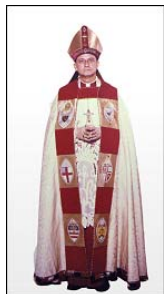


Sermon Preached by the Rt. Rev. Russell E. Jacobus
Bishop of Fond du Lac
At the 50th Annual Eucharistic Festival
June 6th, 2009

Jesus said. “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Fifty years ago, William Hampton Brady, fifth Bishop of the Diocese of Fond du Lac, had a vision – a vision – as the bulletin indicates -- of this Diocese “united in its faith in the Presence of our Blessed Lord in the Bread and Wine of the Altar” – a vision where all members of the congregations of this diocese would “know Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, love Him there, and follow Him” – a vision of a people so “devoted to Jesus in the Sacrament that we would become devoted to one another in our love for Him” – a vision of a diocese “united in its efforts to make Jesus’ presence known to all people.”

I thank God for that Visionary – William Hampton Brady, and the vision he set for us. I thank God for this 50th Eucharistic Festival – in which I pray we will all come into a deeper knowledge of Jesus in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood. I thank God for this commemoration in which we increase our love for Jesus. And I thank God for this celebration of the Holy Eucharist in which we are strengthened by Christ’s Body and Blood to be “a community of disciples enthusiastically leading all people to transformation in Christ”

So how might we fulfill this vision which Bishop Brady had for us? How are we to understand the Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood? How are we to come to know and love and follow Him? And how are we to make His presence known to others?

Over the centuries since the institution of The Last Supper, many theologians and scholars have tried to explain the mystery of this Sacrament. The temptation, even in a sermon, is to try to explain everything. And no matter how scholarly or erudite the explanation, they fall short, because the Mystery of the Sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood IS A MYSTERY. It is something we will never completely comprehend.

But what we can comprehend is what Jesus did at that Last Supper – and we can consider the implications His death, resurrection and ascension have for us in light of this Sacrament.

As I was growing up, my parents had a picture of the Last Supper on the wall in our living room – it was “The Sacrament of the Last Supper” by Salvador Dali. Other than Leonardo da Vinci’s “Last Supper”, Dali’s rendering is probably one of the most memorable. As you can see in this photograph (or in the actual picture for those sitting in the choir), not only is Christ sitting at the table with His disciples – his Resurrected or possibly Ascending torso looms over the whole of the painting.



As a child I always wondered what Dali was intending to portray when he painted the picture. And I came to the conclusion, many, many years ago that what the painting said to me was that Christ not only instituted the Sacrament using bread and wine – He was not only the initiator – He was in every way in and over the consecrated bread and wine we know as the Body and Blood of Jesus.

The painting dramatically visualizes for me what is crucial and central to the Christian faith – and what is fundamental and essential to the fulfillment of Bishop Brady’s vision for us. We are always to remember it! Someone died for you and for me. A body was broken and blood was shed – so that we may have eternal life and be one with Him and one with one another.

As we read scripture we can see that the preparation for the Last Supper was intentional. Matthew, Mark and Luke make it quite clear. The instructions were easy for the disciples who would enter the city. A man carrying a jar of water would meet them. He would lead them to a house, where the guest room was waiting, and the disciples were to make ready for the Passover Feast. There was advance preparation. Jesus deliberately chose the way that he wanted his followers to remember him.

Then, in the midst of that celebration of the Passover, Jesus took bread – and then he took the cup of wine.

Jesus could have made different elements the focus for our remembrance of him. He might have chosen a lump of clay and left us a legacy by saying, “Remember how I made the blind to see. Use this clay whenever you gather so that you might see me after I am gone.” He might have done that, but he didn’t!

He could easily have produced a piece of fishing net from underneath his garment and said, “Remember how I called you originally to be my disciples. Use this net whenever you gather in my Name to remind you to call others in the same way.” That could have been done, but he did not do it.

He might have taken other articles, such as a pinch of salt, a little leaven or a candle and said, “Take these as a reminder of your roles in my Kingdom.” He didn’t.

He might have taken a couple of leather thongs and said, “Remember your prophetic ministry and how I cleansed the Temple of Jerusalem.” He chose not to.

