

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

This week the Catholic Church in the United States begins the second of a three-year Eucharistic Revival. Last year encouraged diocesan efforts to stir up faith in the Eucharist, and this year the focus shifts to parishes. Bishop Johnston has asked us preachers to speak about the Eucharist on the first Sunday of every month this year, beginning this weekend.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that Christ “is present in many ways to his Church: in his word, in his Church’s prayer, ‘where two or three are gathered in my name,’ in the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned, in the sacraments of which he is the author, in the sacrifice of the Mass, and in the person of the minister. But ‘he is present . . . most *especially in the Eucharistic species*’” (1373). At every Mass we present bread and wine as symbols of the sacrifice of our lives, and over these the priest repeats Jesus’ own words, “This is my Body,” “This is my Blood.” These consecrated gifts are then returned to us in holy communion, as we each profess our faith in this sacrament by bowing our head and saying “Amen” just before we receive.

Christ most generously grants these gifts to those who make room for him in their lives. Today’s first reading tells of one woman’s decision to consult her husband and welcome the prophet Elisha to the spare room in their home. As a result, Elisha promised that she, who was still childless, would conceive a son. As Jesus would later encourage in Matthew’s gospel, by receiving a prophet because he was a prophet she received the prophet’s reward. We can all probably recall a time when we offered hospitality to someone and received back more than we gave. This happens most dramatically when we make room in our hearts for Christ.

In this spirit, the lectionary offers us several verses from Psalm 89 that sing of God’s generosity. These proclaim to the Lord, “your mercy is established forever.... How blessed the people... who make your justice their joyful acclaim... For you are the glory of their strength; by your favor it is that our might is exalted.” God has established mercy, rendered justice, and provides strength. We witness this continually when we eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ. He comes to us in mercy. Even when others do not appreciate our good intentions, the Lord in his justice does. When our steps falter through pathways of doubt, sin, or death, the Eucharist provides the strength we need.

We can each enter the Eucharistic Revival this year in various ways, but none is more important than receiving the Body and Blood of Christ at Mass. He is present to us in many ways, but most especially under the forms of bread and wine. If for some reason you are not eligible to receive communion in the Catholic Church, perhaps our pastoral staff can help remove the obstacles. If your dedication to weekly Mass is unsteady, then let this be a year of recommitment. And as you meditate on the generosity of Christ, the prophet who comes to enter the home of your heart, be so moved to keep practicing the virtue of hospitality. You too will receive the prophet’s reward. The Lord’s mercy is established forever; so is our response. In the Eucharist we experience God’s mercy, justice and strength. Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, we can declare each week as we sang today, “For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.”