

Witness Corner ~ Deacon Joe O'Connell
Eucharistic Revival Reflection
August 3, 2024

Please pray with me: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of us your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray: Oh God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, instructs the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever rejoice in His Consolations, through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

In that prayer we ask God to send the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts and set them on fire with His Love. Then the next sentence is my favorite: "Send forth Your Spirit and we shall be created, and You shall renew the face of the earth."

The key word in that sentence is "created". A Biblical definition of create is "to re-form something already in existence." To re hyphen form, to re-create, to make new my heart with a burning love for you Lord. Keep that definition in mind when I read the scripture passage.

We are gathered here today to give honor and praise to Our Lord in the presence of the Most Holy Eucharist. We are here for a mini-Eucharistic Revival. The root word -revive- means "to live again" in essence to be re-formed or re-created. The Eucharist is God's response to the deepest hunger of the human heart, the hunger for authentic life, for in the Eucharist Christ is truly in our midst, to nourish, console and sustain us on our journey. It can be a struggle to choose what is good, just, and right, and we may at times feel that we are constantly pulled toward sin. However, sin is a choice not a given, and God's mercy is always greater. Let the power of the Eucharist and the Gospel take hold of your heart once more so that you can be revived and "live again".

Our Gospel passage today is from the end of the parable of the Vine and the Branches from John chapter 15. We're all familiar with this parable. Jesus says "I am the vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He then tells us that we are the branches and that the Father will prune the branches (us) so that we bear much fruit. Then we read starting in verse 9 how to accomplish this task:

"As the Father loves me, so I love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in His Love. I have told you this so that my joy might be in you, and your joy might be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another."

In this passage Jesus calls us "friends". Psychologists tell us that a true friend is someone who has seen us at our worst and still loves us. If you encounter me only on my best days, when all is going well and I'm in top form, and you like me, I have no guarantee that you are my friend. But when you have dealt with me when I am most obnoxious, most self-absorbed, most unpleasant and you still love me, then I am sure that you are my friend. What the first Christians saw in the dying and rising of Jesus is that we killed God, and God returned in forgiving love. We murdered the Lord of life, and he answered us not with hatred but with compassion. He saw us at our very worst, and loved us anyway. They saw confirmed in flesh and blood what Jesus had said the night before he died: "I do not call you servants any longer...but I have called you friends." They realized, in the drama of the Paschal Mystery, that we have not only been shown a new way; we have been drawn into a new life, a life of friendship with God. These early Christians had an encounter with Christ. It was always a loving experience, but it may not have always felt good. To encounter Jesus is to face a confrontation of sorts. When we meet him, we are

presented with a choice: let go of what holds us back from holiness and grasp the hand of the Savior, or remain in sin. Encounters with Jesus offer us the opportunity to become different people, the opportunity to be his friend.

It is because of this life of friendship and his love for us that Our Lord gave us his precious body, blood, soul, and divinity in the Eucharist. As a reminder to us that even though he has seen us at our very worst, he still loves us unconditionally. Then he tells us that if we keep his commandments, as he has kept the Father's commandments, we will remain in his love and our hearts might be filled with his joy. Notice he did not say that our hearts "will" be filled with his joy but "might" be filled. This is because we have free-will. God wants us to choose from our hearts, not from our heads, to love one another. When I love from my heart, then I am loving as Jesus loves. When I place another's needs above mine, when I show mercy and compassion to another, when I am not self-absorbed, when I am nonjudgmental, when I am happy at another's good fortune, when I listen attentively, then I am loving as Jesus loves. In all of these situations I have a choice to make. I can choose to love or not. Jesus said, "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you." Yes, that is true for each and every one of us, however each of us had the free-will to say "Yes" or "No" in response. Fortunately we have all said "Yes" and Jesus tells us what we said yes to: "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another."

The Eucharist is the sacrament of love. A miracle transpires at every liturgy. Through transubstantiation God dwells with us in the form of bread and wine. Though our five senses cannot detect a change in the substances, the eyes of faith reveal that Christ is truly present, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. For this reason, the Eucharist is the source and summit of every grace and blessing because the Eucharist is Christ. In the sacrifice of the Mass, God offers us a chance for a deep and personal encounter with Jesus, a chance to be re-

formed, re-created, and to live again as a close personal friend of Jesus. Will you let another opportunity pass you by?

Today we come before the Living Christ in the Eucharist to give Him praise and glory

--- through our adoration of His true presence among us in the Eucharist;

--- through our meditating on his sacred scripture and the words he will speak to each of us in our hearts;

--- through our praying together as a Eucharistic people united in love of Our Lord;

--- and through our silent reflection asking him to open our hearts to the working of the Holy Spirit.

Let each of us make a conscious choice:

to give thanks to God for the many blessings and gifts he has bestowed upon us and our families;

to offer sacrifices in reparation for those times we chose not to love;

to surrender our hearts to Our Lord allowing the Holy Spirit to re-create us;

to serve and give of ourselves as a true disciple a true friend;

and to love as Jesus loves – unconditionally.

When we make choices to offer our thanksgiving, sacrifice, surrender, service, and love to our Triune God we will truly be a Eucharistic People.

AMEN???