

October 29, 2006 Instructed Eucharist w/ Gus Franklin Cathedral

So what does all of this have to do with our day-to-day lives? Little connection is seen between liturgy and life. What is celebrated in church does not appear to speak to the everyday reality that characterized human life today. In church we deal with the realm of the holy. When we leave church we go back into reality. If our prayer has given us a bit more strength to live each day, we are grateful. But there is seldom the expectation that the liturgy will give us a vision or deeper appreciation of how to live our lives more meaningfully purposefully.

What is there in the Sunday liturgy that could support us in our home lives? What are the connections between our faith as expressed in the liturgy and our work in the marketplace? These questions can never be answered if we think of the Sunday Eucharist in the personal terms to which our consumer society has accustomed us. If the church primarily provides services to satisfy our personal needs, we will find it hard to understand that its real purpose is to submit us to the direction of God, allowing us to follow him, so that the rhythm of life may go on.

The church's liturgy, with its many moods and rhythms, leads us on life's journey in ways quite different from where the self-fulfillment gurus would take us. For it immerses us in the mystery of life where meaning and salvation is found in one who was nailed to a cross in an act of total self-giving.

Our liturgy is meant to bring about the renewal of Christian life. As the embodiment and summary of the riches of our faith, liturgy has the power to take our everyday lives and transform them, by bringing them into contact with the saving actions of Christ. But not if we persist in seeing it as a holy action quite apart from what life is all about.

Within Christianity the Bread of Life is not primarily an individualistic thing, a solitary supper, my private party. Its function is to form a community. St. Paul phrased it beautifully: "Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one body; for we all partake of the one Bread." The Lord who nourishes the man or woman beside me, my next-door neighbor, the same Christ who feeds the Christians around the world. Christ is not divided; Christ is not multiplied. There is one and the same body, one and the same Christ, for all. In his flesh we are one.

Even more crucially, there is the world outside our altars. Outside these walls is a hungry world; hungry for food, hungry for justice, hungry for peace. Hungry for understanding; so many human hearts, close by you, are waiting hopelessly for a world of love or the touch of a hand. In that context—millions of men, women, and children struggling desperately to live human lives, struggling even to live—talk about the Bread of Life can sound awfully empty, suspiciously hollow. And it will be empty, will be hollow, unless there is a Christian exodus, unless we go out of our small selves, unless we who feed on the Eucharist Christ are ourselves Eucharist's for life of the world.

The Eucharist is central to Christians for a complex number of reasons. It is a presence, a real if hidden presence, a presence without peer, a presence of Christ's whole person, a presence which leaps from love and leads to life, a presence which is a promise, a promise of good things which our eyes have not yet seen, our ears have not yet heard, blessings it has not entered our minds to imagine. If I am to be a Eucharist for the life of the world, my feeding on the flesh of Christ must take me from church to world, to wash the feet of my brothers and sisters. I must begin to be present to others, present where they are, present in ways that respond to their needs, to their hungers—for food or freedom, for justice or understanding, for peace or God. I must be really present—I, not merely my money or my mind—somewhat hidden at times but always totally committed, because as a Christian my life is love and only love can bring life, can light dulled eyes with hope, can promise somebody that tomorrow will be more human, will be worth living.

We prepare “to celebrate the Eucharist”. It may be held in an upstairs room or a great cathedral. The Spirit is life giving, bringing life out of death. What participants in such a service discover, is that the first and indispensable thing for Eucharist is a *community* of faith. When we gather, no matter where, we break bread and share a cup in faith and love, and are graced or gifted by God to discover that there is so much more to life than the passing moments, and so much more to a person than a fleeting glimpse, an outward form. We sense the sacredness, the goodness, of all things; bread and earth, wine and flowers, art and music, and above all, people. The Eucharist uses simple signs, like coming together, eating, drinking, and sharing. This gives us a feeding or conviction that there is more to life. We are right. That feeling is a clue to the presence of God.

A Eucharistic prayer from the second century speaks of “this broken bread: which ‘was scattered over the hills,’ then was ‘gathered (and) became one mass,’” one Bread.

The Christ of that Last Supper in the Upper Room not only feeds us. He does with us today what he did that night with the bread: he takes us, and he blesses us, and he breaks us, and he gives us. The broken bread—then as now—the broken bread is a force for healing, for freeing. But then as now, the bread must be broken. Otherwise it cannot be given—especially to those who are themselves broken. And once we are given to others, we shall find that it is they who give to us. Given to the enslaved, we shall be lifted from our own slavish centering on ourselves. In the broken we shall find our own healing.

At that first Eucharist he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave himself to us. We give at least our thanks, and pledge our lives for each other. For this has been our covenant meal; we are not strangers, we are friends. We praise the Father with our words, and now, with our deeds.

Amen.