

**Homily for Corpus Christi Mass and Procession
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

June 19, 2022

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My dear priests, deacons, and brothers and sisters in Christ:

For Jesus, meals were very significant. There are many occasions in the Gospels where we see Jesus involved in sharing food and drink with His friends or with people in general. He uses those occasions – right up to and including the Last Supper – for much of His teaching. Today’s Gospel (Luke 9:11b–17) recounts an occasion when Jesus fed a huge crowd of over five thousand people with a few loaves and fishes, and all had enough and more to eat; there were no fewer than twelve baskets of leftovers, a sign of the abundance of God’s generosity.

It was not simply the miracle that filled people with astonishment, but what it pointed to: before the feeding, Jesus had been healing sick people and teaching about the kingdom of God. The healing, teaching, and feeding together were an expression of God’s care for the whole person, body and soul.

On the night before Jesus died, as today's second reading reminds us, Jesus instituted the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:23–26). He gave us the Mass and Holy Communion. The central act of Christian worship for all time would be in the form of a sacred meal, a banquet where his followers would be nourished on His own Body and Blood; and that meal would itself be a foreshadowing of the banquet of heaven.

In today's Gospel, Saint Luke shows the close connection between the feeding of the crowds and the Eucharist by the way he tells the story: he describes how Jesus took the loaves, blessed them, broke them, and gave them to the people. These four actions — taking, blessing, breaking, and giving — are precisely the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper, and of course they are the actions that we witness and participate in at every Mass. In fact, you could say that they provide a brief description of the Mass.

In the very first book of the Bible, in the Book of Genesis (Gn 14:18–20), we hear how God is preparing for this great gift. The figure of Melchizedek mysteriously enters the scene and appears to Abram, whose name would be changed by God to Abraham. The priest Melchizedek, who is also king of Salem, brings out bread and wine to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving. He and

the other kings in the area are grateful to God and to Abraham for delivering them from the clutches of an oppressive king and his allies. The attacking king wanted to punish Melchizedek and the other local kings for seeking independence from him. That king succeeded in capturing a number of cities, including Sodom, where Abraham's nephew Lot resided. Lot was now a captive.

When Abraham got word of Lot's capture, he assembled a small force and with God's help pushed the attackers out of the territory. Abraham recovered all that had been taken by them. He also recovered Lot and all his possessions. What is fascinating is that, although Abraham is not a king, he was able to defeat a coalition of kings that threatened all the other kings in his area. Abraham accomplished this because of an oath he took as a loyal servant of the Lord God. Abraham is clearly the dominant leader in this account because he relies on God. He is also generous and offers Melchizedek a tenth of all that he has recovered.

This episode, seemingly small, is extremely important. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains its significance in this way:

The Christian tradition considers Melchizedek, “priest of God Most High,” as a prefiguration of the priesthood of Christ, the unique “high priest after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 5:10; cf. 6:20; Gen 14:18) “holy, blameless, unstained,” (Heb 7:26) “by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified,” (Heb 10:14) that is, by the unique sacrifice of the cross.¹

The scene mentions that Melchizedek offered bread and wine. Bread and wine were traditionally used in Old Testament sacrifices. These two elements were mentioned later in the Book of Exodus in connection with the Passover which was at the heart of the identity of the Jewish people. Jesus takes these elements of bread and wine and gives them a new and definitive meaning by uniting them to the New Passover event of His death on the Cross to free us from the slavery of sin and to lead us to the new Promised Land of Heaven.

Notice also that Abraham gives Melchizedek a tenth of all that he has recovered as a gift to God in gratitude for all that God had given to him. This is the first example in the Bible of the practice that has come to be known as tithing, or giving ten percent of one’s income to the Church as a gift to God.

There is much that we can learn from this account. First, we should note that the ten-percent tithe is given after the battle, not before. This is significant in that the offering is not made in supplication as a plea for God to grant the favor of a successful outcome in battle. Rather, the offering is made in gratitude for the victory having already been achieved.

Second, the offering is not made in response to a request from Melchizedek to satisfy some financial need. Melchizedek, for example, did not ask for a donation to pay for repairs for a leaky temple roof. Nor did Abram ask what Melchizedek intended to do with his gift. That is in contrast to our present reality where so much of charitable giving today is based on responding to a demonstrated need. Fundraisers write “case statements” to explain their need for funds and often donors want to know precisely how their money will be used before contributing. While the desire to know how the money will be spent is understandable, this approach can also diminish the donor’s sense of sacrificial giving in its truest sense.

In this regard, a study by the University of Notre Dame’s Catholic Social and Pastoral Research Initiative found that Catholics are more likely “to focus on giving as ‘paying the bills’ rather than ‘living the vision’ when

thinking about money.”² As a result, the report showed that, on average, “Catholics are less generous in voluntary financial giving than other Christian groups in the United States.”³ In response to this reality, the study suggests that what is needed is “fostering parish cultures in which the use of money is not seen as a mere secular or profane matter, but, as the Bible teaches, a spiritual concern that God cares about, that shapes one’s personal spiritual life profoundly, and that can genuinely help transform the world along Christian values and purposes.”⁴

At the end of this Mass, we will carry the Blessed Sacrament in procession outside the Cathedral as we celebrate the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, traditionally known by its name in Latin, *Corpus Christi*. This year’s celebration of *Corpus Christi* will mark the opening of the three-year Eucharistic Revival announced by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The mission of the Eucharistic Revival is “to renew the Church by enkindling a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist.”

The focus of the first year of the Eucharistic Revival will be on Diocesan Revival. Here in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, we will observe a Year of the Eucharist, beginning on December 8, 2022, and ending on December 8, 2023. The highlight of our diocesan Year of the Eucharist will be our Centennial Celebration on October 28, 2023, marking one hundred years since the translation of our Diocesan See from Alton to Springfield. This Centennial celebration will be held at the Bank of Springfield Center in Springfield, which holds 7,000 people. Our featured speakers, who will address the relationship of the Eucharist in the life of Christian discipleship, will be Dr. Scott Hahn, Professor of Biblical Theology and the New Evangelization at the Franciscan University of Steubenville in Steubenville, Ohio, and Bishop Robert Barron, founder of the global media ministry Word on Fire, who recently was appointed as the new Bishop of Winona-Rochester in Minnesota.

The second phase of the Eucharistic Revival, through June 2024, will foster eucharistic devotion at the parish level, strengthening our liturgical life through eucharistic adoration, missions, resources, preaching, and movements of the Holy Spirit. These local efforts will be designed to help

convert hearts and minds to fall more deeply in love with Jesus Christ, truly present in the Holy Eucharist.

The third phase of the Eucharistic Revival will be the National Eucharistic Congress, to be held in Indianapolis from July 17 to 21, 2024. At this historic event, more than 80,000 Catholics of all ages from every diocese in the United States are expected to gather in Indianapolis to worship our Risen Lord in the mystery of the Eucharist. Then, the Year of Going Out On Mission will take place from July 21, 2024, through Pentecost of 2025. We pray that the Holy Spirit will enkindle a missionary fire in the heart of our nation as we reconsecrate ourselves to the source and summit of our faith.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

+ Thomas John Paprocki

¹ CCC, §1544.

² Brian Starks and Christian Smith, *Unleashing Catholic Generosity: Explaining the Catholic Giving Gap in the United States* (University of Notre Dame: Institute for Church Life, 2011), p. 5.

³ Brian Starks and Christian Smith, *Unleashing Catholic Generosity*, p. 1.

⁴ Brian Starks and Christian Smith, *Unleashing Catholic Generosity*, p. 27.