priest is the person of Christ. St. Francis of Assisi, he said if there was our Blessed Mother and a priest who would he bow before? The priest because the reality that is Christ's presence in the world. So, you can look at the sinfulness of the priest or you can look at Christ inside the priest. That is why today when we talk about the Institution of the Priesthood we have to make it part of our commitment that we pray for priests; that we do fasting for priests; that we encourage our sons to become priests. That we pray for those vocations because we are in a great need

and the need is growing, I am telling you. I've talked about when I was in Springfield and there were 3,000 kids there. I looked at the boys and said, "Gentleman, how many of you are man enough to give your life to Jesus Christ? How many of you are man enough to willingly lay down your life for Christ, nobody else but Christ and Christ alone? How many of you would be willing to lay down your life or be open to the call of vocation to the priesthood? I want you to come and stand on this stage." I am standing there and the stage is slowly becoming more and more filled. Do you know how many boys approximately came down? 400. And then we talked about the girls. And how many girls came down? It was 600 because they saw some nuns that are beautiful. How many of you want to be a bride of Jesus Christ? We need to come back to the reality of what the priesthood is. What the religious life is. It is a gift to the church. What has happened in my opinion is we became secularized. We became people that bought into the culture and bought into the world. Holiness was no longer our goal. We wanted to become people of social justice and social justice is nothing if not founded in Jesus Christ. Holiness is first and flowing out of holiness comes social justice. Social justice without holiness is socialism or communism but it is not of God. We have got to make sure that everything is founded in holiness. God is calling you and me to be holy. And how are we going to become holy? Self-sacrifice and that takes us to the last thing we need to focus on today.

When Jesus came and He was the God of the Universe, He laid down His life. He said, "What I have just done is given you an example." What that means for you and me is that God wants you and me to become a great saint someday in spite of your sinfulness, in spite of your weaknesses. Do you have that goal? Is that what you want? When you take your last breath on this earth will people be able to say about you and me that they gave more than they took? They only had one life and everyday they gave. They were more concerned about others than themselves. That is the way Jesus was and that's the command of Jesus to each of us this day that we will truly, truly become men and women of love. You can't be a person of love unless you are a person of service, that you lay down your life in self-sacrifice.

So everything we have talked about this night is fulfilled in the Eucharist where Christ comes and He gives everything for you and me. And then He says what I want you, My followers to do, is do the same. However your vocation is, whatever your vocation, like someone came to me yesterday as a matter of fact and we are talking, and they said, "What should I do Father with me life?" And I said, "Oh, it is very simple. God wants first of all for you to be a saint. Now how are you going to find out what kind of saint God wants you to be? He is going to want you to be a person of love. What vocation is going to make you a better lover? If it is to get married, then get married. If it is to be a priest, then become a priest. If it is to be a lay person who is to be single then be a lay person who is single. God's vocation for you and I is to be saints. And the way we will express that is how I am called to be a person of love. How am I called to lay down my life. So today, the Church asks us to focus on three things – the Institution of the Eucharist, Christ's self-sacrifice for us; the Institution of the Priesthood, where Christ calls men to self-sacrifice for the Church and our salvation; and the institution of the command to love one another, that all of us everyday are called to great self-sacrifice. Got it? Get it? Going to do it? May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.