

Holy Thursday
4.2.26

Long before he made his appearance in the movies, Spider Man debuted as a comic book. That's where I first learned of him in the 1960's. The legend goes something like this: a smart, scientifically curious young man is bitten by a radioactive spider. From that, Peter Parker is transformed into something more – more agile, smarter, and graced with spidey-sense, that is, the ability to detect danger before it happens.

Peter, a.k.a Spider Man, often seemed confused by his newfound powers and didn't know exactly what to do with those powers. Upon the sudden death of his Uncle Ben, Peter became aware of and began living this principle: with great power comes great responsibility. With great power comes great responsibility. Peter Parker lives out that principle in every comic book and in every movie.

On this Holy Thursday, I propose that we alter the Peter Parker Principle just a little bit. With every great gift comes even greater responsibility. With every great gift comes even greater responsibility.

Today we remember that first Eucharist which Jesus celebrated with his disciples and friends at the Last Supper. That precious gift makes us stronger. It deepens our faith. It forgives our sins. It helps us to face what is difficult in life.

As we receive this precious gift of the Body and Blood of Christ, we are united with Christ who celebrated with his friends at the Last Supper. In a real sense, that Supper continues and we

participate in it sacramentally each time we gather for Mass. What Christ did at the Last Supper he does for us tonight, at Sunday Mass, and the Masses we participate in during the week.

This is an awesome mystery. It is something which is almost impossible to explain. But it is what lies at the core of who and what we are as Catholics. When we receive the Eucharist by eating his Body and drinking his Blood, Christ gives us a share in his everlasting life – here in this world and the world to come.

We are so moved by this mystery and this encounter with Christ that we often seek to spend time in prayer before Christ and with Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament. For that reason, after we receive Holy Communion we take a moment to thank God for this encounter. We thank God for the abundant blessings he gives to us. We thank God for the gifts he brings to us as we partake in this sacred meal.

Offering prayers of thanksgiving for these blessings is a very good thing, indeed. However, offering praise and thanksgiving alone is not enough. Remember our saying? With every great gift comes even greater responsibility.

Throughout the scriptures, Jesus teaches us and helps us to integrate this commandment into our lives. Tonight and in particular, Jesus models this for us as he washes the feet of his disciples. According to the culture of his day, a slave or paid attendant would be the one to do this lowly task. That's why Peter was so adamant that Jesus not take on this job.

Nevertheless, Jesus persists and carries out this loving and intimate gesture. I have a poster in my room that is old and

faded, but represents this particular part of the Last Supper event. It was painted by Ford Maddox Brown in the 1800's. Peter is angry while Jesus washes his feet. He won't even look at Jesus. In the background are the other disciples. One of them looks up to heaven and the other buries his head in his hands as if to say, "Ooooo, Peter is gonna let someone have it now."

Jesus helps the disciples to make sense out of this event by saying, "If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do." (*John 13:14-15*)

Through this action Jesus is declaring, "with every great gift comes even greater responsibility." In other words, the great gift we receive in the Eucharist is something that is never held onto for its own sake. Rather, the great gift we receive in the Eucharist must be given away.

On this night I also think of another person, a five-year-old child of God from Minneapolis, who was pictured in an iconic photo a few months ago with his Spider Man backpack. Perhaps for that child, but certainly for the rest of us, that photo is a reminder of what we are called to be and what we are called to do as Catholics. What each of us is blessed to receive in this sacrament tonight and every time we come to Mass – forgiveness, mercy, strength, union with Christ, dignity, respect, honor – is what we are commanded to share with others, no matter what their status. With every great gift comes even greater responsibility.

Almost sixteen centuries ago, St. Augustine beautifully captured this teaching of Jesus' in a most succinct way. To paraphrase him, St. Augustine declared that we should become the Christ we receive in the Eucharist. And we should not only become like Christ, but we should live like Christ. That is, our every thought, word, and deed should convey the presence, goodness, compassion, and love of Christ to others. Eucharist is never for ourselves alone. Instead, we receive the Eucharist in order to give away to others the fruits and gifts of this Blessed Sacrament.

Receiving a great gift comes with greater responsibility. As Catholics, our calling is to share with all – saints and sinners, the perfect and imperfect, the ideal citizen and the flawed neighbor next door – the very presence of Christ whom we receive into our bodies. We do this, because that's what Christ does for each one of us. As we will profess in just a few minutes before we receive Christ's precious Body and Blood, "Lord, I am *not worthy* to receive you. But only say the word and my soul shall be healed."

Lord, heal us, transform us, strengthen us – so that we may be a visible sign of your life, compassion, mercy, and love to all. May the mystery we celebrate tonight and at every Mass, be the great gift we selflessly give to others.

Amen? Amen!