

Homily for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi
St. Joseph's Neier June 21-22, 2014
Rev. Kevin Schmittgens

Central Idea: We come to the Eucharist, to remember our brokenness, to remember the grace, to remember to be grateful. We come to live.

*He therefore let you be afflicted with hunger,
and then fed you with manna, a food unknown to you and your fathers...*

Why do we come to Mass week after week after week?

Parents have you ever heard that question? I know, believe it or not, it is a question that I asked my parents as I was growing up. We had no Saturday evening Mass then, nor a Sunday Mass or More. So we were always awakened from a wonderful sleep to get up and go on Sunday morning. I hated it, hated it... sometimes. "It is the same thing over and over again," I would whine. "I don't get anything out of it."

This seemed so true when I was twelve years old. I couldn't have been more wrong 44 years later.

The author Fr. Ron Rolheiser talks about one of his friends who is an alcoholic and goes to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. He recounts: *"It's funny, the meetings are always the same, the exact same things get said over and over again. Everything is totally predictable; everyone, except those who are there for the first time, know already what will be said. And we're not there to show our best sides to each other. I don't go to an Alcoholics Anonymous meetings to share my talents or to be a nice guy. No. I go because, if I don't, I know, and know for sure, that I will start drinking again and eventually destroy myself. It's that simple. I go there to stay alive!"*

So why do we come week after week after week? We go to stay alive.

Each time we gather in this space for Mass we remember three life-giving, life saving, life altering things.

First, we remember that we all are broken. One of my favorite stories: an old priest was at a cocktail party and a young man came up, full of himself, as we like to say. He boldly told the priest that he did not go to church because "it is filled with hypocrites." The old wizened priest took a sip from his Manhattan and simply said: "Well, there is always room for one more." We do not come here because we are perfect. Are there any perfect people here? We don't come here because we have it all together. Does anyone in here have it all together, including me? We don't come here because we are so wonderful. Now, I will admit there are some pretty wonderful people in this church, but don't let that

go to your head. No we come here broken, sinful, hurting, afflicted and as an author friend of mine so accurately put it, screwed up. It is the very first thing we acknowledge as we gather. In a sense, we level the playing field. We admit the rather humbling truth that we are needy. That is why we come.

Second, we remember that we are graced, we are loved, we are gifted by God with mercy and kindness. The symbol for this, the symbol of the Eucharist in the Old Testament is manna, the bread that sustained the Israelites in the desert. Two things about manna stand out: one it was something new for the people. As Moses tells the people, manna is a food unknown to you and your fathers. It was unexpected and astonishing. Conversely, it was also ordinary and plain. The food that sustained them and gave them life, will become boring and uninteresting to them eventually. Sound familiar? But it is precisely the ordinary, everyday, plain things that actually sustain us and give us life: air, water, sunshine, food. Grace doesn't necessarily knock you off your feet, sometimes it comes very subtly, delicately.

Finally, we remember that we are to be grateful. The comedian Louis C.K. tells a revealing story. He was flying on a plane and the flight attendant announced that there would be WiFi on the flight. So everyone got out their laptops, iPads and such and started surfing the internet on the flight. He marveled at the technology that just a generation ago would have been absolutely unthinkable. A couple of minutes later the WiFi went down. Suddenly, the surfing ended. A young man across the aisle from him started ranting and raving. "This is NONSENSE!" he cried, (only he didn't say NONSENSE.) The comedian ends the story by saying that the guy was already complaining about not having something he didn't even know existed five minutes ago.

Such it is with our world. And that is an extremely dangerous things. Once we get the notion that we are OWED things by the big bad world, we are shot. Gratitude, the very word that describes the Eucharist, is at the heart of happiness, the heart of contentment, the heart of life. Every single thing you have had in your life, every joy, every sorrow even, has been a gift that should lead your to gratitude.

We come here to live. Even though Fr. Kevin is, sometimes, let's face it...boring and predictable. Even though it seems we do the same things over and over again. Even though we are often awoken from a wonderful Sunday morning sleep, or a Saturday afternoon nap. Even though everyone around us are hypocrites. Even though the bread we eat and the cup we drink are ordinary. Even though all of this is accurate and true, we still come here to live. We come here to live.

That is why we come here week after week after week.