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Corpus Christi Sunday Vigil, Cycle C
St. Mary's Star of the Sea Church, Jackson
June 5, 2010

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

Have you ever felt like the walls were talking to you? OK, maybe not literally... in fact, I hope not literally... but as I turn to my left, and see the mural on the wall which reads "Joseph Fear Not" I am reminded of how comforting yet challenging that mural was to me about a decade ago. At the time, it was becoming increasingly clear that God was asking me to take a step of faith to become a priest. Doing so would mean leaving a very good job, and all that came with it, at Consumers Energy, where I was working with people who I liked very much. When I would come down here to Mass at St. Mary's over the lunch hour with some regularity... in fact I see some people here with whom I had previously been eating lunch, now they know to where I was sneaking off... my heart would be encouraged as I would look over... from about the seat where my friend Jeff is sitting this evening... and see the words that seemed directed almost perfectly to me. It was encouragement I needed, for I was afraid of many things: I was afraid of what people would think of me, afraid of being a lonely priest, and I struggled to see how I could possibly be happy as a priest. How wrong I was about that last point... If you remember nothing that I say in this homily, I hope you will remember the smile on my face, for radiant joy has marked this wonderful period of time in my life, the joy which comes from the freedom of being the man God made me to be.

Over time I have come to see that one of the Devil's most effective weapons in keeping us from becoming the men and women who God made us to be is fear. This reality should prompt us to ask the question: how can we overcome those fears which prevent us from becoming the man or woman who God lovingly made us in His image to be? For the answer, we can turn to today's gospel and today's feast day.

In today's gospel the Apostles see a massive and hungry crowd. The situation seems impossible. In the face of these circumstances, what does their miracle-working teacher tell them? If this were a comic book, we might expect Jesus to stand up and boldly proclaim: "Super Jesus is here to save the day." But instead, Jesus tells them: "Give them some food yourselves." Put another way, Jesus invites the Apostles to do something that must have seemed laughable. And they undoubtedly felt fear of what people would think as they did something so preposterous as trying to feed 5000 with only 5 loaves and 2 fish. Yet when they were challenged, the Apostles trusted Jesus. They trusted because they knew Him and had been with Him. The Apostles placed the little that they had in Jesus' hands, and as when they did so, they experienced a miracle. A miracle thanks to Jesus, but a miracle accomplished through them as His docile instruments. 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.

In a few minutes, my friends the McAullife family, will follow the example of the Apostles. They will, as the representatives of all in the Church, and following Jesus's request

from the second reading, bring to the front the simplest of gifts to be presented to God in sacrifice: bread and wine. They will give them to me, as Christ's representative, to place on the altar, for me, in turn, to give to Jesus to transform.

It is also worth noting the content of the gifts they will bring forward. 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, the grapes become wine through non-trivial human skill and initiative. 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. In the Mass they are given to Him, and the result, we believe, is a miracle even greater than the feeding of the 5000. We believe, and we celebrate in a particular way on the Feast of Corpus Christi, that the bread & wine are miraculously transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. In short, as Catholics, we believe that even if our scientific minds cannot grasp it, the words spoken in today's second reading are literally true: that somehow, in their essence, the bread and wine are transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ. We believe this because we trust what Jesus said was true. Just like the Apostles trusted Him when they were asked to bring the 5 loaves and 2 fish to feed 5000. And many of us have experienced the transforming power of the Eucharist in our lives.

[Note the text in blue was in my original homily text, but I decided not to include it in what I preached] Today's feast is a very Catholic celebration. Yet this evening we are blessed to have a number of non-Catholics among us. They are here to celebrate this Mass of Thanksgiving with me because they have been my cherished friends and in many cases, cherished sisters and brothers in Christ. And so I warmly welcome the non-Catholics here today to worship. Yet in doing so there is the recognition which causes my heart much pain: that while our hearts are united in friendship, we are not fully united in belief. In particular, the meaning of the Eucharist is one of the areas of greatest disagreement between Catholics and other Christians. What Catholics see as the Body and Blood of Christ, most other Christians see as something less. The Protestant understanding of communion generally is that it points to God and to the friendship we share in Christ, but is not His real presence. Which then gets me to the most difficult part this homily and the Mass, the part that can make us Catholics look inhospitable. It is because Catholics believe the Eucharist to be sacred beyond a mere sign of Christian fellowship and beyond a common belief in the fundamental tenants of Christianity, that we ask that non-Catholics, who do not cherish the Eucharist in the same way, refrain from receiving the Eucharist at Mass. I realize this is hard, and may not even make sense to everyone. If non-Catholics wish to come forward at communion time, you are most welcome to do so, but we ask that you cross your arms across your chests when you reach the Minister of Holy Communion, from whom you will then receive a blessing. And at this moment when Christian disunity is most painfully felt, I encourage all of us to pray for the day when the Christian community will once again be in full unity.

Returning from that difficult and painful tangent, The gifts for 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 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. In the face of these imperfections, God invites us to something more.

The change involved in becoming something more is not easy, and fears are not easy to overcome. We have bad habits, we have areas of sin in our lives, and we have fears that hold us back from being the man or woman God made us to be. Perhaps we have even tried to make the changes we know we need to make on our own. But just as Jesus did not want the disciples 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 to help us do it.

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, in particular, the grace that He gives us through the Eucharist. The grace He gives us when we follow his command to “Do this in remembrance of me.” When we receive the Eucharist, with the sacramental graces 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.

Which then gets me back to the beginning... Although God is not yet done with me, I can look over at the mural on the wall with great joy. I can think of how God transformed my life once I was able to overcome fear and trust Him. Strengthened by His grace through the Eucharist, and 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. Just as He called me, He is also calling each of you, in one way or another... Perhaps a few of you are being called to the priesthood or religious life. But most of you are being called to live out the universal call to holiness as a husband, father, wife, mother, son, daughter, or friend. Thus, when the McAullifes come forward with the gifts, 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, and with the power of the Eucharist, let us allow God to begin the process of transforming our very lives.