JMJ

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER – B – 2021

This afternoon, 50 of our children are going to receive their First Communion. Jesus is going to live in them, through the Eucharist, for the first time. It’s a great event in the life of a child. They’ll dress up for it. The little boys, many of them, will wear ties; and the little girls will wear white dresses and veils. It’s a very special event. As it should be *every* time we receive God into our bodies.

He lives in us, so that we can abide in Him. He is the Vine and the source of our life; we’re the branches, and our children are the tender little buds. We and our children can’t survive without the sap (or the life) of the Vine flowing through us. That’s the teaching of Jesus. He says also in another place: “I am the bread of life. . . . If anyone eats this bread he will live forever. . . . He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life because of me.”

So, receiving the Eucharist is important. In fact, receiving the Eucharist is a matter of life and death. And we should never receive it unworthily; that’s where the death comes in. St. Paul said, “Whoever eats or drinks (the Eucharist) unworthily [that is, in the state of sin] eats and drinks condemnation unto himself.” So it’s a very serious business – life or death.

But I’d guess that our biggest temptation is not to *think* about our Communions – at all! The cause of that temptation is Habit. We come forward to receive almost by force of habit: the pew empties out, and we follow. As we walk forward we think about other things, things that don’t have much to do with Jesus; our minds tend to wander. And when we get back to our pew, we hardly realize that God’s inside us now, and that He’ll remain there for many minutes. This spiritual absent-mindedness is a temptation even for the very devout. But we have to be awake and focused in order to benefit fully from this greatest of all God’s gifts on earth – Himself in the Blessed Sacrament.

St. Augustine said that, when we eat ordinary food, we change it into ourselves (“Wonder Bread builds strong bodies 12 different ways!”). But in the case of the Eucharist, he said, it’s different: He changes us into Himself.

One of the most beautiful prayers I know that expresses that was composed by St. John Gabriel Perboyre. It goes like this.

“Lord Jesus, transform me into Yourself. May my hands be Your hands. May my tongue be Your tongue. Grant that every faculty of my body may serve only to glorify You. Above all transform my soul and all its powers, that my memory, my will, and my affections, may be the memory, the will, and affections of You. Destroy in me all that is not of You. And grant that I may truly say with St. Paul ‘I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me.’” Please repeat it after me.

. . .

It would be a wonderful thing to pray that prayer when we receive Our Lord in Holy Communion or make our thanksgiving afterward. If we keep our minds focused on what we’re doing (and *why* we’re doing it – namely, to be transformed into Jesus) – then every worthy Communion we receive will help to change us into the persons we’re called to be: “other Christs,” an extension of His presence in the world.

May we receive our *every* Communion as though our lives, and the lives of others, depended on it. Because they do.