HOMILY
Do You Really Believe?

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a Homily for Sunday of Ordinary Time Cycle A

Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16 1 Cor. 10:16-17 John 6:51-58

Today is the Feast of Corpus Christi, it's our feast day since we're Bread of Life Parish. So Let's go to John 6. If you question the Eucharist or you wonder about it, you have to go here. You can't be any more real. I just taught my kids all the Scripture passages that deal with the Eucharist. This is the core of Catholicism. This is it. This is what makes us Catholic. This is what separates us from all our brothers and sisters of other denominations. We are Catholic and we believe the most fundamental thing. It's been believed since day one in the Catholic Church, since the beginning of the Church before there was ever any division that Jesus Christ is truly present, physically, spiritually, divinity, humanity, 100% God, 100% man before us in the Blessed Sacrament. We are here before Almighty God.

I believe most of us say "yes" to that, but for some of us it's never "clicked". When I talk about the "clicking" experience, it's like persons who have been Christian all their lives, or Catholic all their lives and one day-- boom -- it hits them: I want a relationship with Jesus and then their faith takes on life. It's the same way with people who go to communion every week again and again -- they go up and receive their vitamin pill -- even sometimes people who go to daily Mass -- they go and receive their vitamin pill so they can get through their day and that's the way it is. Somewhere it has to "click". I'm in the presence of Almighty God at this very moment. That I'm in the presence of the God Man Jesus Christ who walked the face of the earth in Jerusalem. He's just as present
here whom each of us will stand before on judgment day. He's just as present right here. We are in the throne room of Almighty God and somewhere that has to "click" like whoa, finally it makes sense.

A Protestant minister was coming into church with a Catholic priest and the Catholic was showing him around the church and when they reached the tabernacle the priest genuflected and the ministers says, "Why do you do that?"
The priest said, "We believe that that is the body, blood, soul and humanity and divinity of Almighty God in Jesus Christ." The minister said, "If I believed that I would never get off my knees in adoration before him." If you ever go to Taize in France -- it's an ecumenical community in France -- the brother who started it, if he finds out you're a priest he'd grab the person and he would take them by the arm and run them to the Catholic tent and he would fall on his knees and cry, "Before us is Almighty God. Worship him."

We come here every week and God is here before us, body, blood, soul and divinity, right here and we need to honor and worship him and glorify him. The problem with Catholic Churches today is that they've forgotten he is present. Oh, Jesus is present in you and me, and he is. When he's present in you and me, I don't have to worship him here. We need to be spending quality time with Jesus in the Eucharist.

Let's find out more about this in John 6. Begin with verse 53: "Let me solemnly assure you that if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you'll have no life within you. But he who feeds on my flesh" -- and we've talked about this before -- the word for flesh in John, Chapter 6 is sarx in the Greek. Sarx is a hunk of flesh. If there were a cow hanging here which we just butchered, and I take a hatchet and I chop off a leg of this cow and I throw it in front of you -- pretty grotesque, huh? That's what sarx means. When he says, "He who feeds on my flesh, he's using a word which means "knaw." I don't remember the word in Greek, but it means "knaw". It's like a lion knawing on the skull of a rabbit it just caught. Pretty graphic. But its the graphicness that shocked the Jewish people. "What do you mean? What are you talking about -- knawing on your flesh?"
Again, the early Christian church was accused of cannibalism because we ate the flesh of our God. We were considered cannibals. There is no way, historically, you can get us out of the Eucharist. It's impossible. We eat the Body and Blood of Christ. We believe it's the true body and true blood of Jesus Christ. And he says, "If you eat this flesh, my flesh, you will live forever." That's a promise. When I eat his flesh, I will live forever. Everyday we eat regular food so we can be alive. So don't you think if we do it physically, we should be doing it spiritually?
Let's go now to John 6:66. This will keep you in the Catholic Church for the rest of your life. It says, "From this time on, many of his disciples broke away and would not remain in his company any longer. Why did his disciples leave him? Over the teaching of the Eucharist. Now he didn't say, "Oh, please, I was only talking about the word of God. I'm not talking about my body. C'mon back. You misunderstood me." Jesus doesn't say that. He lets them go, and he says to his apostles in verse 67: "Will you leave me, too?"

