

JMJ CHS

As you all know, there are several reasons why we come to Mass here Sunday after Sunday, month after month, year after year throughout our lives. And for some, you come here daily as well. But basically, you want to be fed. The very first way you want to be fed is with the spiritual food we call Eucharist. Holy communion; 'The Living Bread come down from heaven'. You recall John Chapter 6 and the wise but controversial words uttered by Jesus, "*Whoever eats this bread will live forever. And the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.*" And you know the words of Jesus at the Last Supper – we say them at every Mass "*This is My body, and this is My blood.*" And finally, the greatest command, "*Do this in memory of me.*" You believe in this, and so you come to Mass, Sunday after Sunday, in obedience to these words.

But you also want to be fed by the Word of God. The Church offers several readings from the Bible, Old and New Testament, plus the prayers of the Mass, and even the songs we sing. All are meant to be a '*lamp for our feet*', and '*a light for our path*' to guide us in the ways of righteousness; to show us how we are to conduct ourselves in this world so as to make this world a better place where people can get along, but also to get us, our families and our friends to heaven and eternal life.

But I also know that you are all looking forward to a good homily as well. One that won't put you to sleep, but will provide you with some food for thought that you can sink your teeth into. Something that you can take home with you and to think about, meditate on and perhaps to change your life.

But families are there to help interpret the readings, deepen our understanding of the truth, and inspire us to ... '*Be calm, and carry on*'. Yes, in this life we are all in the midst of a storm and we could use a little help to get us from one week to the next; to help us.... keep the faith.

In today's Gospel we have an interaction between a scholar of the law and the Master and, by default, we necessarily have to take the part of the scholar. And, as the text points out, he's got an agenda. He is subtly wrestling with Jesus. It says in the first line that he intends to test the teacher and so he asks the big question; "*Master, what do I have to do to gain eternal life.*" Of course Jesus knows the man's heart and so he turns the question back on him. "*What does the law say? How do you interpret it?*" The man says, basically, love God and love your neighbor. And Jesus commends the man for getting it right.

But then, with a little sarcasm in his voice(?), the scholar asks, "*And who is my neighbor?*" This is where Jesus launches into one of his most famous stories, the parable of the *Good Samaritan*. Now we know the story and we know that the point is that everybody is our neighbor, so we probably don't need to go back over that lesson again. But how about if we were to examine ourselves in relation to the scholar. In what ways are we like him? I mean, don't we, too, wrestle with God? Don't we try to justify ourselves like the scholar? Don't we look for loopholes? If we're honest, the answer would have to be yes to at least some of these questions. Maybe some examples would be helpful.

One of the ways I think that we do a lot of wrestling with God is when we are addicted to something. Now there's all kinds of addictions. Topping the list will naturally be drugs and alcohol, but there are also lesser gods, like coffee, candy, YouTube, video games, sports.....and even people. Yes, I've heard addictions referred to as 'love affairs'. And for anybody who has

ever struggled with an addiction, you would probably have to agree with that comparison. Our addictions can literally consume our thoughts.

In our mysterious relationship with that “thing”, even if it’s a person, it’s very mysterious. The conversation that goes on in our heads and our hearts can be confusing, convoluted, circular. It’s like two voices which are arguing; the scholar and the master; the demon and the angel; error and truth; relativism and reason; nonsense and common sense. You want to listen to the good voice but the bad voice can often be quite loud and persistent. Who wins in the end? Well, Jesus warned us about ourselves when he said, “*The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*”

Our first reading from Deuteronomy offers some assistance whenever we find ourselves ‘wrestling’ with God. He speaks to us through Moses, and sounds like he’s reasoning with us. It’s like he’s telling us “Come on guys. This is not that deep. Not that mysterious. This is not too remote for you. It’s not up in the sky or across the sea. You know the rules. You know what the truth is. It’s very near you. It’s already in your mouth and in your heart. Just do it!” Just obey my commandments, and you will live. Yes, love God and love your neighbor. But Jesus also says elsewhere , “*If you love me, you will keep my Commandments*”.

To return to the beginning, yes, we come to this Mass today for many different reasons, but there’s still one that’s the very best reason of all, and it’s there in our readings today. The best reason to come to Mass is because we love God. To love God with our whole mind, our whole soul, and all of our strength.

But before I close, I feel obliged to add a little addenda to this homily. This is based on something I saw on YouTube the other day from an insider priest who said that another reason for coming to Mass is actually the most important reason. But his claim is that it’s been suppressed. And that it is truly the main reason we came to Mass today, and that is to offer a sacrifice. The meal part, Holy Communion, has been emphasized but the sacrifice part is frequently not mentioned or taught.

You have heard me say many times that the basic definition of a priest is one who offers sacrifice. At the Passover Meal that Jews were commanded to celebrate throughout the ages, the centerpiece, the sacrificing of a lamb, and the eating of its flesh. At the last supper Jesus changed that. The little lamb has been replaced by a human being, Jesus. And at this and every Mass we replicate, re-present and continue what took place at the Last Supper. And so that is what we come here for. Yes, we will be fed with the Eucharist, and the Word of God and hopefully, a good homily, but we are also going to offer to God the sacrifice of Calvary. We offer to the Father his own spotless Lamb. The Lamb of God.

~Fr. John