

Thursday for Third Week of Easter

Acts 8:26–40

Psalm 66:8–9, 16–17, 20

John 6:44–51

At both the beginning and end of his papacy St. John Paul II wrote major documents on the Eucharist. I want to frame my homily this morning with two quotes from these documents.

In 1980 he wrote the following in *The Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist*:

The Church and the world have a great need for Eucharistic worship. Jesus awaits us in this sacrament of love. Let us not refuse the time to go to meet Him in adoration, in contemplation full of faith

This is such evocative language that speaks to us of the intimacy of the Eucharistic presence of Jesus. St. John Paul II speaks of the sacrament of love and in the next sentence says that we go to meet him in adoration. The word adoration means to meet someone face to face, mouth to mouth, as husband and wife do in the expression of conjugal love. Here in the Sacrament of love we meet with the bride groom face to face, and mouth to mouth as we receive him.

Now think of this language of the sacrament of love in relation to Jesus' words.

No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me

This is the language of love. Those who fall in love are drawn to the object of their love. There is willingness in the heart, a stirring of the soul that desires to be in relationship with the other. When young people, for instance fall in love, there is this quality of adoration, the desire to be in the presence of the other that is accompanied by an intensity that we might term as infatuation. But with time, if this love deepens, it leads to a desire to truly know the other. As the church teaches such a knowing, if it results in marriage, is then consummated by the beauty of the marital embrace. This is in human terms the deepest expression of adoration that two people can express one to another.

Now listen again to St. John Paul.

Let us not refuse the time to go to meet Him in adoration, in contemplation full of faith

To meet with the Lord in contemplation and full of faith is the desire to grow in knowing Jesus not just cognitively but deeply and intimately. Let me again quote from our Gospel for today:

It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.

Do you hear the sequence here? When we know that these words are from the Father, we will want to learn from Jesus.

How does such learning happen? Think to our reading from Acts. Here the Ethiopian is reading a most important passage from the Old Testament. And as St. Augustine so aptly stated “The New Testament is contained in the Old Testament and the Old Testament is revealed by the New”. Philipp showed how this text, written hundreds of years before Jesus found its fulfilment on Calvary and continues to find expression in the Sacrifice of the Mass. Here that same Lamb is made present to us. As Jesus said, and as this passage so beautifully illustrates from Acts, all Scripture brings us to Jesus, the one who is the true object of our love and desire.

Now what is the fruit of such fulfilled desire? We are told that the Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing.

The Greek root of the word joy is “grace”, which in Greek is the word “charis. Now listen again to the Greek word. “Charis”. It is at the heart of the word “Eucharist”. This you see is the meal of joy, the sacrament of love and rejoicing because it is here that God in Jesus meets us literally face to face. It is here that we understand the eternal life is not just quantitative, life that will go on forever. It is also qualitative.

The Last Encyclical of John Paul II called the Church and the Eucharist the Pope wrote of this qualitative life this way.

In the Holy Eucharist, through the changing of bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord, she rejoices in the presence of Jesus with unique intensity. Ever since Pentecost, when the Church, the People of the New Covenant, began her pilgrim journey toward her heavenly homeland, the Divine Sacrament has continued to mark the passing of her days, filling them with confident hope.¹

It is this confident hope that is known by those who have been drawn to the bridegroom Jesus, who in this sacrament of love continually says to us.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

¹ Ponessa, J., & Manhardt, L. W. (2004). *The Gospel of John* (p. 59). Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing.