

Homily for the 6th Sunday of Easter

In our Gospel today, Jesus taught His disciples that He would send them the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, who would teach them everything, and remind them of everything that He told them. And what types of things did Jesus tell His disciples? Well, on the night he was betrayed, when he took bread and broke it, He gave it to His disciples, saying: “This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.” And similarly, when supper was ended, He again gave thanks, and gave the cup to them, saying: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you...” do this in memory of me. These words were first proclaimed at the Last Supper – the very first celebration of the Eucharist – that is Holy Communion. And down through the ages, the Holy Spirit has continued “reminding” us as Church of the truth that the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ is given to us at each and every Mass. Since this weekend children from our parish are celebrating their first Holy Communion, I’d like to share an adaptation of an awesome children’s story I came across, entitled “The Weight of a Mass” by Josephine Nobisso. I highly encourage this book for children and the young at heart.

Once there was a king, betrothed to a queen in a faraway land. She agreed to marry him in the cathedral, even though they knew that only a handful of people would attend the holy Mass. It’s not that the subjects of the kingdom wished the royal couple ill. They just had grown cold and careless in the practice of their faith, and preferred to find other ways to celebrate this important wedding.

Shortly before the ceremony, a ragged old widow shuffled into the kingdom's most prosperous bakeshop. The baker in that shop had baked the royal wedding cake, and people were coming from all over the city to see the large and beautiful cake. The shop was full of people buying everything in sight. The baker lifted elegant pastries, and arranged them in lacy boxes with fancy bows. Finally, it was the widow's turn in the crowded shop. "For the love of God", she begged the baker, "if you will give me a crust of stale bread, I will offer my Mass tonight for you."

The baker's son hurried to get the bread reserved for children who fed the royal swans, but his father growled, "This woman shares the disease from which you suffer and your mother before you! If I didn't keep you busy here, I'd find you on your knees in church associating with people like this poor old woman!"

A hush fell over the crowd. The baker peered over the counter. "You propose to offer a Mass for me," he challenged the old woman? "I'd rather hear the jingle of your coins!" "But", the poor old woman whispered, "I haven't a schilling!" "Then, I haven't the bread", the baker shot back! "Father," the son protested, "she asked in the name of God!" "Then let God provide her with bread," the baker shouted back!

The widow turned to leave, but the baker shouted after her, "Let us see how much bread I would owe you!" So the baker tore off a tiny piece of paper from his finest tissue. He wrote the words "ONE MASS" on the small scrap of paper and threw it onto the tray of his shiny brass scale. He then flicked a slice of old bread onto the other tray. He looked, blinked his eyes, confused. The bread side had not dropped to lift the lighter side with the scrap of paper on it.

“Impossible,” the baker exclaimed, placing even more cakes and bread onto the tray! But, this did not tip the scale. He piled even more onto the scale, and still it did not budge. “The paper outweighs his goods” a man exclaimed! “This scale was just tested last week,” the baker protested, “Something has gone wrong with it!”

The baker’s son then lifted the tiny scrap of paper off the scale, and a gasp went up as the baked goods crashed down to the floor. Everyone began speaking at once: “What can this mean,” they asked each other? The crowd quieted to watch as the baker cleared off both sides of the scale and tested it again with a slice of bread on one side and a large cake on the other. And, as should have happened, the bread went up and the cake went down – the scale was correct!

Interested in what was happening, more people crowded into the store, and the baker tried again, putting more and more bakery items onto one side the scale – bread, candies, and cakes. “Now”, the baker said as he let the snippet of paper float down toward the empty side of the scale, “we’ll see the truth!” But no sooner did the tissue touch the shiny brass tray that it lifted up the opposite one. “This can’t be,” he cried as he put even more items on the scale! And the baker’s son marveled, “the Mass intention weighs more than all these things!”

With that, the baker became even more furious. He yelled at his son, “Don’t think I don’t know that you would abandon the baking trade to become a priest! And, don’t think any of this will influence me! Bring the royal wedding cake.” The baker and his son lifted the huge cake onto the top of the pile. But the paper on which the baker had written the words, “ONE MASS” hadn’t even fluttered. The baker and his clients stood, dumb-founded.

Just then, the cathedral bells began tolling the call to the royal wedding Mass. The baker's son stood over the piece of paper, just staring at it – "ONE MASS". When he lifted it from the scale, hands lunged forward to rescue the wedding cake as it, and everything beneath it, crashed down with a mighty clang. At that point, a man went out into the street, and began singing a hymn to the blessed Virgin Mary, because the church bells were playing the same tune. And soon the others in the bakery, who had intended to celebrate the royal wedding in their own ways, now filed out and processed toward the kingdom's great cathedral. One by one, they joined in singing the beautiful hymn.

The stunned baker saw that the only customer left in his shop was the old widow. "Come every day," he told her, "you will never go hungry again!" The poor old widow faintly smiled, and tucked only a thin slice of bread into her pocket.

Then, the baker, his son, and the widow trailed the procession to the cathedral, to offer Mass with their king and queen. Amid the singing and the joy, the baker asked the old lady, "Why did you take only a slice of bread when you could have had anything and everything in my shop?" "I was ashamed to take more," the poor old lady said. "Ashamed," the baker asked? "But it was you who believed in God's power while the rest of us had grown cold" "I was ashamed," the widow explained, "because even though I have never given up going to Mass, I asked you merely for a crust of stale bread in exchange for it. You see, my friend, like you, I, too, did not truly know the weight of a Mass!"

My brothers and sisters, the celebration of the Eucharist – that is the Mass – is the priceless, "source and summit of the Christian life" because in it, Christ Himself is truly present. And in its unfathomably deep richness lies the perfect fulfillment of Jesus' command to repeat His actions and words until He comes again. God bless you.