

July 24, 2021 4:00 p.m. St. Augustine Cathedral
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time/Conclusion of “Jubilee Jamboree”

On this very hot, humid July afternoon, we come together to be “refreshed” in the Love of our God for us, and to experience God’s “closeness” to us in the Word that we have just heard proclaimed, and in the amazing Gift of Jesus Himself in the Holy Eucharist.

For some of us who have been participating in the “Jubilee Jamboree” in celebration of our Diocese’s 50th Anniversary, we have had a full, festive, and faith-filled day. We’ve “gotten our steps in” as many of us are concerned about doing for our own health and daily exercise. We processed in Pilgrimage to the Arcadia Center praying the Rosary for the needs of our Diocese and for growth in our own Faith; we had a fun-filled, enjoyable day singing---listening to presentations---enjoying some good food and fellowship. And then just a little while ago, we processed back to our Cathedral with the Blessed Sacrament, as a public witness to our Faith as a Eucharistic people, and asking God’s blessings on our Diocese, as well as upon our Local Communities. So, to those in that category, I say “Welcome Back” to the Cathedral!

To those others of you, I say a “Warm Welcome” to you as well as you’ve come for this time of prayer and worship that we need, and long for, every week. And whether you’ve participated in the Jubilee events earlier today, or you were busy about other important things, I hope that for all of us, this has been a day of growing awareness every day on the Love of God for us His People, and His desire to be One with us. It is here, when we gather as People of Faith, where we encounter the Living God in His Word, in the Eucharist, and in the mission in which we all share through our Baptism to live our lives in this world as holy people.

The Eucharist is the amazing Gift Jesus gives to us of Himself to be our Spiritual Food that will nourish our lives both to renew us as the members of His Body---the Body of Christ, and to reignite the “Flame of Faith” within us so that we are “on fire” with the desire to bring the Love of Jesus Christ to all.

As we all have recently been made aware, there seems to be a pretty significant number of our fellow Catholics who do not understand what the

Eucharist is---or should I more properly say, "**Who** the Eucharist truly is. The Eucharist is infinitely more than a "symbol" of Jesus' Body and Blood; the Eucharist is more than a reverent "reenactment" of what Jesus did at the Last Supper. The Eucharist IS Jesus----really, truly, substantially, sacramentally--- Present with us to BE our Food and Drink for our Journey of Faith.

My dear sisters and brothers, whether it's me, as the Bishop, or any of our priests or deacons, or whether it's any of you gathered together for this Mass--- we need to realize, with a profound sense of gratitude and a deep amount of reverence, that when we are in the Presence of the Eucharist, we are in the Presence of Jesus! Every time we come into a Catholic Church, we need to be aware that we are in the awesome Presence of the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the Tabernacle----which of course is the reason why we genuflect as we come in, and before we leave. And every time we come forward to receive the Eucharist, we need to be fully conscious that Jesus is coming into our hearts. That's why our "Amen" is so important, when the Minister of the Eucharist says to us: "The Body of Christ". Our "Amen" is really an Act of Faith---"I believe and though unworthy, I welcome You Jesus into my heart".

As we receive Jesus in Holy Communion, we enter into a special union with Him----we are "in communion with Him"---; and that is what leads us to say "Yes" to the "mission of the Eucharist", which is to fulfill what Jesus told us is the most important of all the commands, to "love one another". Our hands become Jesus' Hands on Earth; our Feet, His Feet; our ears become attuned to the cries of the poor and the needs of those around us; and our actions help to further the Kingdom of God here in this world. And that also means that we are then open to be transformed into the Eucharist we have consumed.

