

The Rev. Daren J. Zehnle
St. Joseph Church, Island Grove, Illinois
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The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King (A)
[Benediction]

How very fitting it is that we gather here this evening in this church to adore our Lord Jesus Christ the King. We have come, as it were, into the great hall and throne room of the King of Heaven and Earth. Here we kneel down before him present in the Blessed Sacrament and we pay our homage and listen to his commands.

Our lives are marked with many days of blessed festivity such as today but we also know that this pilgrimage of earthly life is no easy journey particularly because we seek to follow "the way, the truth, and the life" (). As those who take up the name "Christian" we must also take up the cross as did our Lord for he says, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Following after Christ Jesus is no easy venture; it is filled with joy and sadness, success and failure, but we know that the ultimate victory is his so we come after him with confidence, but we are not strong enough on our own.

As we carry the cross, willingly or no, there are times when it feels that the Lord has abandoned us. Try as we might there are moments when we cannot sense the presence of God in

our lives and it seems that we have been left alone and forsaken by God. The Israelites felt this way as they wandered through the wilderness and so they complained to Moses. Moses went to the Lord who then gave the people water from the rock and manna from heaven as their food and drink. Moses reminded the people that God had always been with them:

"Do not forget the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery; who guided you through the vast and terrible desert with its seraph serpents and scorpions, its parched and waterless ground; who brought forth water for you from the flinty rock and fed you in the desert with manna, a food unknown to your fathers" (Deuteronomy 8:14-16).

This manna was a sign for the people that God was with them even and especially in their struggles and adversities; that he had not left them alone. God himself fed them and sustained them on their journey and gave them the strength they needed from him because they were not strong enough on their own. But as wondrous as this bread was they "ate and still died" (John 6:49). This bread, this manna, could not give them the life and peace we seek.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus felt this alone-ness as well, as though God had orphaned them. Without knowing it, they pleaded with the Lord, with the one with whom they had walked, urging him, "Stay with us" (Luke 24:29). He does stay with them, and "in the breaking of the bread" they realize the presence of Jesus in their midst (Luke 24:). Through his gift

of his Body and Blood Jesus remains with his disciples who cannot live without him or possibly make the journey.

Who among us has not uttered these simple and heart-wrenching words: "Stay with us, Lord"? We cry out and beg him to stay with us because we cannot bear to be left alone, we cannot live without the presence of our King, we cannot live abandoned and orphaned. St. Augustine said it so well: "Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they rest in you." We search and we grope for life, for peace, for meaning, and we are ill at ease until we find the Lord and stay with him. Unless we "seek the Lord" all of our searching will be in vain and our loneliness and heartache will only increase. We are made by the Lord, we are made for him and until we rest in him we will never rest securely. The King who gave his life for us hears our prayers and our cries and answers us in our distress. In their confusion, he says to the Apostles, "This is my Body", "This is my blood", and "Do this in memory of me."

Through the Holy Eucharist the Lord remains with us and gives us access to his throne of grace; he is near to us and is in our midst. Never is he absent! He has not abandoned us or left us orphaned! He is always present to sustain us, to comfort us, to strengthen us! The bread and wine are transformed into the very Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord Christ the King that we might receive him, that he

might be near to us, and so that we might "live forever" in him (John 6:58).

Through our sharing in the Eucharist, and by living a life worthy of so great and marvelous a gift, we receive the pledge of the everlasting life of heaven. We will be in the presence of God forever, standing around his throne in humble and joyful adoration and praise. Stay with us, Lord! In gazing up in wonder on the one who created us, all of our deepest desires and longings shall be fulfilled and we shall forever be at peace. In the Eucharistic liturgy we stand already in the great hall of heaven before the throne of God. The great King of all the earth descends from his throne and enters into us through the Body and Blood of Christ. St. Francis of Assisi reminds us:

See, daily He humbles Himself as when He came from the royal throne into the womb of the Virgin; daily He comes to us in a humble form; daily He comes down from the bosom of the Father upon the altar in the hands of the priest. And as He appeared to the holy apostles in true flesh, so now He reveals Himself to us in the sacred bread. And as they saw only His flesh by means of their bodily sight, yet believed Him to be God as they contemplated Him with the eyes of faith, so, as we see bread and wine with [our] bodily eyes, we too are to see and firmly believe them to be His most holy Body and Blood living and true.¹

Christ calls us to form one body with he himself as our head and it is the Eucharist which forms us into one body and which is the ultimate sign of our unity. Through his Body and Blood he forms us into himself so that it is no longer we who

¹ St. Francis of Assisi, *The Admonitions* 1.16-21.

live but Christ who lives in us. In Baptism we are configured to Christ and we promise to grow in union with him and in the Eucharist this union is fostered and strengthened.

Having become members of the Body of Christ, Jesus is present with us in a most intimate and miraculous fashion. We take him into ourselves and he transforms not himself into us but rather he changes us into him; we become his Mystical Body and are united to him. As we eat his Body and drink his Blood we truly can rest in him for he is closer to us than we know. He is always present to us because we have become his Body; we are truly united with him. "Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they rest in you." "Stay with us, Lord!"

Because our King is with us, let us follow after St. Anthony of Padua who urges us, "Let us adore him whom the archangels adore. Let us serve him whom the angels serve, who is blessed, glorious, and to be praised, most high for ever and ever. And let every creature say: Amen!" (First Sunday of Lent 1.4).