

The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ – Year A

Last week 22 year old parishioner Julie Pegher addressed our newly formed Women's Group and spoke about her deployment in Iraq. Julie is a mechanic in an army reserve unit out of New Kensington. Julie had much to say about her experience. One of her more compelling comments came when she spoke about being away from the comforts of home. She said, "I hope I never forget my time there because it made me appreciate my family and friends so much."

On this Memorial Day weekend we salute all of our military personnel, those who throughout the years made it home and those who did not. As Americans we enjoy our freedom today because of people like Julie – and countless men and women who took risks, left home, and put their lives on hold. May God bless these men and women. May he lay his outstretched arm on all of our military personnel and may God bless America. Remember, there is no Mass here tomorrow. Mass will be at 9:00 AM at St. Susanna and St. Joseph. I will participate in the memorial prayer service at Mt. Carmel cemetery at 9:30 AM. And don't forget about the parade which begins in our parking lot at 11:30 AM. I invite you to come and watch, the Church will be open for your convenience.

Anyone who has ever lived abroad can identify with the sentiment of Julie who said, "I hope I never forget my time in Iraq because it made me appreciate my family and friends so much."

For four years I lived and studied in the eternal city of Rome. While that experience provided a host of opportunities it also contained its share of heartache and homesickness. I, too, see my family and friends through a different lens and I see my country with so much more respect. In my mind of memories I often think back to the four thanksgivings I celebrated in Italy. In Italy, it was just another day, but all of us Americans came together and did our best to keep the spirit of the pilgrims alive by gathering around the table with all of the trimmings and giving thanks.

Today we celebrate the solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ. As Catholics we celebrate our thanksgiving and keep alive in a special way the spirit of the Last Supper when Jesus took bread and wine and said, "This is my Body. This is my Blood."

Jesus speaks about this profound mystery in today's Gospel. He says, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him on the last day. 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."

The Eucharist – the Body and Blood of Jesus is real food and real drink. And if we want to have life and live forever it must be a part of our diet.

Sadly, however, this divine food is not part of everyone's diet for at least two reasons. First, there are people who simply, for whatever reason, choose not to take and eat week in and week end. Many of these people do not even come to Church. This is a significant number. Research indicates that more than half, in some cases two-thirds of Church members do not go to Church. It would seem by this absence that there are more important places to be. And yet, of all the things we do, and of all the places we go, what can be more important than receiving our Lord, the bread of life? The Church acknowledges this importance when she states in the introduction to the Sacramentary, "Sunday is to the week what Easter is to the year." Every Sunday, then, is a little Easter, that reminds us of Christ's victory over death. Sunday also brings to mind that famous encounter on the road to Emmaus that the two disciples had with a stranger. They said, "Stay with us." This stranger went into their home and broke bread with them, and their eyes were opened, and they saw it was the Lord. Every Sunday, then, our eyes are opened and we

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see not only the Risen Lord, but also we begin to understand the deepest mysteries and quandaries of our lives.

The second reason why the Eucharist is not part of everyone's diet is because in some parts of the world there are no priests. An increasing decline in vocation has brought about more and more priestless parishes. While we have not reached that point yet in our Diocese, it is on the horizon. In this week's Pittsburgh Catholic, amid the listing of transfers there is a new trend developing, namely priests administering more than one parish. This provision is being made of course so that the Eucharist can be made available to all. For Jesus said, "Take this, all of you, and eat."

Today we need to pray for our brothers and sisters who, for whatever reason, disregard the Eucharist. We need to go forth and be Eucharist to them. We also need to pray for our priests who are taking on increasing responsibilities. And we need to pray for more vocations to the priesthood. The implications of the priest shortage are scary, because without the priest there can be no Eucharist.

You know in life it is so easy to take people and things that are always there for granted. It's not until they are taken away from us, or we are taken away from them that we appreciate their value and worth. That's why Julie's words are so poignant. "I do not want to forget my time in Iraq because it made me appreciate my family and friends so much."

The last thing Jesus said at the table was, "Do this in memory of me." Essentially, he was saying, "Do not forget me or the magnitude of my presence in the Eucharist." Even Moses said, as evidenced in today's first reading, "Do not forget the Lord your God...."

So today on this sacred feast as we receive the Body and Blood and say "Amen" let us never forget that Jesus' flesh is real food and his blood is real drink.