

## Faith Break 2 – Together in Thanksgiving

Transcript of the pre-event video

Zoom Meeting October 17, 2020

### **What is Eucharist? - Fr. Jacob Herklotz, OMI**

“You have to eat.” That’s what Mom used to say when I dropped by Mom and Dad’s Sunday afternoons back when I was in my twenties. And when supper hour approached, I would say, “Well, I should be off now.” “Are you not hungry, you have to eat.” Both Mom and I knew that I would stay for supper but we went through this ritual almost every Sunday, it seemed. “You have to eat,” is something God said a long, long time ago but He wasn’t talking about burgers and fries. Good things to eat and drink appear often in the scriptures and as a matter of fact a table full of food and drink was pure heaven to these ancient people when starvation might be only a few days away. So, what happens when we eat and drink? I suppose a biologist could give us a much more technical answer but basically that food and drink become part of us, helping us grow and keeping us alive. We usually call this ‘nourishment.’ Jesus is telling us that we need to be nourished by him; He wants us to let Him become the substance of our bodies and souls. He wants us to become a grateful community of people who love and care like Him.

So, how are we nourished by God in our hunger and thirst? Well, first off, our Church community. We come sometimes for different reasons, but we come. We have saints and sinners, the shameful and the shameless, the rich and the poor, the proud and the humble, the hot shots and nerds. We’re all seekers among millions around the world and so we’re part of something bigger. We belong, we’re disciples, sisters and brothers in Christ.

We’re nourished by the Word of God. We have inherited 2000-5,000 years of wisdom, what we call the scriptures. Scripture has nourished the saints who have gone before us and millions upon millions of people have turned to scripture to be fed by it as it touches their lives.

We’re nourished by the consecrated elements of bread and wine which become for us the real presence of Jesus. Two thousand years ago, Jesus broke bread and shared the cup of wine with his disciples and asked that we do the same in his memory. And as the first disciples had table fellowship, breaking open the Word, then sharing the bread and the cup, they sensed Jesus was very real, very present to them. Through the Eucharist, we are connected to Him and to each other. We are connected to an ancient tradition and still nourished by its richness.

There is one more hunger I want to talk about today, one that we’re reminded of every time we come to celebrate the Eucharist. We are exposed to the hunger of God, the hunger for us to be people of gratitude. Grateful people are happy people. And that scares the heck out of some of us, maybe it could be seen as a sign of weakness, of being subservient to others, maybe it comes at a cost. Jesus showed us how to be thankful. When He instituted the Eucharist, he established it as an act of thanksgiving. The Words of Institution are: “He took the bread, and giving thanks, broke it,” and, “He took the chalice, and once more giving thanks, he gave it to his disciples” (see Lk 22:19, 17 and 1 Cor 11:24). The Greek word

“eucharisteo” means “to give thanks.” Thanksgiving is a fundamental part of our understanding of the Eucharist.

Back to the family supper on Sundays. It was never lost on family members this notion of gratitude. Being humble and gracious was drilled into us as children and ingratitude was not tolerated. I believe that strengthened the bond of our family and to this day the surviving members remain very close and committed to each other and to Christ. Gratitude, it seems to me, is in short supply in a highly individualistic culture. People are so busy looking out for number one that thankfulness is often missed. The focus on my rights, my privileges, and my prerogatives trumps the common good and weakens community.

There is also a lively debate in some circles on the question: “Why are less and less people going to church in our Western World?” The question has sparked a lively response and those, more liberal in bent, make it clear that for them the reason people are not attending is because the churches are too old-fashioned and not in pace with the times. The others, more conservative in view, have suggested the exact opposite, namely, that people are no longer going to church because the churches, in trying to be relevant to the world, had sold out. They do agree on one thing, attendance within all of the major churches is in a steady decline.

Both the liberal and conservative theories miss the point, I believe. While church attendance is dropping, belief in God is not in decline and neither is church affiliation. People, it would seem, still believe in God and still connect themselves to some church. They just don’t go to church very often. Most who are not attending church regularly have no serious issues with their church. The bigger problem is that of indifference, of individualism, of a cafeteria-style approach to everything, including religion, and of the breakdown of community at every level of our society. Churches are in trouble because community is in trouble.

We tend to treat our churches similar to the way as we treat our families and neighbourhoods. We want them to be there (for when we need them) but we do not want them to make any demands on us. We tend to buy in on our own terms. We pick which occasions we want to be present, how much to be involved, and for the rest we remain free. Generally, we want community, be it our extended family, neighborhood, or church, to celebrate special occasions with: rites of passage, Christmas, Easter and the like; but, outside of that, we want to be left alone. Some might even ask, “Why is the church trying to control my life? My relationship with God is nobody’s business but my own!

What must be challenged is the almost unhealthy individualism within our culture, especially the fallacy that we are independent and not interdependent, that our lives are all our own, that we owe nothing to anyone and that we can buy in on our own terms, how and when we feel like it. That excessive individualism, with its focus on my rights and privileges, I believe, weakens gratitude and the very fabric of community. And community suffers by it.

And so, when we talk about being fed, we know we are nourished by each other, by the scriptures, by the consecrated Bread and Wine, and by the overwhelming love of God. That should prompt a litany of praise and thanksgiving. And it’s to your credit that you are here today, seeking to get closer to God.