JMJ

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT – C/A – 2022

My time as your pastor is drawing to a close, and the number of times I still have to speak with you on Sunday are now very, very few. So I want to make them count. I want to talk about things that matter the most. And so, today, I’d like to talk about the Eucharist.

There was a survey done three years ago by the Pew Research Center that told us that almost 70% of Catholics in the United States do not believe that bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Only 22% reject the teaching; and most of the other 48% mistakenly think the Church teaches that the bread and wine are only symbols of our Lord’s Body and Blood.

Most of those who believe they’re only symbols don’t go to Mass very often, if ever. But the survey also found that, surprisingly, 37% of those who *do* go to Mass every Sunday think that the consecrated Host and the Precious Blood are only symbols. So the rest of us have a little work to do. Namely, to share the good news, the remarkable good news, that Jesus Christ Himself shows up at every Mass – His living Body and His true Blood. His Body, His Blood, His human Soul, and true Divinity, become present here on that altar table, and are present in that tabernacle.

But we can’t see Him as He truly is, can we? And that’s probably the biggest reason why so many think His presence is only symbolic. They can’t *see* Him; they can’t *touch* Him. They’re like the doubting Apostle Thomas, who said: “I won’t believe unless I can put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand into His side.” And so we have to pray for them, that they do come to faith, as Thomas later did. He came to faith, but it took a while.

Which reminds me of a true story about a young man that I knew from the time he was a little boy. His name was Bart. I was in Muskogee at the time, and he lived in Tulsa. He called me up one day and said he had something he wanted to talk with me about. I asked if we could talk on the phone. He said: “No, it’s too important. We have to meet.” And so we did. Do you know what he wanted to talk about? He wanted to tell me that, although he’d been a Catholic from the time he was a baby, it wasn’t until recently that someone had explained to him the meaning of Transubstantiation – the teaching of the Church about the *Real* Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist! He was full of excitement. As we should all be.

We may not come to realize the truth all at once. But please God, one day we all *will*.

St. Thomas Aquinas, not the Doubting Thomas, but the great Doctor of the Church, said that, in regard to the Eucharist, all of our five senses (except one) are deceived. We don’t detect the Real Presence by seeing or tasting or feeling or smelling, but only by hearing; because we have heard Our Lord, who cannot tell a lie, say: “This is My Body … This is My Blood.”

So those here today who may not believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist will, please God, be like the man in the Gospel who came to faith gradually, step by step. He said about Jesus, at first, that he was “the man who cured me.” Later, though still not fully realizing who Jesus was, he called Him “a prophet.” But in the end, he “worshiped” Him.

May it be so in regard to the Eucharist! May all those Catholics who think now It’s only a symbol, someday come to the fullness of faith, and, together with fellow Catholics everywhere – and someday, the whole world – say, “I do believe, Lord,” and worship Him.