Yesterday afternoon after a wedding in Pittsburgh a girl came to me and said, "Father, I used to be Catholic, but I left." My heart always sinks when I hear that. I always say: "How could you leave Jesus in the Eucharist?" "Well, he's everywhere, Father." Yes, he's everywhere. But he says unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you will not live forever. If you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you will live forever. Now it's one thing to be brought up one way and change. If you're Protestant all your life, and you have the Word of God, Jesus is there; Jesus is truly present in our brothers and sisters in different denominations, but we can't be trying to be so much "one" that we neglect the core of our faith. We can never say, he's just as present in every church because that's not true. Not every church has Christ physically present in the Blessed Sacrament. Only the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches have Christ's real presence in the Eucharist and that is not something to be taken lightly. It's not something you can walk away from because if you ever walk away from the Catholic faith Jesus Christ will look at you and say, "Will you leave me, too?" You'll say, "Oh, no Lord, I'm going to this place where they're alive, they jump up and down and sing." "Will you leave me, too? Are you receiving my body? Are you receiving my blood there?" "Well, spiritually. I receive it in the Word of God." "My flesh is real food. My blood is real drink."

In case you're wondering, let's go to 1 Corinthians Chapter 10: 16: This the second reading for today. "Is not the cup of blessing that we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? And the bread we break not the sharing of the body of Christ?" So there, Paul is saying -- this is 30 - 40 years after Christ's resurrected and he's talking about the Eucharist. In case you think it might be a symbol or something to remind you of God go to Chapter 11:23ff: "I received from the Lord what I handed on to you, namely the Lord Jesus on the night on which he was betrayed took the bread and after he'd given thanks he broke it and said, 'This is my body.'" He didn't say, "This is something like my body." He didn't say, "This is something to remember my body." He said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." "In the same way after the supper he took the cup saying, 'This is the cup of my covenant in my blood. Do
this and whenever you drink it, remember me." Verse 26: "Every time then when you eat the bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes." Verse 27: Now this should really sting us to our heart: "This means that whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup unworthily sins against the body and the blood of the Lord." That's why we as Catholics believe that you can't go to communion unless you're in the state of grace because if you receive communion outside the state of grace you're committing a sacrilege and you're sinning against the body and blood of Jesus, not just the symbol of Jesus, not just reading his word. You're sinning against Jesus Christ himself because you're receiving his real body and his real blood. Verse 28: "A man should examine himself first and only then should he eat the bread and drink the cup." So not everyone should go to communion all the time. We need to examine ourselves first. "He who eats and drinks without recognizing the body and blood of the Lord eats and drinks a judgment on himself." Get this next verse -- 30: "That is why many among you are sick and infirm and why so many are dying." That's pretty strong. We need to really know who it is we receive. It's not just a symbol, it's not just something that makes us different. It is God and we have believed that for 2,000 years. It is an unbroken tradition. Paul believed it. Jesus, the first thing he did after resurrection was what? Say Mass. The early church died for that. In fact you were killed if you went to Mass. It was a crime -- a capital punishment to be caught at the Eucharistic liturgy. And so many of the early Christians were killed over the Eucharist. The emperor once said to a group of Christians: "How can you do this? Just stop it. You can just believe in your Jesus. Why do you have to go to the Mass?" And the Church looked back at him and said, "There is no Christianity without the Eucharist and there is no Eucharist without Christianity." This is a core belief. You must believe it. This is the word of the Lord. This has been taught as an unbroken revelation for 2,000 years.

Do you truly believe this? And before you say, "Oh, yes, Father," practically how? If you truly believe that Christ is present in the Blessed Sacrament, you would do everything in your power to go to daily Mass. No problem. You eat everyday don't you? And you go out of your way to eat everyday, don't you? But eating the body of Christ and drinking his blood, do you go out of the way for him? If you can't because it impossible -- you start work too early and stay too late, do you stop by a church everyday? If I were giving out a billion dollars to everybody who comes to me, I bet there would be people from all around the world running here. I'm giving you God who created the billion dollars. You and I will receive Almighty God this very day. That's power.

I want to challenge you today -- if you believe that Christ is truly present in the
Blessed Sacrament -- that everyday you and I should be doing something to be present in his presence -- whether it's going to daily Mass -- I have daily Mass everyday at 7 a.m. --we are out of that church everyday at 7:22. 22 minutes. And you can receive Almighty God. If you can't go to Mass everyday and I realize it's impossible for some of you, there are 32 Catholic Churches in the city of Erie. Everyone of us here could at least stop by a church for five minutes. Stop before or after you go to work. If you really, really believe, there'd be nothing, nothing more important in your life than to spend time in Christ's presence in the Eucharist everyday. And so I ask you: Do you really, really believe and if you do then live it.

May each of you know his love today and forever. Amen.