

Homily
23OrdB
Sept. 6, 2015
St. Bernard Church

I get asked a lot, “How can I get more out of Communion?”

Today’s Gospel gives us some good answers, if we look at it closely. I’m going to ask you to open your red hymnals to #937, where today’s Gospel from Mark, Chapter 7, verses 31 to 37 is found, and to follow along with me.

First of all, the Mass is divided into two parts, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Eucharist starts after the Creed and the Prayers of Intercession. So we are now going to focus on the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and how to understand it better.

“People brought him a deaf man who had a speech impediment and begged him to lay his hand on him.”

What part of the Mass does this correspond to?

The bringing up of the gifts.

The bread and wine that are brought up and placed on the altar, they represent our lives, the lives of the faithful, all of the significant things that are happening in the lives of all of us. They are placed on the altar.

When the gifts are brought up, then, we should be thinking of the needs of all of us who are gathered here, those who are ill, those who have lost a job, those who are caring for a loved one, those of us who are dealing with stress and anxiety, any burdens that exist among our community – we put all these on the altar. And just like in today’s Gospel, we ask Jesus to respond to these needs.

“He took him off by himself away from the crowd.”

The Eucharist has a community aspect which I just described, but here Jesus lets us know that He also deals with us on a personal basis. So just as we put the lives of others on the altar, we are thoughtful about our own lives, what’s going on, what our deepest needs are. We put our individual life on the altar, trusting that Jesus will deal with us in a uniquely personal way. We pray that our lives will be united with the life and sacrifice of Jesus.

“He looked up into heaven and groaned.”

Jesus suffers with us. He knows our hurts. He knows our burdens. He knows our anxieties, our worries. He is very conscious, very sensitive, of the sin, the misery, in

the world, all of the victims of man's inhumanity to other human beings. All of these are put on the altar. Jesus is keenly aware of them. And so he groans.

There is a psalm which captures all this quite beautifully. It's Psalm 40.

Here's how it goes:

"I waited, waited for the Lord; who bent down and heard my cry,
drew me out of the pit of destruction,
out of the mud of the swamp,
set my feet upon rock, steadied my steps,
and put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn to our God."

This is what happens in the Eucharist. First of all, even if we don't know it, we are all crying. Even if nothing bad is happening in our life, we are still crying. Crying for union with God. Crying to know that God is real. That His love for us is real.

Jesus groans. He hears our cry. He knows our deepest needs. And He bends down from heaven, becomes present on the altar, comes to us in the form of bread and wine and sets our feet upon rock, steadies our steps and puts a new song in our mouth.

"The man's ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly."

Through the power of the Eucharist, the power of being united with the sacrifice of Jesus, we participate in some way in the Resurrection. Like the deaf man in today's Gospel, we get a taste of heaven, when all of our burdens, all of our infirmities, will be swept away.

Why do we not experience more of this power when we go to Mass? Because our expectations are too low. Jesus is present in the Eucharist, but just like His presence when He walked the earth, the level of His power depends on the faith of those He encounters.

The one thing that could transform humanity, transform the world, in just a few days is the power of Jesus Christ in what Catholics have in the Eucharist. All that is needed is for us to truly believe in the power of Jesus in the Eucharist and expect the same kinds of miracles that took place in today's Gospel.

"He ordered them not to tell anyone, but the more he ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it."

We should be wildly excited to tell other people what we have in the Eucharist. We have, as I have said, the one gift that can change the world virtually overnight. If we

raised our level of expectations for the Eucharist, Jesus would honor that, we would experience his power and we could not help but tell other people what happened.

Finally, “they were exceedingly astonished.”

Can we say, after each Mass, that would happened was astonishing? That Jesus touched us? That He touched someone who was there and brought a powerful healing to that person? That He revealed to us something that we needed to know, a new sense of direction for our lives?

This is all possible, at every Mass, if we just believe that such things can and will happen.

I want to close with these words from Psalm 68:

“Blessed be the Lord day by day,
God, our salvation, who carries us.
Our God is a God who saves;
Escape from death is in the Lord God’s hands...
Confess the power of God,
Whose power is in the sky.
Awesome is God in his holy place,
The God of Israel,
Who gives power and strength to his people.
Blessed be God!”