

CORPUS CHRISTI HOMILY

When I was a young novice teacher at Immaculate High School in Leavenworth Kansas, I was living on my own for the first time. This was way back before I was married. I decided to try and teach myself to cook. The "man-sized" TV dinners weren't cutting it. So I got a couple of cookbooks, including one called "The Joy of Cooking," which included recipes for things like meat loaf, chili and pot roast. But the most adventurous thing I attempted was trying to bake bread. When I was a child, home-made bread was a meal-time staple. This was a gift from my mother that touched me greatly. I don't know why I thought baking bread was something I needed to know how to do, but I thought I'd give it a shot. If you've ever tried this, you know: it's an all-day affair. You take the ingredients and knead the dough and then you knead it again and then you have to wait for it to rise and then you have to actually bake it.

It took hours. And when I was done, I later told a friend about it. He listened very politely and then replied, "You know, Dan, they sell that already made at Safeway. It's in little plastic bags and it's called Wonder Bread. You should try it." That was more or less the beginning of my career as a baker.

But speaking of Wonder Bread, there is something wondrous about it. When I was a student at Rockhurst College, I worked at the Wonder Bread Bakery in Kansas City. The smell, the texture, even the flavor of just baked bread is unlike any other experience. And if you add butter or jelly or even use fresh bread to make a sandwich, well, it's transformative. It is truly astounding to consider what bread can become. And that, I think, is the point of this feast, Corpus Christi, the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ. It is astounding to consider what bread can become.

The work it takes to bake a loaf of bread can't begin to compare with what has gone into creating the Eucharist. It is the labor of a lifetime Jesus's lifetime and all that He taught and lived and suffered and died has been poured into that sanctifying moment when bread becomes His body. By the hands of the priest and the grace of God, the mundane becomes a miracle.

And when we receive that miracle, we are transformed. We bring God into us, and He becomes us. It is more just than transubstantiation that massive word the nuns from Leavenworth, Kansas taught us in grade school that describes what happens on the altar. It is nothing less than a resounding echo of The Incarnation. It has been said that God became man so that man might become God. In the miracle of the Eucharist, we experience it, and relive it. Yes: It is astounding to consider what bread can become. It is a miracle and a mystery, but it continues to happen. Christ continues to feed us, so that all are satisfied. He does it with His Word. And He does it with His own body and blood. What began on Holy Thursday with a few people in an upper room now feeds multitudes around the world. Jesus continues to give, and give us Himself. God becomes bread, and bread becomes God. And in that, He becomes a part of each of us. But a lot of us, for whatever reason, refuse to believe in something that sounds so unbelievable.

In 1995, the year I was ordained, a Gallup poll reported that only 30 percent of Catholics, less than a third -believed in the Real Presence, that the bread and wine truly become the body and blood of Christ. Another 30 percent said that they believe it's just a symbol. I wish they could see what I've seen. But listen to this. A few years ago, my brother Michael, also a deacon, told me about a Eucharistic miracle in a town called Lanciano. He gave me a DVD that documented a wonderful miracle. About 1200 years ago, a priest there had begun to doubt the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Then one morning, during mass, he was stunned to discover that the bread and wine in his hands had become actual flesh and blood.

Today, it's been preserved in a glass case, on its own altar. You can walk around it and see the host from many different angles. The blood has congealed naturally into five distinct pellets -just like the five wounds of Christ. In 1970, scientists were given permission to take samples and analyze it. They weren't prepared for what they found. The bread is actually myocardial tissue, tissue from the heart. And what had been wine is, in fact, type AB blood, the universal recipient blood type. It has been so perfectly preserved, the investigators ruled out any kind of fraud. They determined it was human, and could not have come from a cadaver, or it would have spoiled. Instead, the flesh and blood that was hundreds of years old appeared new. In other words: ageless.

Jesus Christ promised to be with us until the end of time. And He is. What happened in Lanciano 1200 years ago is a powerful testament to that. So is what will happen on this altar in a few moments. Prepare to receive the greatest gift God can give us. The gift of Himself.

It is astounding to consider what bread can become.

As you open your heart to this truth, you will know that.....

YOU ARE LOVED.....

Deacon Dan