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Corpus Christi Sunday, Cycle C
Queen of the Miraculous Medal Church, Jackson
June 6, 2010

Genesis 14:18-20 Psalm 110 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 Luke 9:11-17

If I were to ask the question: does anyone here have some bread or some fish on you right now here in Church that you could give up to help Jesus work miracles? I suspect the answer would be no. In fact I would be stunned if anyone did. But by the end of this homily, the answer might be different.

Today's gospel story of Jesus miraculously feeding the multitudes is one of the most famous events in the gospels. In fact, it is one of only about five events in Jesus' ministry which appear in all four gospels. Such universal inclusion is a sign of how amazing the miracle was to the people of the time, and also of its theological importance to the early Christian communities as the gospel writers decided which of the many stories of Jesus' amazing life should be recorded.

When reflecting upon the story, I was particularly struck by how Jesus started this great miracle. There was a crisis. There were thousands of hungry people in a crowd who needed food, and essentially no food for them to be found anywhere. If this were a superhero cartoon, we would expect Jesus to stand up and boldly proclaim: "Super Jesus is here to save the day." Instead, Jesus starts by saying to His Apostles, "Give them some food yourselves." Rather than making a miraculous leap, faster than a speeding bullet, bounding over the Sea of Galilee to rescue the people from their hungry plight, Jesus invited the Apostles to take a great leap of faith. It was only when they responded in faith to God's voice in their lives, that Jesus took what they had, and transformed it miraculously. Just think how futile the Apostles' task must have seemed at the start of the story, when they were scrounging up the 5 loaves and two fish. Yet they did it anyway. And think of how amazed and joyful they must have been an hour or two later when they realized what happened. In spite of what seemed beyond reasonable, when they were challenged, the Apostles trusted Jesus. They trusted because they knew Jesus and had been with Him. The Apostles placed the little that they had in Jesus' hands, and when they did so, they experienced a miracle. A miracle thanks to Jesus, but a miracle accomplished through them as His willing servants. God used what they had, what they voluntarily gave to Him, scarce as that was.... He did not ask to use something they did not have to give, and He was not able to use what they did not give Him. And for the Apostles, this was just the beginning. During the rest of the gospels and beyond, after Jesus returned to the Father, the Apostles would be invited to give more and more to Jesus to use, and ultimately their very lives. And as they gave more and more, Jesus was able to work greater and greater miracles through them.

In a few minutes, my friends the Olsen family, will follow the example of the Apostles. They will act as representatives of all in the Church today. They will follow Jesus' request from the second reading. They will bring to the front the simplest of gifts to be presented to God in sacrifice: bread and wine. They will give these gifts to me, Christ's representative. I will in turn place the bread & wine on the altar to give to Jesus to transform.

The content of the gifts they will bring forward is also worth noting. Like what the Apostles surrendered to Jesus in today's gospel, the gifts are simple yet significant. The bread

and wine are items that have their origins in the God-given gifts of grapes and wheat. Yet they are also the products of human toil. For instance, grapes become wine through non-trivial human skill and initiative. My friends Jim and Chris Chilson, sitting in back, can tell you all about the work involved in winemaking. In the sacrifice of the Mass, the bread and wine, the fruit of the Earth and work of human hands, are given back to God. The result, we as Catholics believe, is a miracle even greater than the feeding of the 5000. Today, on the Feast of Corpus Christi, we celebrate, in particular, that the bread & wine are miraculously transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. I am a physics major, and our scientific-oriented minds cannot grasp what exactly happens. Yet we believe that the words of Jesus recorded in today's second reading are literally true. We believe that somehow, in their essence, the bread and wine are transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ. We believe this because we trust that what Jesus said was true. And we do so with the same trust the Apostles demonstrated when they surrendered to Jesus the 5 loaves and 2 fish to feed 5000.

The gifts that the Apostles gave Jesus to work with, and the gifts offered in the sacrifice of the Mass should also remind us of our own lives. We are gifts from God. We grow and become more than babies as we develop our God-given talents. But just like no piece of man-made bread is perfect, nor is any bottle of the Chilson's best wine, we too have our imperfections. As we grow, we do so as people who experience the effect of original sin, that inclination that draws us away from being the man or woman God made each one of us to be. We have bad habits, we have areas of sin in our lives, and we have fears that hold us back. In the face of these imperfections, God invites us to something better. To become that something better requires change. But such change is not easy, and the fears that often accompany change are not easy to overcome. Perhaps we have even tried on our own to make the changes we know we need to make. But just as Jesus did not want the Apostles to try and feed the crowd on their own... in fact, they could not... God knows that we cannot make the changes we need on our own. That is why He sent His Son Jesus. And that is why God gives us grace, the strength, to help us do it.