The Gospel reading for today's Mass (Jn 6:1-15) is the familiar and powerful account of the Miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. Jesus has compassion on the large crowd of people who have come to listen to his preaching. When he asked the disciples, "*Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?*" Philip's response is one that seems to be filled with a bit of frustration: "*Two hundred day's wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little.*"

Don't we sometimes feel like that in the face of the social problems we face today—hunger, homelessness, addiction, unemployment, lack of access to health care—or even our own personal or family worries/stresses/anxieties----the solutions at times seem impossible to find. One approach to that sense of being overwhelmed by the problems of the world or our own lives is an attitude of: "Well, since we can't solve the universal problem, we might as well not even try". Jesus took a very different approach. He began by asking what was available? As it turned out, someone had five barley loaves and two fish; then, combining what they offered with His own miraculous power, food was made available to feed 5,000 people, with 12 wicker baskets left over. This miracle of God's abundance overcoming human scarcity is a foreshadowing of the Eucharist. St. John told us that: *"Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted."* Those words should sound very familiar because they are similar to the words Jesus would use at the Lord's Supper---*"Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them"*. When Jesus said those powerful words at the Last Supper, the result was the Miracle of the Eucharist to be our spiritual Food that occurs each time the priest says those very same words of Institution here at Mass.

We heard about another miracle in today's First Reading (Kgs.4:42-44) as Elisha, *"the man of God,"* was able to feed 100 people with 20 barley loaves—which is no small miracle. But whether it was the 100 people fed in that account, or the 5000 people miraculously fed with five loaves and two fish, the numbers are not the point of either miracle.

The point is that our God is a God Who is with us,---which means that God is not only "present" to us, but He is "with us"; He's not working against us, or trying to make life difficult; He's "on our side"! Or to use the beautiful words of today's Psalm Refrain: *"The hand of the Lord feeds us; He answers all our needs."* Through the miracle of the Holy Eucharist, Jesus feeds every part of what makes us "us"; He feeds our mind, our soul, our heart, and our body— nourishing us with His Body and Blood.

In today's Second Reading, St. Paul urged the Ephesians *"to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace."*

This is a completely different way of living than our contemporary culture teaches. St. Paul is advocating for us to live a Eucharistically-centered way of living, *“in the unity of the Spirit”*, modeled on self-sacrifice and service, which is exactly the Way Jesus lives---the One Who is the “Servant of all”.

So, is that what we are living; is that what we are modeling for our children and grandchildren? Or are we letting them (and ourselves?) be controlled by the values taught by our culture, supported by social media and various other media, and forced down our throats at times by the divisive and partisan forces controlling so much of our society?

Through the Eucharist, Jesus intends, every time we come to this altar of love and sacrifice, to transform us from people “of the world” to People who are “of the Family of God”. The Body of Christ, which we not only receive, but also “become” when we open our minds, hearts and bodies to the great Gift of the Holy Eucharist, compels us to be faithful missionary disciples of Jesus, and sends us on a mission: to carry out Jesus’ parting instruction as He ascended--- to: *“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...., teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”*

My dear sisters and brothers, it is very important to keep in mind that the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of our Diocese certainly gives us the occasion to remember the past and thank God for all that our Diocese has accomplished over it’s rich history. But, I believe that this particular Golden Jubilee calls us to look forward to the future with hope, and renewed Faith, and an enthusiasm to be true “missionary disciples of Jesus Christ”. Our mission continues to be the mission that Jesus originally gave to the Apostles---- to transform the world by sharing the love of Christ with our neighbors. And the only way we can accomplish this mission is the same way the Apostles accomplished theirs---thru the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. He is the One who will ***set our hearts on fire*** with desire to keep building God’s Kingdom here in the nine countries of southwest Michigan that make up our Diocese, and throughout the whole world.

Because of the essential role that the Holy Spirit will play in helping our Diocese carry out its mission in the years ahead, which is the same role that the Holy Spirit has constantly played in guiding the Church Universal since the first Pentecost, as I announced this past Wednesday, I will be celebrating a special Mass right here in the Cathedral on August 28, the Feast of the great St.

Augustine, the Patron of our Diocese and of this Cathedral Church, to launch us into the "***Jubilee Year of the Holy Spirit***" to be observed in all the parishes of our Diocese. More information will be available about this in the coming weeks, but it is my profound hope that this special observance of a "Year" of special prayer and openness to the Holy Spirit will result in enflaming our hearts and souls with a fervent desire to be faithful to the call Jesus has given us., which St. Paul reminded us of today.

May all that we do, may the Eucharist we receive, and may the guidance of the Holy Spirit, lead each of us, and our entire Diocese, to become renewed in God's Love, and to live in unity with one another, as we, in St. Paul's words, "*strive to preserve the unity of the Spirit to be with "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."*

God bless you, now and always!