

Even though we share the gravest concern for Pope John Paul, we have reasons to rejoice today. I'd like to thank all of you who welcomed Father Michael O'Shea last month. You visited with him, learned from him and prayed with him. I'm especially grateful for those who helped organize the potluck at the end of his visit, and all of you who came. Without giving you much notice, we took up a collection for an orphanage in Romania that Father O'Shea helps. You gave over \$2200 for that effort, an amazingly generous gift to the needy. That final day that Father O'Shea was here we experienced prayer, communion, community and service. Those are the elements that go to make up a good Christian community. In the Catholic Church, our eucharist is of the utmost importance to us, but it comes to life when it is supported by prayer, community and service.

This weekend we celebrate first communion with several of our children. In order for first communions to happen, kids and parents have to work very hard. Kids have to prepare by studying books about communion, and parents have to help the kids understand what they read. Anytime you get ready for a big meal, somebody has to do the work. Somebody has to plan the meal, somebody has to shop for the food, somebody has to cook the food, somebody has to set the table, somebody has to serve the meal, and somebody has to clean up afterwards. Sometimes that is all the same somebody. But it works better if everyone pitches in.

The same is true in parish life. For us to celebrate mass each weekend requires the assistance of a large number of volunteers, but it also needs people who spend the week living out what this eucharist expects of us - love of God and love of neighbor. We show that in hundreds of ways each week at home, at school and at work. When we live like Christians, our communion has much more meaning to us as individuals and to our community as a whole.

Every meal needs to be supported by service. This past week we have reflected on the relationship of food and service in the examples of Terri Schiavo and Pope John Paul II. The Schiavo case revealed how much we value the importance of food, and the role it plays in families, loving relationships, health and death. It is not my place to judge the motives of Terri Schiavo's husband, but what made this case so riveting was the belief that nutrition is an essential part of care, and the withdrawal of nutrition from a person who is not otherwise dying is offensive to the human spirit.

Even as Terri Schiavo lay dying without her feeding tube, physicians inserted a tube into Pope John Paul II. His condition has become quite perilous, and the nutrition being offered him is a sign of the care the flock wishes to return to its shepherd.

In the early church, according to Acts of the Apostles, the apostles "devoted themselves to teaching, the communal life, the breaking of bread and to prayers." This is the ideal we all strive for in every Christian community. Whether today is your first communion or your hundred thousand

first communion, let this be a day of rejoicing that we have food to eat, and a day of commitment that we have a community to serve.