

**Homily for June 11, 2000  
Solemnity of Pentecost Cycle B**

**By Father Charles Bowes**

**Acts 2:1-11  
1 Corinthians 12-3b, 12-13  
John 20:19-23**

## *We become what we receive in Holy Communion in order to share that with the world.*

Every Sunday we celebrate – this church celebrates – the Eucharist. We gather, we read the scriptures together, we make prayers of intercession, then we gather gifts for the poor and the church and prepare the table with our bread and wine. Around the table, we join in speaking and singing thanksgiving for all God's gifts, all gifts gathered in the body of Christ given for us, the blood of Christ that is shed for the forgiveness of sins. To all of this we give our firm assent, our "amen." The presider concludes, "All glory and honor are yours...forever and ever." Amen! The Eucharistic prayer depends on and ends with this amen. We say amen. To say amen is our duty and our right, as this people who died in baptism and live now in Christ. It is our right; it is our duty.

So that we are ready for that part of the liturgy we call communion, Holy Communion, after that amen, we pray the dearest, hardest prayer we know, the Lord's Prayer. This prayer rightly comes in many places in our lives. It is a morning and night prayer for many. It is a prayer at bedside and at graveside. Here it is a communion prayer. Recited or sung, it is everyone's prayer, the words we all own. And still they are the words that we never will own. What can it mean to pray that God's name be hallowed, be holy? What kind of courage and longing does it take to pray that God's will be done? Isn't it dangerous – scary maybe?

In the Eucharistic prayer, the assembly and the presider pray in a sort of dialog; the affirmations and acclamations of the people flow back and forth with the words spoken by the presider. But when we come to the Lord's Prayer, we take the leading role ourselves, we the assembly, the people. We pray the Lord's Prayer together, then exchange the greeting of peace, and go on to the Lamb of God litany. All – Lord's Prayer, peace greeting, Lamb of God – all take us to the communion procession itself.

What sort of moment is the peace greeting? Why, after being together all this time, would we turn to one another and embrace

or shake hands? Perhaps it is that moments before we share the bread and wine, we give a sign for what the communion means. We turn to one and all alike and say, "Peace," or "Christ's peace." On the Solemnity of Pentecost these words have special significance because they represent the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to his disciples before his death... "Peace is my farewell to you," he said. Now on the day of resurrection he proclaims the reality that it is indeed the case: "Peace be with you," he said. The communion means no walls. It means no first place and last place but all in the same place. It means today is God's reign, some little bit of it, here among us. This goes beyond the hospitality we extend to one another on arriving for the liturgy or when we begin the Mass. It is caught up in this word "peace," the greeting spoken by the risen Lord to the disciples. To say "peace" and to clasp hands or to embrace others is physically laying down whatever keeps us from communion with one another. Some of the people near us may be family, some may be friends, and some will be strangers; we have the same word, the same gaze and unity, with all.

When we have extended this peace to one another, we slowly focus back toward the table. There, our ministers of communion have gathered with the presider, ready to prepare this tiny meal we call a banquet. The presider takes up the bread and breaks it for all to see. This simple gesture is, in a sense, only doing what must be done so the bread can be shared with all present. But it is the single act that the early Christians fastened on; the name they gave to their Sunday assemblies was, "the breaking of the bread." That act of taking a large piece of bread or loaf of bread and breaking it into pieces caught the essence of their gathering. Here was the one and the many; here was Christ of whom they were all members.

As the bread is broken and divided into serving dishes and as the wine is poured into cups, we sing a litany. The first words

are “Lamb of God,” and the response sung by all is “have mercy on us.” The communion procession itself may begin during this litany, this breaking of the bread.

When all is ready for the communion, the final words we sing are, “grant us peace,” and immediately the one presiding invites all to the table with these words: “This is the Lamb of God.” And we say, “Lord, I am not worthy.” And we are not. No one is. But that is exactly why we so need to come forward to eat and to drink the body and blood of Christ.

Do you see how it all depends on us, on all who gather in this room, and not simply on the priest? The priest is our leader of prayer and our servant. We are the ones who must do these rites of Lord’s Prayer and peace, Lamb of God and now communion. There is no audience. None. All are partakers because it is the loving deed of the church that gets done here, and no other. And it is this deed which empowers us to go forth and be Jesus to the world.

And so we come forward. We who are hungry and thirsty come forward to the table. We fast before Mass because to be here at all is to be hungry and thirsty in our hearts and minds and even our bodies. This procession that we make is not like going to the bank or the supermarket. At those places we just line up. But here, this is a procession. It is procession to a common meal of a common people on the earthy food of bread and the earthy drink of wine become for us the body and blood of Christ our Lord. It is a procession, and it is to look and move and feel like a procession. That is why we sing through this time. We don’t sing just to have something to do or to fill time. It is the music of moving as one, as the Church...the music, as does silence, unites us.

When we stand one by one before the minister and hear the words, “the Body of Christ,” “the Blood of Christ,” we have to know what Augustine told his congregation hundreds of years ago. He said, “It is your own mystery that you receive. Say amen to what you are!” Say amen to what you are: the Body of Christ. The Blood of Christ. Come with hands extended, look at the communion minister as she or he looks at you and says, “The Body of Christ,” “The Blood of Christ.” Say amen, yes, this – this bread, this person, this people: the body of Christ. Amen.

Jesus said, “Take and eat, all of you.” Jesus said, “Take and drink, all of you.” So we do that. The cup is not an extra for those who like extras. It is what Jesus told us to do. Take the cup in your hands and drink from it. It is the taste of the heavenly banquet. It is Jesus there for our every thirst. If I am disconnected from my child or friend, physically or emotionally, I thirst. If I am in grief or full of cares, I thirst. If I have failed at work or if my work goes unrecognized, I thirst. If I am one with the struggling and suffering

world, I must thirst. We are a thirsty church and this is Jesus, this cup of the covenant, Jesus for whom we thirst. And this cup is also to be our bond of delight in this church and world that are so often not delightful at all.

All through the communion of this church, all through it, let our prayer be the singing of the church; let our posture be attentive and alive. And when the great procession is over, then there can be a great silence, a needed time for contemplation of this wonder. In silence, too, we are in communion, united as we were in song. We ponder together that there is indeed food for our hunger and there is indeed drink for our thirst.

So this time together, after the liturgy of the word, is a lot like a meal where we meet around a table, give thanks for all God’s goodness, and have our hunger and thirst satisfied for the moment. It is a hunger not only of the body but also for communion with each other. We need to know such meals in our daily life so that we might know the renewal and refreshment and the sacrifice, too, the all-embracing sacrifice, of this Sunday meal as the church.

A quiet prayer concludes our communion. Then we hear the “announcements,” which are the business of this community. We share the blessing, say, “thanks be to God,” as words of departure, and, on most occasions, join in song as we prepare to take leave of one another.

To have a liturgy that lets us pour out our whole lives as Christians and that gives us strength and challenge to live all the hours of the week as Christians, we who are this assembly, we the people who surround the book and who surround the table, ourselves take on the hard work that is the church’s – to be the Body of Christ, the Blood of Christ, the bread that is broken for the life of the world. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” says Jesus in John 20. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit whose sins you forgive are forgiven...whose sins you retain are retained.” You and I are called to bear witness in the Spirit to the word, which speaks eternally. The task of confronting people with the Word, provoking faith or rejection, now falls to you and to me – to all who participate in the Eucharistic celebration. Thus, not only are we confronted today by the Word, we are called to receive the very task of the Word. The Spirit of Pentecost still comes in flesh and blood, not just through Jesus, but now through us, and we are called today, through our lives, to speak the word of peace to others.

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