

For the last five weeks, as we have listened to the Gospel of St. John, Jesus has been preparing His disciples for the New Covenant that He would institute on the day before he was to suffer. Jesus has been describing the greatest gift that any of us could hope to receive in this life. What was that new covenant? What is that greatest gift of Jesus? The Eucharist!

Jesus gives Himself to us - Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity - in the Eucharist. This is a miracle. Through the words of a priest and the power of the Holy Spirit, simple gifts of bread and wine are transformed into the real Body and Blood of Christ! And this miracle happens everyday in churches throughout the world! It happens everyday, right there on that altar!

But what is it that is happening there? What is Jesus doing in the Eucharist? The first Eucharistic prayer, which I use on Sundays, repeats a word several times that can help us to understand more fully what Jesus is doing. That word is “offering.” Or sometimes in the prayers of Holy Mass we’ll hear a synonym of “offering”: “oblation.” Whether we hear it in the word “offering” or in the word “oblation”, the meaning is the same. In the Eucharist, Jesus is offering Himself - He is giving Himself - to us and for us. And this offering, this oblation is made in a very specific way. In the Mass, Jesus offers Himself in the same way that He did nearly 2,000 years ago; that is to say, Jesus offers Himself in the Paschal Mystery - in His blessed Passion, in His Resurrection from the dead, and in His glorious Ascension into heaven.

This offering of the Passion and Resurrection and Ascension of Christ is made present for us here, in the Mass. Through this great prayer of the Church, we are present for these saving events that happened so long ago. We become witnesses, participants of these holy mysteries.

And not in the sense that Jesus dies again or rises again or ascends again. Instead, the Mass takes us outside of our own time and place. We are transported, if you will, to that one eternal sacrifice, that one eternal offering that Jesus made for us.

This is what is happening in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass - Jesus is offering Himself to us and for us just as He did for the Apostles at the Last Supper. "...This is my Body, which will be given up for you." "...This is the chalice of my Blood...which will be poured out for you..." The Precious Body and the Precious Blood of Christ! This is what He is offering TO us in every Mass. This is what He is offering FOR us in every Mass.

In the Holy Mass, in the Holy Eucharist, Jesus gives everything to us - a complete and perfect offering of Himself. What can we give to Him in return?

First, we can offer to Christ our faith in the Eucharist. Recent studies show us that fewer than half of Catholics believe what the Church teaches about the Eucharist - that the bread and wine truly become the Body and Blood of Christ. This should not be a huge surprise. Many of the disciples of Jesus could not accept this teaching and, as we heard in the Gospel, they stopped following him. Granted, it is likely that the Catholics today who do not believe in the Eucharist are many of the same who do not attend Mass regularly. But if you are struggling, if you find it difficult to believe this teaching, pray for the gift of faith. Faith is a gift from God, so ask Him for this gift. If you are struggling to believe, come talk to me or one of our deacons. Maybe we can help in this struggle.

The second thing we can give to Christ in return for His self-offering is ourselves in service to God. The Eucharist that we receive - Jesus Himself - should transform us. It should change us. It should make us into more faithful servants of the Lord. The Eucharist should lead us to ask the Lord: What would you have me do? And it should lead us to respond as the Israelites did: “We will serve the Lord for He is our God!”

Finally, The gift of the Eucharist should lead us to serve one another. This is what St. Paul means when he says: “Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ.” In speaking about marriage and family, St. Paul is not talking about who has power or who makes decisions or who washes the dishes. He is speaking about a relationship of mutual love and service. This relationship is for husbands and wives, for children, for parents, for all of us. In the Eucharist, we see the perfect example of love and service that Christ offers for us. And we are called to imitate Him in our love and service for one another. We are called to offer our lives for one another, just as Christ did for us.

The Eucharist is the Lord’s perfect offering of Himself for us. Let us pray for the grace to be transformed by His gift and to offer ourselves to Him in return. As we prepare our hearts to receive Jesus in Holy Communion, may we echo the words of Peter and the Apostles: “Lord, to whom shall we go; You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God!”