[For the sake of brevity, as I was preaching I decided to omit this paragraph] Grace, according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, is a "favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life. Grace is a participation in the life of God. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life."

God bestows grace upon us in countless ways. On Corpus Christi Sunday we celebrate one way He does it; in particular, the grace that He gives us through the Eucharist. It is the grace He generously gives us when we follow his command to "Do this in remembrance of me." When we receive the Eucharist, with the sacramental grace that accompanies it; we receive power from God to transform our lives. We receive the strength to move from the limited person we think we are stuck being, to the person who God wants us to be, even if such a transformation may seem impossible. We also grow in intimacy with God. The Apostles came to trust Jesus by being with Him. In the Eucharist, Jesus becomes present with us, even if He is no longer walking around here on Earth like He was two thousand years ago, to give us the strength to become ever more like Him.

Today I return to Queens in thanksgiving to celebrate a big change in my life... to celebrate how my life 8 days ago became conformed in a special way to the life of Jesus... and to celebrate how I gave over my life to God ever more fully. When I originally scoped out an

itinerary for my post-ordination Masses of Thanksgiving, it was not an intentional decision for me to be here at Queens on Corpus Christi. Yet when I realized that providential occurrence, it gave me goose bumps... as it is so incredibly fitting that I celebrate here today. For it was literally down below me, in the perpetual Eucharistic Adoration Chapel in the church basement, where God more than any other place spoke to my heart. Since I realize that not everyone here my know what it is that I am talking about when I say adoration let me give a short explanation. The Catholic understanding is that the bread which becomes Jesus' body remains Jesus until He becomes an intimate part of us when we consume Him. Jesus has an on-going presence in a real way in a host that is not consumed. Downstairs there is a chapel where the Eucharistic Jesus is kept & revered. People commit to come and pray there, in hour segments, 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. And other people just drop in to pray, as I most often did.

During the times I spent praying with Jesus in the Eucharist downstairs, God would gently invite me to offer Him what I have... in particular my life... to give to Him as His priest. This was a long process, a call that it took me literally years to accept. Much like with the Apostles, I became willing to give up what I had... a good job, all that went with it, romance, and a level of control over my life... and I overcame a number of fears... by coming to trust God by being with Him in a special way... By being with Him, I saw how He would work in amazing ways as I would give over something small to Him... By being with Him I came to see how He could even do great things through the time that I was seemingly wasting by being with Him. A special gift He seemed to give me personally was insight. He helped me see how He had long been preparing me to be a priest, of how He could transform even my failures and deepest hurts in life and use them to serve others if I but followed His voice and surrendered them, and my life more generally, to Him. Needless to say, I would strongly, strongly encourage anyone to spend time in prayer in Eucharistic Adoration, whether by signing up for a weekly holy hour, or just dropping by the chapel when you have the time. And now for an ad: For more information about Adoration here at Queens, you can check out the parish bulletin or contact the parish office.

Although God is far from done with me, I come here today to celebrate how God transformed my life once I was able to overcome fear and trust Him. Strengthened by His grace through the Eucharist, and by placing my life more fully in His hands, I was able to be changed; I was able to overcome the fear that held me back from becoming the man He made me to be. Just as He called me, God is also calling each of you, in one way or another to become the man or the woman He made you, in a very unique and loving way, to be... Perhaps a few of you are being called to the priesthood or religious life. But most here today are being called to live out the universal call to holiness as a husband, father, wife, mother, son, daughter, or friend. What we all share in common is that we need God's help, we need His grace, to live out that call.

While there may not be any literal loaves of bread or fresh fish here in Queens Church today to give Jesus, as I look from this pulpit I see in front of me a church full of loaves and fish. With that in mind, when the Olsens come forward with the gifts in a few minutes, we too, should figuratively carry our hearts and our lives forward, to present them to God, to be placed on the altar... to be given for God's use, and to be transformed by His self-giving love. During the remainder of this Mass, let us open our hearts to hear His voice, let us commit to placing our talents, in fact our very lives, at the service of God. Let us do so with the confidence that Jesus will transform what we give Him; He will work miracles through us.