

There's a restaurant in NYC that prides itself on always pleasing the customer, which can sometimes be an impossible task...Like the time a man complained that only one bread roll came with his dinner... So the waiter left & came back with four rolls...But the man still wasn't satisfied..."That's not enough! I love bread..."The waiter went off & came back with a basket full of rolls...The man said, "That's better. But aren't you being a little cheap?"...Then the waiter decided to end this for good. ...So, he brought out a 6-ft loaf of French bread, & placed it on the table...The man looked at the huge loaf of bread...& grumbled, "So, I see we're back to one roll again..."Some people really love bread. ...I love bread, especially the hard-crusteD Ital. bread that was always on my family's table growing up in East Utica... So many times I got my hand slapped four dipping a big hunk of that crusty bread into the pot of sauce simmering on the stove...(it was those darn crumbs floating in the sauce that always gave me away)...But, Mama Mia, it was "wortha alla da pain."

Why all this talk about bread? Because today we celebrate the Feast of the Body & Blood of Christ...as the Church reflects on the Eucharist,...this great **mystery** of our faith: ordinary bread & wine becoming the Body & Blood of Jesus...St. John Chrysostom said a mystery is when what we see is not the same as what we believe. ...In the Eucharist, what we see is the bread & wine;... what we believe is that it is the Body & Blood of Christ...We believe what Jesus said to His disciples at the Last Supper...and what He says to us through His priests from the altar at every Mass: "This is my body given up for you...This is my blood which will be poured out for you."

Today's Gospel from Luke is the familiar story of Jesus feeding a hungry crowd of thousands with just a few loaves of bread & a couple of fish...In Chapter 6 of John's Gospel, we are told that many of those whom Jesus had miraculously fed followed Him to Capernaum...hoping He would feed them again...And it is there that Jesus says to the people – as He says to us – "I am the Bread of Life... Whoever eats of this bread will never hunger...I am the living Bread come down from heaven...Whoever eats of this bread will live forever..."The bread Jesus was talking about was not bread to feed the hunger in our bellies...That bread doesn't last...We'll be hungry again...He was talking about the bread His Father sent – Jesus Himself - to feed our souls, to feed our spiritual hungers, hungers only He can satisfy: our hunger for purpose & meaning in our lives,...our hunger for peace,... our hunger for forgiveness,...our hunger for faith... our hunger for strength...our hunger for love...

In his homily on this feast day last year,...Pope Francis said, "Only the Body & Blood of Jesus Christ can satisfy the heart's hunger for love..."He said, "The Eucharist is simple food,...like bread, yet it is the only food that satisfies. It is Jesus himself, as food for our journey towards happiness & eternal life."

Jesus said, "I am the living bread come down from heaven..."*Living bread!*...My friends, the Eucharist we receive is not a thing...It is not just a piece of bread...It is the *real, living presence of Jesus*...If visitors who knew nothing about the Eucharist were watching how we come to Communion,.. they should be able to see in our face & our demeanor that we truly believe we are taking the *living person* of Jesus Christ into our own body,...that He is becoming one with us...And when we gently take the Body of Christ into our hands, they should see in our face joy & gratitude that Jesus is coming to us in this powerful way, to strengthen us,.. heal us,...forgive us...& unite us with Him & with one another?...That's what they should see.

Whenever I reflect on the Eucharist, I often think of Ann. Ann was a patient I visited at RGH twice a week for about 5 yrs....Ann was a very devout Catholic, & for all but a few months of those 5 years, she was unable to receive Communion because she had a tube in her throat & couldn't swallow. ...She was fed through a tube in her stomach...Every time I visited her, I would hold up the host to her and say "Body of Christ", ...and since Ann was unable to speak, she would mouth a silent AMEN...And when I touched the host to her lips, she would tenderly kiss Jesus as tears rolled down her face,...tears of gratitude that the living Jesus had come to her,...yet tears of sadness that she could not take His broken body into her broken body...Ann deeply longed for what we must never take for granted: the bread from heaven which we should get down on our knees & thank God for every day...Thank You God....Thank You.

Now, we might think of the Eucharist as a personal union with Jesus – a "Jesus & me thing."...Which it is, but it's much more...It's a "family thing."...All of us belong to a family. Many of us belong to more than one family... As I look out, I see a lot of different families of diverse ages & generations...There is one family to which we all belong by virtue of our Baptism: the family of God...One of the main facets of family life is sharing meals together...Today - and at every Mass - we come together as God's family to share a special meal in which we are fed by the Body & Blood of Christ in Holy Communion, & by the words of Christ from the holy Gospels. ...When we come to the Lord's table as family, & partake of this sacred meal, it can energize & deepen our faith, & strengthen us to face the decisions & challenges that are part of every family's life. The Eucharist is the most precious gift of Jesus to His Church – His very self powerfully present here among us, binding us together as family...Thank You, Lord Jesus.

But, you know, being thankful for the gift of the Eucharist we receive HERE IN CHURCH will mean nothing unless it shapes what we do OUT THERE.... Bishop Matano in his pastoral letter on the Eucharist said, "All that we do as Catholics stems from our attachment to the Eucharist" ...How we live, ...the decisions we make,...how we set our priorities,...our moral code, ...how we treat others... after we walk out that door...has to reflect the reality that through the Eucharist, we have become bearers of Christ. ...Strengthened by our bond as a family of faith, each of us are called to carry the presence of Christ within us as we go back out into the world ...a world that sorely needs to know Christ.

A wise priest once told me that the best way to answer someone who asks, "Why should I go to Mass?", is to say, "Because Jesus is here,...& He wants to be out there."

The last words Jesus said to His disciples before His ascension into heaven were, "Go and take my Gospel into the whole world."...That was their mission...At the end of every Mass, at the dismissal, Jesus gives us the same command, "Go & live My Gospel in your little part of the world, so that others may come to know Me." ...That's OUR mission.

I will end with the story of a young boy who had just received his First Communion...He went up to the priest after Mass and asked, "Father, you told us that after we receive Communion, we are carrying Jesus inside us,...and that if we really believe that, it should change us to be more like Jesus. Right?"...The priest answered, "Yes, that's right, Billy."..."Well, Father, how will I be able to see that I've become more like Jesus?"...The wise old priest looked the boy in the eye and said, "Billy, it's not so important that YOU be able to see it...What's more important is that OTHERS can see it."

AMEN!