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The Eucharist challenges the faithful to share their lives courageously with others.

Nourished by the Eucharist, Sent Forth in Service

Ronald Patrick Raab

Nourishing your faithful by this sacred mystery,
you make them holy, so that the human race,
bounded by one world,
may be enlightened by one faith
and united by one bond of charity.

—excerpt from the *Preface on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ*

While our parish church was closed for restoration, our community celebrated Eucharist in the windowless gym in the old parish center. Eucharist was celebrated on the altar that had been in the church. The familiar items brought over from the ninety-five-year-old worship space made it comfortable for prayer. For a few hours on Saturday evening and Sunday morning, in a gym, the assembly was renewed with the proclamation of Scriptures, the echoes of songs and refrains, and the reverent reception of the Eucharist.

An aspect of praying in the gym breathed a surprisingly different rhythm into the assembly's prayer. Immediately after the last Mass on Sunday, the room was completely stripped. The altar furnishings were tucked away in a makeshift storage closet. The chairs were hung on metal racks, and all the items of the liturgy were stored in an old classroom used for daily Mass. The

quick dismantling of the church furnishings prepared a safe space for an evening meal for people from the neighborhood. For many years, that old gym has offered hospitality for people living outside and for our low-income neighbors. Nine churches come together and take turns providing food and conversation for more than a hundred people on Sunday evenings. The evening meal is called the Lord's Dinner.

CONNECTING EUCHARIST AND JUSTICE

The floor of the old gym, literally and spiritually, connected prayer and service, Eucharist and justice. People in wheelchairs or holding canes, and young men and women carrying their infant children, gathered to receive Eucharist on the gym floor. Old men with war injuries, and young men carrying all their possessions on their backs, later walked on the same tile floor waiting for food and drink. During those weeks of combining Eucharist and the Lord's Dinner in the same room, the floor itself was a profound experience of prayer. This connection grounds our reflection and prayer for the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ.

The sentence upon which we are reflecting from the Preface of the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ enlightens the dual identity of the old gym as soup kitchen and makeshift church. Breaking down the phrases from the Preface, we enter into a deeper meaning of our Eucharistic

celebrations. The words “nourishing your faithful by this sacred mystery,” is a reminder that the Eucharist is God’s activity among us. The action of our Sunday celebrations comes from God’s initiative and ends in our charity. The Table of the Lord is approached by the hungry who know they are in need of redemption. Each person is fed in the ways in which he or she needs God. Collectively, we learn how to move beyond selfishness into a greater world of need, isolation, and poverty. This phrase recalls that the graces embedded in the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ remain a mystery no matter where Mass is celebrated. These graces will assist people in taking the risk to allow God to satisfy their deepest hungers.

Next, the phrase “you make them holy” challenges us to a life of humility. God is in charge of how Christians are fed and called into faith and holiness. This mystery is revered when details do not work out despite our best organization skills as liturgists. God invites us into a deep relationship even when we do not like the liturgical style of a minister, the assembly is less than welcoming, and the musicians are not at their best. No matter whether the liturgical ministers are prepared, God invites us into holiness, a life of prayer and service. *Corpus Christi* is the essence of love no matter the floor on which Mass is celebrated.

The phrase “so that the human race, bounded by one world” unlocks not only our church doors but our hearts. The Eucharist is celebrated so that we may see a glimpse of the Kingdom of God on earth. All things will find their home in God. The Eucharist is a light that searches for all who remain in darkness. If Eucharist is true food, then we are called to truly feed people in their hunger. If Eucharist is a source of justice and love in revealing God’s Kingdom in heaven, then we express this justice moving from our altar tables and into our streets and into the real issues in the lives of people. If we believe in the forgiveness of God within the Eucharist, then we are to live bridging the gaps of people searching for wholeness. If the Eucharist is a revelation of peace in Jesus made flesh, then our lives are to be broken open in a violent world. If we believe that God speaks to us in the Eucharist, then we are called to speak out for people who need us to respond, people who are bound up by the ignorance of others. We believe that the Eucharist is our source of freedom and liberation, the essence of our true selves. We learn to move into lives that are trapped by illusion and infidelity, and bound up by addiction, heartache, and emotional instability. In the world, the liberation sought at the altar is lived.

LIVING OUT THE MERCY OF GOD

The task for liturgical ministers is to take this sentence from the preface into their daily work so that their common lives may be “enlightened by faith” and “united in charity.” This is the often-forgotten message of the Eucharist. We experience the tension of taking the love of Eucharist to others. We can get stuck in preparing liturgies and forget how to show others how to live the divine message of this love. Sometimes we want to control this love and tighten its reins. There is a long road from the altar to the soup kitchen, from the abundant and rich mercy of God and the poverty of empty stomachs among runaway children. As ministers, we are called to a profound humility so that our lives may become the leaven for God in service for other people.

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ reveals such compassion in the Eucharist. We are the Body of Christ on the earth. We are consumed in tenderness and mercy by the Bread and Cup. We are the Body of Christ that helps others unite and love into earthly communion. We do this as a matter of the heart.

Partaking in the Eucharist breaks open our hearts. In fact, many aspects of the human condition break our hearts. The word *corpus* translates to “body.” *Cor* is a Latin word for *heart*. We come to Jesus with, from, and in his heart. Our participation in the Eucharist becomes a radical change of heart in our relationship to Christ and with one another. The Eucharist offers us courage. *Courage* comes from the same root word, *cor*. As the Cup of Salvation is drunk and the Bread of Life received, we courageously live the mystery of kindness, love, and mercy well beyond the sanctuary steps or the temporary set up for Mass. With courage, the flow from Mass to feeding people in poverty is part of the mystery of Jesus in our world to help every person find love, compassion, and health. The Eucharist restores people well beyond the church walls.

REALIZING THE CALL TO SERVE

As our conversion takes place during the Eucharist, we come to understand who God is for us, and we begin to grasp the needs of our neighbor. In responding to the call of the Eucharist to serve others, we risk living beyond the tidiness of our liturgical ministries. Reorganizing what is on the sanctuary floor will not revitalize the Church. The Church will be restored when we truly see that all people stand on the same ground of the earth. When walls between others are diminished, the connection of the Eucharist to service will be discovered.

The mystery of the Eucharist is seen in our complicated lives and how we live the love we profess and build a community and world on the realization that the Kingdom of God is present on earth. On our common floor of the earth, we are so often afraid to look for God. We may fear that we will be challenged to change our lives and help others reveal such a mystery. As liturgical ministers, we must stand on the common floor of our earth and discover the ways in which we all need God. This is the song we sing that echoes well beyond the choir loft. This is the sacrament we receive that takes us from the sanctuary steps into the world. This is the way we listen to the Sacred Scriptures capturing the history of salvation that does not forget the broken, the marginalized, and the ill.

We are “united by one bond of charity” in our celebrations of the Body and Blood of Christ. No matter where we celebrate the Mass, whether on concrete, tile, carpeting, or hardwood, our common floor of the Eucharist challenges us to go into the world to invigorate the lives of all people who walk firmly on the earth. ♦

REV. RONALD PATRICK RAAB, CSC, serves as pastor of Sacred Heart Church (Tri-Community) in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He broadcasts the weekly Scripture Commentary *On the Margins* on *Mater Dei Radio*, Portland, Oregon.