

Homily—20th Sunday OT; B-cycle

There are three predominant lessons we learn from the Holy Eucharist.

Now, there are many more lessons we also learn from the Eucharist, but the three I'm talking about today are most significant in light of what's happening in the world right now.

Today's gospel is a continuation of John chapter six, we've been hearing for the past several weeks.

Jesus has given the people, this crowd he fed on the multiplied loaves of bread and fish, this crowd that chased him across the Sea of Galilee, his most challenging teaching, "the living bread from heaven that he would soon give to the world."

They're understandably confused.

The first important thing to note is that Jesus does not back down or water down the teaching because they don't understand it or say "Amen" to it.

Quite the opposite in fact. As the crowd becomes more forceful in their objection, Jesus responds by becoming more forceful about his message.

For example today, first Jesus is talking about eating the living bread that comes from heaven. Then Jesus says "I am the living bread come down from heaven."

They object. Jesus says, "the bread I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

They strongly object. Jesus says, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life within you."

The fact that Jesus won't back down, or re-package his message, means that to Jesus, the Eucharist is serious business.

But it's something we take for granted, isn't it? (at least from time to time.)

Jesus gives himself to us body, blood, soul, and divinity, and often people say, "It's just Mass...It's boring...It's OK if we skip...God won't care...What's the big deal?"

OR, people who go to communion regularly and do NOT go to confession regularly.

That's another sign we take the Eucharist for granted.

Our difficulty in appreciating the Eucharist is rooted in our difficulty in appreciating the incarnation.

It's next to impossible for us to wrap our mortal minds around just what is meant for God

to become man in Jesus Christ.

The best analogy I ever heard was given by the late, great, Bishop Fulton Sheen.

He said... *Imagine that you loved dogs, and you were very much concerned about the awful state of dogs in your town: they had become wild and unruly, they barked at postmen, they bit joggers, they refused to be housebroken—in short, they were leading incredibly rotten lives. But you loved dogs so much; and you were given the power to empty yourself of your humanity, so you could put your mind and soul into the body of a dog, and you chose to do so. This would mean, among other things, that even though you had a mind which far transcended your organism, you would no longer be able to use your reason. You would have to follow instinct. You could no longer speak or sing. You could only bark. And worst of all, you'd have to spend the rest of your life with dogs—endlessly looking for fire hydrants and trees. And then, after you spend your entire life and all your energy trying to make these dogs better, in the end they turn on you, and tear you to pieces.*”

Sheen added, *“It would be hard for us to imagine becoming a dog in order to teach dogs to be good, how much more must it have been for God to become a man—making himself a zero and be willing to suffer and die at our hands?”*

And I would add to THAT, if it's that hard for us to imagine becoming a dog to save other dogs, how much more difficult would it be for us to imagine becoming a dog biscuit?!

How much MORE love would you need for Fido and Spot to become their FOOD?!

And what makes Sheen's analogy even more powerful is that there's a much smaller gap between us and dogs, than between God and us.

So how much does God love us? The answer is right here in the Eucharist, if we have the spiritual vision to see it.

When a priest holds up the consecrated host just before communion and says “Behold the Lamb of God...” Jesus is saying to us, “Behold, THIS is how much I love you. I love you enough not only to die for you, but to become your spiritual food.”

So that's the first lesson we learn from the Eucharist: we learn about the depths of God's love for us.

The second lesson concerns our value as human persons.

Provided that we are baptized, in the state of Grace, and properly prepared and disposed, Jesus invites us to the sacrificial banquet of the Eucharist, because we are human beings, created in the image and likeness of God, who have immortal souls—and therefore have a dignity far beyond anything else in the material universe.

This would SEEM to go without saying, but you'd never know this truth about the dignity of the human person from watching the nightly news on ABC, CBS, or NBC in recent weeks.

By watching the major network news outlets recently you'd think that spot of dignity beyond anything else in the material universe belongs to a lion named Cecil.

Now don't misunderstand me. I think the killing of Cecil the lion was wrong and the guilty parties should have to face APPROPRAITE punishment.

My problem is what was eloquently summarized by writer Katie Yoder:

“Even after three weeks, the broadcast news shows are choosing to cover the death of one animal before the story of countless babies torn apart by a taxpayer funded organization. In the three weeks since the release of the first video exposing Planned Parenthood July 14th, ABC, NBC, and CBS, spent 20 minutes, 21 seconds on the videos during their morning and evening news shows. In contrast, since July 28th, the nets devoted 1 hour, 32 minutes, 56 seconds to Cecil, the famed African lion shot by an American dentist. In other words, the three broadcast networks covered Cecil four times more than the trafficking of baby body parts by Planned P.”

My brothers and sisters, this is a very sad commentary on a very sick society.

YES! We should be good stewards of creation and not abuse it, as Pope Francis reminded us of in his latest encyclical...

But to almost completely ignore the murder of innocent children and the selling of their body parts in order to focus four times as much on the death of an animal, (an animal who would have no problem whatsoever attacking, killing, and eating anyone of us if given the opportunity); is disgraceful.

Let me be very clear; no lion, no tiger, no elephant, no dog, no cat, no bear, or any other animal for that matter, will EVER be invited to the table of the Lord at Mass.

That privilege is for humans ONLY! And if ABC, NBC, and CBS don't like that, perhaps they can start their own church and invite all their lion friends to join them...of course, the first service would also be the last.

"Yum, yum," said the lions!

Which brings us to the third lesson we learn from the Eucharist, to love is to make a gift of oneself to another. Again, we get the exact opposite message from the culture these days.

Our culture is telling this generation that real love is about loving ME, and getting and using everybody else to get what I want. How different Jesus is!

During the meal in which our Lord instituted the Eucharist he said, "*Greater love no one has than to lay down his life for his friends.*"

Then Jesus makes it clear that real love is selfless, self-sacrificial, and Eucharistic!

Jesus himself gives himself to us in the Eucharist body, blood, soul, and divinity.

In other words he gives himself to us totally and completely out of perfect love.

"This is my body which will be given up FOR YOU."

"This is my blood...which will be poured out for YOU and the forgiveness of your sins."

It is no coincidence that the battle cry of pro-abortion advocates has been, "This is MY body!" And people who say, "this is MY life," to justify other sinful behavior.

The fact that they use the same words of Jesus who used them in an act of complete selflessness to justify self-ISH-ness is an indication to me that this culture is in the grips of a demon. The demonic ALWAYS mocks or parodies the sacred.

And there is nothing more sacred on this earth than the Eucharist.

So this is something we need to pray hard against. Let's pray now...

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, the crowd was confused when you told them you were the bread that had come down from heaven. Help us today not to be confused. Help us to understand these three lessons you teach us in and through the sacrament of your body and blood: that you love us with a perfect love, that we have incredible value in your eyes, and that real love is about giving, not taking or using. Help us Lord to embrace these lessons and use them in our daily lives for our salvation, and your glory. Lord Jesus Christ, in your name and through your sacred body and blood we beg you to speak this word...AMEN.