

Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, A, 6/14/20

One of the things I loved to do as a young boy was to serve mass. I would look carefully at the people quietly kneeling in reverence at the old Communion rail as they received the sacred host. I noticed the body language of the people coming for Communion. It showed their faith and trust in the small wafer of a host that Jesus was truly present under the form of bread. Later on in life I would understand even more deeply the people's devotion to the real presence and their need to have the divine presence in their life. St. Paul reminds us of what receiving Communion does for us: *"If God is for us who can be against us!"*

I recently celebrated 55 years of priesthood and I realized what a gift it is to be a priest and specially to celebrate Mass -- to act in the name of Jesus and use his words to consecrate simple bread and wine and change them into his Body and Blood. Today's feast of the Body and Blood of Jesus reminds each of us of what a gift it is to receive the very Body and Blood of Jesus as often as we wish.

Now that we are finally coming to the end of a long Coronavirus quarantine I think all of us will deeply appreciate the opportunity to again go to Mass and the wonderful privilege of having the very Body and Blood of Jesus in our very bodies through the reception of the Eucharist.

But human nature being what it is we may probably soon habituate our mass attendance and perhaps neglect to appreciate what it is to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus in the Eucharist. Perhaps a story might help to remind us not to do that.

One of my favorite people is Dorothy Day. A book written a few years ago tells the story of Dorothy as a lost soul in New York. After long hours of heavy drinking, Dorothy would be leaving bars in Greenwich Village at about 3:00 or 4 am. She would pass by the

Church of St. James which celebrated mass at that time. It was a printer's mass for printers going to work. Dorothy would dare to enter the church and sit in the very last pew and observe people walking back from receiving Holy Communion and see how happy they seemed to be for receiving this holy sacrament. This actually led her to seek out information on the church and to study and become a catholic. In fact she became such a great catholic that one day soon, please God, she will be declared a saint in the Catholic Church.

I also had the privilege when I was a priest in Our Lady of Mercy in the Bronx and a chaplain at Union Hospital to meet Fr. Walter Cizek, a Jesuit priest who had been imprisoned for 23 years as a Vatican spy and sent into a harsh labor camp by the Soviet Union. In his book "He Leadeth Me!" he tells of offering mass in secret and in danger of death for himself and his fellow prisoners. They all faced death for coming to his mass. But, he said it was well worth it. It was a great blessing to realize that God was so intimately with them in their lives as prisoners.

Now let us think about receiving Holy Communion this weekend when we finally can leave our quarantined homes and go to church. It will be incredibly special to once again know that we are never alone and God is with us and feeds us with his body and blood. What a gift!