

2021 Year of the Eucharist and St. Joseph
Homily Aid: July 25, 2021
The Presentation of the Gifts and Preparation of the Altar

- “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?” (John 6:9)
 - These words of Andrew from our Gospel today are the perfect image for us as we continue our Year of the Eucharist and St. Joseph preaching series on the Mass, for today we focus upon on the *Presentation of the Gifts and Preparation of the Altar*
 - In this well-known Gospel, Jesus takes the seemingly insufficient loaves and fish from the boy and transforms this gift into abundance! Something similar, yet even more miraculous occurs each time we gather together to celebrate Mass
 - ◆ Early church writers frequently spoke of the “mysterious exchange” whereby we come forward with bread and wine – simple gifts of creation and the work of human hands – and in turn God takes our gifts and transforms them into the greatest of gifts – the Body and Blood of Christ!
- Following the Prayers of the Faithful each week, the collection begins and then all that is collected along with the bread and wine are brought forward to the altar – this is an incredibly significant part of the Mass and one that calls for the full, conscious, and active participation of the assembly
 - This is the time when we must be prayerfully gathering up all our gifts – our sacrifices from the week, our monetary contributions, our pains, our joys, and our thanksgivings – and we present these along with the gifts of bread and wine
 - The bread and wine are central for they are what Jesus offered at the Last Supper and asked us to continue to do in memory of Him
 - ◆ In connecting our gifts – our very lives – to the gifts of bread and wine which will be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, we too seek to have our lives (with our joys and pains) transformed and offered wholly to God
 - So each week when we come to Mass, we should not come unprepared or empty handed. We must bring our whole selves which we truly place on the altar of our Lord!
- As the gifts of bread and wine (and really so much more!) are brought to the altar and offered to God, the prayer of the priest acknowledges that these gifts we give to God are only possible because of His goodness
 - Prior to offering the chalice, the **priest or deacon mixes water and wine**, saying quietly “By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” In preparing these gifts, everything continues to foreshadow the Divine Gift.
 - Then the **priest washes his hands** praying, “Lord, wash away my iniquity; cleanse me from my sins.” He seeks to be purified for these hands will be the hands of Christ who will transform these gifts. We all can be praying at this time that God will give us, too, a pure heart as we offer our gifts to Him.
- You will notice that at some Masses we also use **incense** during this time of Mass (prior to the priest washing his hands): the priest incenses the bread and wine, the altar, the cross, and then an altar server or deacon incenses the priest, and finally the assembly
 - When we use incense we see smoke and smell a fragrant aroma. These are important images that appear very often in Scripture symbolizing reverence and worship, our prayers rising up to God (e.g., Psalm 141:2; Rev. 8:3-4), the very presence of God (e.g., Exodus), and the aroma reflects that which is pleasing to God (Ephesians 5:2; 2 Corinthians 2:15-16)
 - ◆ So, we use incense to symbolize our prayer, to reverence the holy offerings, and to add aroma to make them pleasing to God
 - ◆ Note well: the deacon/server incenses the people of God because they are part of the offering!
- Then comes the priest’s words we hear each Sunday: **“Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father”**
 - We worship together! Together with the priest, we offer the sacrifice of Christ, and together with Christ, we offer our lives to God!
- Just as Jesus requested for the crowd to recline as he brought about the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 from the lowly offerings of a young boy, we bring our own offerings to the Lord. We bring all that we are – even when that might not seem to be enough – and we trust that as the Lord joins our offering to His own, we will be acceptable to God and transformed by his life-giving Body and Blood.