

Fr. Mike Homily—June 3, 2018
Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ

Think about all the eating and drinking that you do in close proximity to other people that isn't communion with them. Think of a ball game at Target Field, where I might be having a hot dog and a beer—the very same food and drink as the guy sitting in the seat next to me. That's not communion. Think of having a meal on an airplane, maybe the identical one with the person in the next seat. That's not communion. Think of a Friday Lenten Fish Fry at St. Pascal's, seated around the same table with others and partaking in an identical meal. That's not communion.

Or is it? Well that depends. But it doesn't depend upon what the specific food or drink is. It depends upon what's going on between me and the person next to me as we both consume these things. At Target Field the guy sitting next to me could be a complete stranger, with whom I don't even carry on a conversation. Same thing on an airplane or at the Fish Fry.

Or it may be that the person next to me is my dear friend or relative, with whom I share a common purpose, a common history, and a common destination. Maybe we're on vacation together on that plane. Maybe we're part of a group of old buddies at the ball game, or maybe we're eating fish with a table full of parishioners. Suddenly it's communion time, because the very same dining experience is no longer just putting food and beverages in our mouths at the same time and place. It's now celebrating and deepening an important relationship that already exists and that we all desire to deepen. It's not because of any magical food or drink. It's because of the marvelous, mysterious event of realizing something precious in and through our being together at a meal. We need the meal together in order to make that communion happen, but it's about something much more profound than what's on the plate and in the drinking cup in front of us. It's about what's really going on here. Eating next to somebody is not sufficient.

A friend of mine does a good deal of travel in his work, and frequently enough finds himself spending overnights in airport hotels by himself. He's told me that he always orders his meals to take to his hotel room to eat, because he finds the bar in the lobby to be the most depressing, dis-spiriting place in the world...where everyone is there together but there's no communion at all, no matter how good the food and drink may be. I think he's absolutely right about that. And absolutely Catholic about that.

Today we observe in our liturgy the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, as we do so every year around this time. It is an important moment for us to remember again together just what it is that we celebrate and commit ourselves to in this most important Catholic sacrament of all. Because, to be honest, in the course of our church's history—and sometimes even today—we've tried to make this mystery too small, too mechanical, too magical in the worst sense. We have tried to limit this mystery to an analysis of what's in the food and the drink, the bread and the wine. It's been telescoped into a thing rather than a living event. We've impoverished the questions we ask about it by focusing more about what's in that material than about what's going on here when we partake of it together.

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Is it truly the body and blood of the Lord that's on that plate and in that chalice. Well, yes it is, but if that's all you're curious about you've mis-understood the magnitude of this feast. This body is not a corpse. This blood is not a stagnant puddle of liquid. It is what stirs us to life and communion by our participation in it—together. It is a person. It is a summons. And haven't we all seen enough examples of so-called communions in churches where the celebration of Eucharist threatens to look more like dinner on the airplane or in the hotel bar—strangers filling up on nutrition without being changed with one another at all.

I've shared here before one of the most memorable insights for me from a Catholic theologian who wrote, "God must always be thought about in such a way that He may never be merely thought about.... God must always be thought about in such a way that He may never be merely thought about." The focus of this feast day is not primarily about a concept or a doctrine, like "yes, yes, the bread is now the body and the wine is now the blood." Nod, close the catechism book, and move on to the next topic. The focus of this day, rather, is relationship, responsibility, solidarity, and yes, love. If our partaking of this bread and wine, this sacred body and blood of Christ, does not summon us to any and all of these things, then we've missed the point. We've merely thought about it. We've made the whole thing too small. This is our annual excuse to wake up.

It is not possible truly to engage in Eucharistic communion without being challenged, changed, and more deeply immersed into the mystery of life with God and with one another. That's quite a far cry from eating and drinking at the ball game or from the fish fry. It's real communion. It's a summons to ever deeper intimacy with everyone else who approaches this table to share the same food and drink, intimacy that is brought about in and through the Lord who is truly present in bread and wine here, but he is not trapped inside the elements. Quite to the contrary, he bursts forth from them to stir all of us to life, together. He lives among us not as an idea or a philosophy, but as a Divine Person who is capable of making the world new, if only we would believe it and respond. May this solemn feast be our invitation to do exactly that.