

Holy Thursday 2020 Homily (based on First Letter of St. Paul to Corinthians 11:23-26)

- We live in a world that constantly calls us to focus on physical well-being. Jenny Craig, Lucille Roberts, and the Weight Watcher folks constantly prod us to get in shape.
- Walk down the cereal aisle at Stop and Shop and learn Cheerios is Heart Healthy, Oatmeal lowers cholesterol in 30 days, Raisin Bran keeps the plumbing working! (Why cant chocolates do these things?)
- Wouldn't it be something if you picked up a box of cereal and read these claims: "This food makes you view the world differently"; "makes you more patient, and understanding"; "makes you love others and makes you more lovable"; "Eat this food and you will live forever."
- While we never see these claims on a box of cereal, this is exactly the claim of our Lord in the Eucharist.
- On this Holy Thursday, as we commemorate that night Jesus first gave us this wonderful gift, His real presence in the Eucharist, we remember Jesus calls us to move beyond our desire for physical satisfaction. We are called to focus on our spiritual well being. We are called to remember how God provides food to nourish this much more important side of who we are. But how do we shift our focus from the physical to the spirit?
- Several years ago there was a story in the newspapers about a farmer in rural Pennsylvania. That year it was a particularly mild winter so the birds in the region didn't make their normal trip south. But suddenly the weather took a sharp turn to cold and to storms. The birds were

now stuck and in danger. The farmer had a huge barn on his property and feeling the plight of these birds, he intended to round up the birds and put them into the barn for shelter. As you can imagine when he walked toward the birds to gather them in, the birds flew away from him in all different directions.

- The newspaper article concluded with this quote from the farmer: “ I wish I was a bird , so I could lead them to safety.” What a caring loving wish – to be one of them.
- But while the farmer could only wish, we know that our God actually did this for us. God became human for us. He sent His only Son in flesh and blood to walk among us, to teach us, to sacrifice his life for us, to lead us safely to our heavenly home. Jesus shifts our focus from the physical to the spiritual.
- At that last supper Jesus spoke to those disciples (and to us) about a new dimension of life. A new side of the person little was known about: our spiritual life. The most important part of who we are; the part of us that leads to eternal life. Life forever and in more beautiful ways than we could imagine.
- In an early teaching, Jesus told His disciples He is the “Bread of Life”. At that Last Supper, Jesus gave them (and us) that bread. At that Last Supper Jesus reveals He is God’s presence, He is the Messiah, the Son of God sent down from heaven to sacrifice Himself for the forgiveness of our sins.
- Jesus told those first communicants that He is the Living Bread and we must eat this bread to strengthen our spiritual life. We must eat this bread to be truly alive and to gain eternal life.

- And to eat this living bread (His Body and Blood) means several things. It means to let Him into our lives; to follow His examples; to live out His teachings; to submit our lives and our will to Him. It means to consume Him; allow His spirit to strengthen us. To eat this living bread means to believe Jesus wants to dwell in us and believe that He established a way to do just that.
- At the Last Supper Jesus gave us a wonderful gift. He knew He was about to suffer and be put to death rather than deny His message of salvation (Love God/ Love each other). He wanted to be with us always, to be accessible to us throughout time, to be in constant relationship with us. So He did this wonderful thing, He invited us to a meal. The Eucharist. He took Bread and Wine; things He knew would endure over time, and changed them into His Body and Blood. He said “Eat. Welcome me in. Every time you share this meal you celebrate my teachings, my sacrifice, my suffering, in a real way. *And I am really present for you.*”
- Jesus tells us His life in us is all the nourishment we need.
- He tells us no one who comes to Him is ever rejected. We can bring our cares, our fears, our hurts, our sins to Him and He will protect, and heal and transform us.
- On Holy Thursday we remember one other thing Jesus taught us about the Eucharist. Actually Jesus showed us— He did so by stooping down and washing the feet of the disciples who were at that Last Supper and telling them “ I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” With that action

and those words Jesus reminds us that receiving the Body and /blood of Christ is a call to action, a call to love and care for each other.

- Jesus calls us to take this bread of life (our spiritual food) and distribute it, share it. He expects us to be His love to each other. He expects us to find those in need, the sick, the lonely, the poor, the worried – those hungry for His love – all the members of His one body. He expects us to find them and bring His peace, His Mercy, His forgiveness and His love into their lives.
- It's a very simple, beautiful arrangement Jesus established on the first Holy Thursday: Jesus feeds us, we feed others.