

Imagine a parish community where it seems like nobody gets along. Every Sunday, when they have mass, they also have a potluck -- every week. In fact, the dinner is really more popular than the mass. But when everyone gets there, some people eat so much that others are actually going hungry, and some get drunk -- every week. Doesn't sound like a bible-based community, but it is. That's how Paul describes the church in Corinth. There was one benefit to their misbehavior. It caused Paul to write the passage we hear in tonight's second reading. If the Corinthians hadn't made such a mess out of the mass, we wouldn't have this description of the Last Supper. This excerpt sounds very peaceful and reverent, but it's part of a diatribe by Paul against the Corinthian church.

Paul makes several points about reverence for the eucharist and behaviors outside the eucharist. With regard to reverence, Paul says the eucharist has got to take importance over everything else, including meals. If he were at St. Regis today, he would probably be pleased with the attempts people make at revering the eucharist. If you fast an hour before coming to communion, if you greet one another with peace, if you genuflect before the tabernacle when you visit the chapel before mass, if you bow to the altar before taking your seat and bow again before leaving the church, if you sing the songs and listen to the scriptures, if you watch the elevation of the body and blood of Christ and bow when the priest genuflects, if you join the communion procession with anticipation and present yourself for communion with a smile, if you remain after communion in a spirit of thanksgiving and go forth at the dismissal -- if you do these things, your actions will foster an inner disposition of reverence for Christ.

But Paul wants more than reverence. He expects good behavior outside the eucharist. He wanted people to share their food, to eat and drink moderately, and to live in a way in keeping with the eucharist. If he were at St. Regis today, he would probably be pleased with the attempts people make at good behavior outside the eucharist. If you contribute from your resources to the poor and the needy, if you volunteer for the soup kitchen, if you support our food pantry, if you serve on a council or committee, if you visit the sick, if you serve in Stephen Ministry, if you help at the childcare center, the school or school of religion, if you bring communion to the homebound, if you write your legislators to end world hunger, if you raise children in the faith -- if you do these things, your actions will foster an inner disposition of service to others.

Tonight's description of the Last Supper comes from Paul. Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell virtually the same story. John does not. When Jesus sits down at table in John's gospel, he never says, "This is my body. This is my blood." Instead, he gets down on his hands and knees and washes the feet of his disciples.

A good eucharistic community will do both. It will revere the presence of Christ in the eucharist, and it will serve the presence of Christ in the community. Tonight our mass will surely inspire our belief in the presence of Christ here, as it should, but it should also inspire our service. Receiving communion is not the end of mass; it is the beginning of service.