

This week I had a solemn but beautiful opportunity to participate in the funeral of my brother priest, Fr. Victor. One of the things that I had the honor of doing was helping to get Fr. Victor vested for his calling hours. I say 'vested' rather than just 'dressed' because it is traditional for a priest to be clothed in the vestments he wears for Mass when he is buried. And I'm sure those of you that attended the calling hours noticed that Fr. Victor was wearing a similar set of vestments to what I am wearing right now, except white colored.

Along with Matt Miller, we carefully clothed Fr. Victor's body in all of the vestments that he wore Sunday after Sunday as he celebrated Mass with all of you. We started with his white alb over top of his cassock, then moved onto the cincture, the cord which we use as a belt, then the stole, the symbol of his priestly authority, and over top of all of those, the chasuble, the outer garment which is a symbol of love, which is to be put on over all other things, as St. Paul reminds us. Each of those vestments has a special prayer that is said while the priest vests before Mass, and as we clothed him, I said each of those prayers silently.

So as we laid Fr. Victor to rest this weekend, he was in his work clothes. "Those are pretty fancy work clothes," you might be thinking. And you're right. We get laden down with a lot of special clothing for Mass to hide, in a sense, our individual personality. Because, at the end of the day, the Mass isn't about me or Fr. Victor or any other priest's personality. Above all, we are vested in order to let Jesus be the one who works through us Sunday after Sunday and day after day. To emphasize Jesus' goodness and His great dignity, we wear these special vestments. One day, God willing a long time from now, I will be buried in my work clothes as well.

We are buried in those vestments in which we celebrate Mass as a reminder of the centrality of the Eucharist to our priesthood. Fr. Victor did much work to beautify this church and serve this community, but ultimately, there was nothing more important than what He did day after day at this altar. Similarly, I am with you and ready to roll up my sleeves and do much work with all of you in this parish family, but ultimately all of what the Lord

wants to do in and through us comes back to the altar, to where we are fed with Jesus Himself.

The readings for this Sunday remind us of this fact in a forceful way. What we have been hearing the last few Sundays all leads up to what we will now be praying with for the next few Sundays: the teaching of Jesus called the Bread of Life Discourse. In this beautiful teaching from the sixth chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus reminds us of the centrality of the Eucharist, the true bread from Heaven that feeds our deepest hunger and satisfies our deepest thirst.

Jesus is preaching to these crowds who just saw him perform the great miracle of multiplication which we heard about last Sunday. They knew that Jesus was able to miraculously provide bread to feed thousands. They had just eaten from five loaves and two fish! So all of them had Moses on their minds, because through Moses God provided the Hebrew people with daily bread throughout their forty years in the desert. We heard this in the first reading. God made sure that they had food to sustain them during their time of trial in the desert. He called on them to trust that He would give them what they needed every day for their journey. God said, "Each day the people are to go out and gather their daily portion; thus will I test them, to see whether they follow my instructions or not." And each day God provided, true to his promise.

So Jesus' miracle of multiplying bread has got the crowd thinking that He will be provide daily bread like Moses did in the desert. They tell Him, "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: He gave them bread from heaven to eat." It's as though they're saying, "Moses sought God and He provided food for forty years, what can you do for us?" They are unaware that the Person standing before them is the New Moses, one who is going to provide them daily bread more wonderful than they could have possibly imagined. So Jesus, the New Moses, begins to teach them about this new Bread.

First, he reminds them that his miracle of multiplication was a sign of something deeper, a food which will satisfy much more than their bodily hunger: “Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” So Jesus is pointing to a new type of food, one which feeds our souls, which “endures to eternal life.” The food Jesus wants to give is about the fullness of life which we are all called to share beyond the veil of death. The food Jesus died to give the Church was that Food which would give them everything their souls most deeply desired, the life of God Himself, given for us!

We are all tempted in the same way as these crowds. Part of us just wants Jesus to satisfy all of our earthly desires, but there is something much deeper that Jesus has for us. Jesus says to all of us: “Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Jesus is pointing them and us to the fact that the new bread from Heaven isn’t just any food, it is Him!

These crowds didn’t realize it, but Jesus was preparing them to recognize that He is God with us, and that He comes to feed us in the depths of our souls with a new bread which contains the fullness of who He is. This has been the faith of the Church for almost two thousand years: that our most precious gift in the Church is Jesus Himself in the Eucharist! He tells us clearly: “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.”

Brothers and sisters, you and I are called to live by these words. We are called to put our trust in Jesus and this most precious food that He gives all of us at every Mass. In the Eucharist, we receive the One who came down from Heaven, died for all of our sins, and is now gloriously risen and alive! We are called to be continually nourished by God Himself! When we come to Jesus with open hearts in the Eucharist, He will give our hearts all we desire: “whoever comes to me will never hunger.” At every Mass, when we bring all of the thirst that we have for love, if we approach Jesus with faith, we will have this thirst quenched: “Whoever believes in me will never thirst.”

The Church calls the Eucharist the Source and the Summit of our faith, and rightly so. There is nothing more precious that God has given us than He who we receive from this altar. All we hunger and thirst for in the depths of our being is fully satisfied right here. The Eucharist is the Source: all that we do in our lives is called to be fueled by God Himself. He gives us everything we need to live and love well when we feed on Him here. Jesus in the Eucharist is the Summit. Each time we approach this sacred altar, we approach to share in the life of God Himself! We call receiving the Eucharist 'communion' because it is a profound moment of unity with the God who made us, redeemed us and calls us to greatness. Here, we bring all that has happened in our lives, the joys and the sufferings, the good that we have done and the sorrow we have for our sins and we give it to God, resting in His embrace. There is no higher moment of communion than this! This is the summit for our hearts.

It is my privilege to feed you with Jesus in the Eucharist. The reason I am a priest is because of Jesus in the Eucharist, the bread of life. As excited as I am for what God has in store for all of us, there is nothing more important in my priesthood than what I celebrate with all of you here at every Mass. I pray that we each live our lives from the Source of Jesus, the bread of life, in the Eucharist, and that the Summit of our lives is found in communion with the Bread of Life here at Mass.

*+ Heavenly Father, thank you for sending us Jesus, the Bread of Life who we receive in the Eucharist. Jesus, thank you for Your generosity in giving us Yourself in the Eucharist to satisfy our deepest hunger and thirst. Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with a deeper longing for the Eucharist so that we might come to Mass often to Feed on Jesus, the Bread of Life. We ask this through Christ, Our Lord. Amen. +*