

HOMILY ~ HOLY THURSDAY

APRIL 6, 2023

Have you ever thought about the difference between your intimate relationships and the other relationships you have in your life? Now this can be a romantic love relationship, but it does not need to be. By intimate relationships, I am talking about your relationships with your spouse, your children, your siblings, your grandparents, your girlfriend or boyfriend, your close friends, the family that you get to choose. To have an intimate relationship with someone, we need to be with them physically and touch them; we need to express that intimate love through our bodies. There are different levels of touch. We will fist bump with anyone, we generally shake hands with most, there are probably somewhat fewer people we feel comfortable with hugging and fewer we feel comfortable with kissing. The greater the levels of touch, the more intimate the relationship. As human beings, we need to be touched. During WWI, there were many young children that were left alone. They put them into great big orphanages where they kept them warm, dry and fed; and the children began to die, failure to thrive. They found that if they just held the children a couple of times a day, they recovered. During COVID, most of us continued to have our intimate relationships and touch because we were living with these people or decided to be with them regardless of the lockdown. I felt bad for the older people who were living alone. People would bring them groceries and the necessities, but the physical touch was gone. People in nursing homes were attempting suicide because they were locked in their rooms alone. Their physical needs were met, but their families and close friends could not be with them. Kind of the same situation as the orphanages, failure to thrive. I understand why this happened and I am not criticizing this, but I think these people suffered terribly. You cannot have an intimate relationship through technology. You must be with them and touch them.

As I look out over the congregation today, I see a whole Church full of people of faith. As people of faith, we want to have an intimate relationship with Jesus. But how do we do this as human beings? Jesus is spiritual, and we need to express intimacy love through our bodies. Jesus left us a great gift the night before he died. He gave us the Eucharist, the gift that we remember in a special way today. Jesus said: *"This is my body that is for you."* Jesus left us his body, and we consume Jesus every time we receive the Eucharist. How can you get more intimate than that? We also have the Eucharist for Adoration. There is something about praying before the

Blessed Sacrament that you have to experience to understand. It is kind of like just being with someone that you have an intimate relationship with. It is comforting to be with them physically, even if you are not touching or talking. Just being physically with them in their presence is enough. When my mother was really sick, I used to stay overnight at her house, not because she could not be alone, but because she told me she felt better when I was in the house.

Jesus also gave us an example of how we are to love and serve one another. He did not say keep one another warm, dry and fed. He washed his disciples' feet. This is a very intimate kind of touch, isn't it? Two thousand years ago, people walked barefoot or with open sandals all over. There were no paved roads; and animals walked on the same roads, so they were walking through poop. They needed to have their feet washed. They would have allowed a slave to do this because that was their job, but Jesus, God? They would probably not let many other people, other than slaves, wash their feet. But that is the kind of loving service that Jesus calls us to do, up close and personal. Who would you allow to wash your feet, especially if you really needed to have them washed because your toenails needed to be trimmed or wounds needed to be dressed? Maybe a health care professional because that is their job. But probably someone would have to have a very close relationship with you otherwise for you to feel comfortable. Many people have told me that they would not participate in our ritual foot washing on Holy Thursday because they are just not comfortable doing that. Some churches, instead of foot washing, have people wash each others' hands. This may get more people to participate, but I think it misses the point.

So today, let's be more aware of the great gift the Eucharist is to us. Jesus is with us physically at every Mass, and we consume his body. That is a very intimate encounter. Let us also remember the example that Jesus gave us to love and serve one another, up close and personal.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim