

## HOMILY ~ 20th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME AUGUST 17/18, 2024

***“You are what you eat.”*** We are all familiar with this statement, and we know what it means. If you eat good healthy food, you can become healthier. There are people in this country and all around the world who cannot get healthy food, and that is very sad. Most of us here at St. Edith have access to healthy food, but we do not always eat it. I try to eat healthy; and most of the time, I am successful, but not always. I was on vacation last week; and I did sneak in a Reese’s Blizzard from Dairy Queen, and I never met a pizza I did not like. We also must be careful about news and social media we consume. It shapes us. We become what we receive.

In the Gospel Reading today, Jesus says: *“For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.”* Jesus, of course, is talking about the Eucharist; and Jesus meant what he said. He did not say the bread is symbolic of my body, and the wine is symbolic of my blood. The Catholic Church teaches that during the Mass, the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. Think about that. ***You are what you eat.*** We become what we receive. Each time we receive the Eucharist, we should become more and more like Jesus. He becomes part of our very cells. Every time we leave Mass, we are living tabernacles; and we are bringing Jesus to the world.

We are not purely spiritual beings. We are creatures of the senses: touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste. In the Eucharist, Jesus is present to our senses. In the Eucharist, we can touch God. Physical touch is very important to us as human beings. Studies that were done in orphanages many years ago showed that even when babies’ needs for food, clothing, warmth and so forth were met, if the babies were not touched by human beings, they died. We can express our affection for one another in words, but words just cannot replace a hug or a kiss. It is difficult to describe hugs or kisses and what they mean to us. You have to experience them. I think we can look at the Eucharist as a hug and a kiss from God.

We need to have particular places where we can encounter God. It is true that God is everywhere, but the God who is everywhere can also be the God who is nowhere. When we come to Mass, this is a physical place where we can find God. God is present in the Eucharist, and God is present in the congregation. I think we learned how important this was during COVID when we could not gather together and receive the Eucharist. We could watch the streaming, and this was better than nothing, but it just was not the same. That physical connection with the Eucharist and with our Parish Family is extremely important.

While the Jewish culture was full of many rituals, Jesus gave us only one ritual, the Eucharist. Jesus wants us to receive him in the Eucharist. He said, *“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.”* He intends for us to receive the Eucharist in community. The first Eucharistic celebration was during the Last Supper. Today no one receives the Eucharist alone, and only the priest gives himself the Eucharist. Everyone else receives the Eucharist from another person. Coming to Church to socialize and be with the community is a good reason to come, and this can help to keep us connected. When we attend Mass regularly, it becomes a comforting ritual. You know what to expect. We want rituals in our lives. We have created rituals surrounding different holidays, weddings, funerals, graduations, birthdays, retirements. Here at Mass each week, we try to do the best we can with music, environment, homilies, etc. Beyond this, when you come to Mass, you know what to expect; and the Mass itself can be very comforting, especially in times of stress and anxiety. Something else very important happened during the Last Supper. Jesus washed his disciples’ feet. When we receive the Eucharist, we become more and more like Jesus. The Eucharist calls us to serve one another, just as Jesus did.

***You are what you eat.*** What is better food than the Eucharist?

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim