

I'd like everyone to take part in this homily tonight. Would you all please locate your keys and place them in your hands. If you don't have any then look at the keys of the person you came with. But everyone, please, hold your keys in your hands.

Now, look at them one by one. What do they unlock? Why do you have those keys? Do they represent someone's trust in you? Are there other people who have keys that match one or more of yours? Who are they? What do you have in common with them? Now let your eyes focus on someone in the church you don't know. If I asked you to trade keys with them, how would that make you feel? Suppose a young child took your keys from you to play. Your keys mean a lot to you, but to a child they would just be a toy. There isn't much to a key -- just a piece of metal, but it means a lot to you. You may put your keys away now.

You'll be holding something else in your hands and in your mouth tonight. The eucharist of this mass. There isn't much to it -- just a small piece of bread, a sip of wine. But it is so much more. It means responsibility and trust. It means our union with one another and our faith in God. The bread and wine we will hold is the body and blood of Christ. If someone else picked it up, they wouldn't appreciate its value. But we know.

There was a time in our history when this symbol, small as it is, became even smaller. Leaders were afraid that people would spill the cup, so they stopped offering it. People felt unworthy to receive communion frequently, so the priest received on behalf of everyone else. You can make a symbol too small. And when you do, you may stop realizing its worth. To get the most out of this small symbol, we use it richly. The church urges us to share the eucharist frequently and to receive under both forms, not one. This symbol should also rest on a foundation of faith and charity. The eucharist will have its fullest meaning in church when it has a full foundation outside church. A wedding ring, for example, won't mean much unless it rests on a foundation of love expressed in many words and actions every day.

We Catholics who believe in the eucharist, we rest that belief on the communion of our lives. We recognize the presence of Christ in all our sisters and brothers. Through communion we overcome our prejudice and selfishness and live for others. Voters in Missouri will have a very specific opportunity this week to decide if we want a society based on trust and charity or a society based on fear and suspicion. Proposition B, the concealed carry bill, wants to make violence as handy as your car keys. As surely as I believe that Jesus is present in the eucharist, I believe that Jesus is present in nonviolence.

We Catholics who believe in the eucharist, we can build communion in many ways. How many of your neighbors do you know by name? How often do you speak to them? How do you treat people at work? Is it different from the way you treat people at church? Are you afraid on your streets at night? Are you willing to claim your neighborhood or do you prefer to move away? Some people say they never drive through Swope Park at night out of fear. I figure every time one of us drives through Swope Park we bring the light of Christ there; we make it a little safer.

Whenever we receive communion we may be tempted to take false pleasure in it. We might think of it as comfort food, like the chocolate ice cream you eat whenever you feel anxious. But the eucharist is not comfort food; it is challenge food. Jesus gave it to us on the night before he was killed, the night he was betrayed, as St. Paul reminds us. At that supper he got down on his knees to wash the feet of his disciples because he couldn't think about eucharist without thinking about service. Eucharist isn't about getting fed; it's about feeding.

The symbol is very small -- a bit of bread, a sip of wine. But if we support it with real communion, it becomes a powerful symbol. We receive the body and blood of Christ; we become the body and blood of Christ; we bring the body and blood of Christ to soothe an anxious world.