He intentionally selected his props for the final drama. He took the bread and the cup that we might remember him in his death. More than a teacher or a friend or a wonder-worker, he chose to have us remember him as our Savior.

“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.”

As the years go by, I continue to cherish the fact that the Lord's Supper enacts something that can never fully be explained. And because of that, the Sacrament humbles us – it enables us to maintain the mystery. The Sacrament acts out the centering event for us as Christians, but it does not spell it out.

In preparation for today, I reviewed some of the old files from Eucharistic Festival's of the past. I discovered that for about the first decade a reading from Dom Gregory Dix's book, *Shape of the liturgy*, was often read. Dix was a mid-20th century Anglican Benedictine and liturgical scholar.

Let me read the passage he wrote, that was read at early Eucharistic Festivals – which is also printed inside the back cover of your bulletin:

“Jesus had told his friends to do this henceforward with the new meaning “for the Anamnesis” of Him – (for the Remembrance of Him) – and they have done it always since.

“Was ever another command so obeyed? For century after century, spreading slowly to every continent and country and among every race on earth, this action has been done, in every conceivable human circumstance, for every conceivable human need from infancy and before it to extreme old age and after it; from the pinnacle of earthly greatness to the refuge of fugitives in the caves and dens of the earth.

Men have found no better thing than this to do: for kings at their crowning and for criminals going to scaffold; for armies in triumph or for a bride and bridegroom in a little country church; for the proclamation of a dogma or for a good crop of wheat; for the wisdom of the Parliament of a mighty nation or for a sick old woman afraid to die; for a schoolboy sitting an examination or for Columbus setting out to discover America; for the famine of whole provinces or for the soul of a dead lover; in thankfulness because my father did not die of pneumonia; for a village headman much tempted to return to fetich because the yams had failed; because the Turk was at the gates of Vienna; for the repentance of Margaret; for the settlement of a strike; for a son for a barren woman; for Captain so-and-so, wounded and prisoner of war; while the lions roared in the nearby amphitheatre; on the beach at Dunkirk; while the hiss of scythes in the thick June grass came faintly through the windows of the church; tremulously, by an old monk on the fiftieth anniversary of his vows; furtively, by an exiled bishop who had hewn timber all day in a prison camp near Murmansk; gorgeously, for the canonization of S. Joan of Arc – one could fill many pages with the reasons why men have done this, and not tell a hundredth part of them. And best of all, week by week and month by month, on a hundred thousand successive Sundays, faithfully, unfailingly, across all the parishes of Christendom, the pastors have done this just to make the plebs sancta Dei – the holy common people of God.”



Jesus said, “Do this for the remembrance of me”. Jesus said, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.”

We are made the holy people of God in receiving Christ in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood – we obtain eternal life – and will be raised “up on the last day”.

The Sacrament, however, is more than a remembering. It is an empowering. To share the cup of Christ is to do more than remember his death. It is to share in his resurrection power and strength. It is to know both a dying and a rising. Jesus said, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.”

We eat and drink – we participate in Christ and He in us – and eternal life is ours.

From all the actions and distractions of both the world and even the church, once more we experience what is crucial and what is central. Hear his words again with your ears and see and taste again from the symbols of his choosing, “This is my body which is broken for you. This is my blood which is shed for you. Do this for the remembrance of me!”

We owe our lives and mission as a church to the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ enacted again and again for us in the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist.

So how might we fulfill the vision that Bishop Brady had for us? How are we to understand the Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood? How are we to come to know and love and follow Him? And how are we to make His presence known to others?

Through the power given us by Christ Himself – in his Body and Blood – by continuing to obey the command that has been obeyed for centuries on every continent and in every country -- by every race on earth – in every conceivable human circumstance and for every conceivable human need -- by making His Real Presence in the Sacrament known and available to all – in all places – and at all times.

Eat and drink –participate in Christ so He can participate in you – and Bishop Brady’s vision – yea, even the vision of Christ himself -- will become a reality.



50th Annual Eucharistic Festival

June 6, 2009

Cathedral Church of St. Paul