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Church of St. Thomas More, NYC
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Solemnity of Corpus Christi 2021

When a person is approaching death often their request is simply to be remembered. When the end is near, when there is nothing more that can be said or done, the dying person may give a loving child or grandchild some token--a ring, a watch, some little keepsake, perhaps handed down from previous generations--with the simple request, "Remember, remember me; when you look at this, think of me." In that simple transaction, a love is expressed, accepted and acknowledged, with the hope that the bonds of affection, which were so strong in life, will not be severed entirely by death. That token, when looked upon in years to come, will bring to mind all sorts of associations, happy gatherings, and significant family moments. But at that moment, as death approaches, this simple request to be remembered is all that is left to be done; is all that can be done.

As we celebrate today the feast of Corpus Christi, the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, the feast of the institution of the Holy Eucharist on the night before Jesus died, we see in this final gesture on His part something very much the same, but even more. At the Eucharist it is not just a memory we recall, but the real presence of the risen Jesus whom we welcome into our lives. For at every Mass, we do what Jesus asked of us, "Do this in memory of me." What Jesus left to His disciples, and to us, is His presence in the Eucharist, but, again, with a gesture that has certain associations, resonances and allusions to the rest of His ministry, a ministry of reconciling, of teaching, and of healing. So, when we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, this ritual should evoke memories and connect us with His wish to continue all that He had been doing throughout His ministry and that led up to His execution on the hill of Calvary.

In a sense, this final bequest of Jesus, sums up what His ministry had been all about. When His disciples would gather to "break bread" and drink from the "cup of blessing," it would bring to mind memories of all those other times Jesus had been with them around the table, eating, talking, socializing. So, when we remember to do what Jesus asked us to do, we call to mind what for Him was a central focus of His ministry, namely, the "dinner table." While the ritual of the Eucharist is centered around an altar, it is an altar that is also a table, one which evokes memories of all those times Jesus is depicted in the Gospels as being a guest in people's homes, eating with them at table. Or, other times when He was the host, having rented a sort of dining room, much as we do today for private parties, when He invited all sorts of people in to share His company and listen as He spoke.

In fact, it was this "table ministry" of Jesus that evoked from his enemies some of their strongest criticism. They called him "a drunkard and a glutton," basically because of the kind of people He associated with around the table. His critics perceived rightly that when Jesus ate with these people, people whom they would dismiss as "sinners," Jesus' sharing of food with them also signified an even deeper acceptance of them as people worthy of God's love and grace. The sharing of food implied sharing of His life with them, an invitation to come closer, to partake of His vision of God's unconditional love, and to allow themselves to be changed by the new perspective of God, of life, of each other, and of themselves that He was offering to them. All this was done in the very intimate, very human, and very personal setting of people gathered around a table. So, at the dinner table we see Jesus at what was His constant pose throughout His ministry—inviting, welcoming, accepting, reconciling, nourishing, transforming.

Today, perhaps more basic and fundamental than trying to figure out just "how" Jesus can be present in this bread and wine (transubstantiation—trans signification), it is more important for us to see how what we do at this Eucharist today is in continuity with all that Jesus did in His table ministry. In that light, The Eucharist is not some kind of "gold star" for us, a reward for having been such good little boys and girls during the past week, but rather the opportunity for us to be reconciled with God's love and support, available to us as we receive the Eucharist and welcome the risen Jesus into our lives. The risen Jesus is present in the Eucharist in a dynamic way, continuing to draw us into the mystery of God's love, regardless of our own individual merit. The Eucharist is not given to us because we are good, but that we might become good, that we might do good. So, we approach the table aware of our need, but also aware that it is this same Jesus welcoming us as He welcomed all in his own day, even such as those who were rejected by the religious professionals, as not worthy of a rabbi's attention and concern. Let us pray, then, as we approach the Lord's table, as we are fed on the nourishing presence of the risen Jesus Himself, we can also begin to accept others as He has accepted us.