

Homily
19OrdB
August 11/12, 2018
St. Bernard Church
Deacon Tim Sullivan

Last week's reading from Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John contained one of the most important questions in the entire Bible. Jesus had just multiplied the loaves and fishes to feed a huge crowd. Many who were in the crowd for that miracle followed Jesus to Capernaum.

Jesus says to the crowd that followed him, "Don't focus on food that perishes but focus on food that endures for eternal life."

The crowd then puts this question to Jesus, and it's the question that is so big, so important:

"What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you?" [repeat]

Jesus answers the question by telling the crowd that the sign he will do, that they may see and believe in him, is the gift of the Eucharist. [pause] At great length, and even repeating himself, he tells them that He is the bread of life, that whoever eats this bread will live forever, and that the bread that He will give is His flesh for the life of the world.

From the time of Jesus to the present, there is something about the Eucharist that captivates even people who are not Catholic and maybe not even Christian.

For example, I remember when our now retired Bishop Slattery talked about being at the funeral of Saint John Paul II. He said that there were over 1 million people in St. Peter's Square in Rome during the funeral Mass. Not all were Catholic. There were many tourists, many non-Catholics, who took advantage of the opportunity to witness a historic event.

What really struck Bishop Slattery was that, at the moment of the Consecration of the bread and wine at the funeral Mass for the pope, you could have heard a pin drop. A crowd of over 1 million people was completely silent. They all knew something very sacred was taking place, even if many of them did not fully understand what was happening.

So maybe it would be good for a few moments for us to reflect on just what happens at the Consecration that is so sacred, that would bring over 1 million people to total silence.

During the consecration, the priest lifts up the bread and says the words that Jesus said at the Last Supper, "This is my body, which shall be given up for you." He lifts up what is only bread and brings down from heaven the full humanity and divinity of Jesus, the Son

of God. At Mass, heaven comes to us. We have access to the divinity of Jesus. We can be fully united with Him and receive His supernatural power and grace.

I wonder if we fully appreciate this. As we walk into church, as we participate in the Mass, as we leave the church, are we thinking, do we realize, that we have the opportunity to experience heaven. The closest we can ever get to heaven in this life is in the Eucharist at a Catholic Mass.

I think it's a fair statement that the way we live in the United States does not prepare us to fully experience the reality and the power of the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. For most of us, the pace of life is way too fast. We are overwhelmed by busy schedules, by technology, by tv, radio, computers, smart phones and so on. So many gadgets. So much noise.

So much of our time and energy go into getting ahead in life and having all the creature comforts that are available to us. We might be drawn to religion and yet it may not be our highest priority.

I read an interesting article recently that talked about what the author calls the "Casual Revolution." What he means by this is that we have lost the sense of occasion, a way of observing a significant event that deserves special care and preparation, an event that used to be observed by dressing up. What we wore was a way of showing respect for the event.

The loss of this sense of occasion results from a process the author calls "casualization."

I think casualization has taken place in many Catholic churches and even here at St. Bernard's, although we certainly have a significant level of reverence. When we contribute in any way to a more casual atmosphere here at Mass, we are making it harder for ourselves and others to fully experience something mysterious, powerful and transcendental, something that takes us deep into the spiritual dimension of life.

This past week, the Church celebrated the Feast of the Transfiguration, when Jesus led Peter, James and John up the mountain to witness him, Moses and Elijah having a conversation, surrounded by dazzling light.

If we truly want to grow spiritually, if we really want to get closer to Jesus, we, too, have to go up the mountain. That means that we have to leave behind all the things that distract us from focusing on our relationship with Jesus.

Jesus wants every one of us to be transfigured in our own lives. He wants us to know Him more completely and to experience the depth of His love, His truth and the amazing power of His grace. But He is not going to force Himself on us. We have a choice as to how far we're willing to go in our relationship with Him.

May I suggest, then, that today, at this Mass, when we come up to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, we put everything we don't need to think about out of our minds. Instead, let us focus on taking the Creator of the Universe, the Savior of all humanity, the source of immeasurable graces, into our very being. Let us see Him with the eyes of our souls and invite Him, welcome Him into our lives. Let us give Him permission to change us in whatever way He knows we need to be changed.

What sign can Jesus give us, that we may see and believe in Him? We're going to experience that sign in just a few moments, right here at this Mass.