

Homily for May 21, 2000
Fifth Sunday of Easter Cycle B

By Father Charles Bowes

Acts 9:23-31
1 John 3:18-24
John 15:1-8

The money we collect, like the bread and the wine, are further signs that we are one with each other and rooted in the vine, Jesus Christ.

So we've gathered; we've spent time becoming a body, more than individuals, by entering, singing, praying and listening, really listening, to our book.

In just a few minutes bread and wine will be brought forward – such simple things, food and drink, associated with the tables of ordinary people. They are “fruit of the earth” and “work of human hands” and placed on the table in our midst. At the same time, the “work of human hands” is seen in the money that is collected, money or other gifts that are explicitly called “for the church and the poor.” Money could be collected in other ways and at other times; this is after all the age of credit cards. Why here and now? Because the money and the bread and wine are bound together. We are about to surround a single table and make a single prayer and eat of one bread and drink of one cup. Part of our preparation for this seems to be this gesture of pooling our resources, putting into one basket some of the money we have earned or received. And folks, I need to tell you that we are facing a serious deficit in our operating budget, unless we increase our weekly collection by 5%!

If I currently give twenty dollars per week, a weekly increase of 5% would mean a dollar more. This might not sound like much, but for folks on fixed incomes and all of us facing tax burdens and increased fuel prices, it can be a hit. We face a better than 31 thousand dollar deficit this year, and that will jump to nearly 40 thousand next year and close to 50 thousand the year after that. Most of our expenses are in salaries and benefits – so if the money is not there, it would mean the loss of jobs and the services those jobs provide. The paper in your pew illustrates what we face.

We get ready for Eucharist by setting a table with bread and wine, but even more by showing some important things in this collection of money. One is that we are bound to one another – thus some of our contribution is for the work of the church – it pays for all sorts of things – our school and parish maintenance, our electric bills, our insurance and payroll. Sure, these aren't dramatic, but without a 5% increase weekly, we can't keep up the service.

Our second thing we show with this money is that this bond is not selfish but is for the life of the world. Thus some of our money is for the poor – we tithe about 9% of our parish income to all sorts of things: our Saint Vincent de Paul Society helps

hundreds in need with food, clothing and shelter. We house the homeless here regularly to help them get on their feet through the Interfaith Hospitality Network. We reach out to the neighborhoods by regular visits to bring the Good News of God's love in Jesus, but also to identify and help those in need. If we can't meet our budget, we can't keep up the service.

And the third thing we show with our money is that what we do here together is bound to all the business and commerce and give and take of everyday life. Bread and wine show that, but perhaps money shows it even more clearly.

As a young priest I learned what it meant to be one at Eucharist in the preparation of the gifts. "Charlie, I need you to ask the folks to increase their weekly offering so we can pay our bills," my first pastor told me. Suddenly I found myself standing before hundreds of folks, and I realized I hadn't been contributing to the parish. After all, I worked there...I got a paycheck. Sure, I gave to charity, but it was to everything but the parish. So right then and there I realized that if I was to be one with that community and we were to be together at the table of one bread and one cup, my cash had to be in that basket, too...and ever since I've put an envelope in the collection, too.

In a few minutes our First Communion folks will bring the gifts of bread and wine...and money. And an adult will accompany them - after all, we're all one at the table; all have a stake in the Body of Christ. It's an adult enterprise in which we are engaged, and we hand this on to our children and they to theirs. I'm making this appeal for increased parish support within the context of Easter preaching, that of instructing our new Catholics about what we do here and of reminding us all of the consequences of God's choice of us in this religious faith. If we don't reach

our needed increase, our Finance Commission and Parish Council will return in the fall with a more intense appeal. Members of our Finance Commission are in the back of church, if you have questions. Truly we are connected to the one vine we call Jesus Christ. Our bread and wine and money signal the unity we share here and in this enterprise of church.

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