

## **Come heedfully to the great mystery of the Eucharist**

**Homily by Most Rev. Samuel J. Aquila, D.D.**

**Bishop of Fargo**

**July 31, 2005 – Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**(Given at the Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo, ND)**

In this year of the Eucharist it was the desire of our late Holy Father John Paul II to rekindle amazement and wonder in the Eucharist. It was his desire to help us to love the Eucharist and to understand the Eucharist more fully. Our readings today show the great initiative of our God. Our God is one who initiates and who gives us the gift. We are free to receive the gift, to say “yes” to the gift.

In the first reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah, we hear the invitation given to us by our Lord. “All you who are thirsty, come to the water!...come, receive grain, and eat...drink wine and milk...Heed me, and you shall eat well...Come to me heedfully, listen, that you may have life” (Is 55:1-3). We see the dynamic of our God who offers all to his people. We hear that it is only in God, and God alone, that we find satisfaction. That is why our God is able to say to us, “Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what fails to satisfy?” All the material things that our culture places so much emphasis on will never, ever satisfy us compared to the love of God. God alone can satisfy us. It is his love for which we are made. Throughout revelation, the Old Testament and the New Testament, God is the one who always initiates, with his love and with the gift of himself, calling others into relationship and into communion with him.

In the Gospel reading, we see our Lord feeding the multitude. We are filled with wonder and amazement at the miracle itself -- that he fed over 5,000 men, not counting women and children, and there were 12 basketfuls left over. The abundance is great. The generosity is great. The people turn to Jesus and they are fed. He looks at the crowd with compassion and with pity. He heals them and restores them. One can see the great love of God and the initiative of God in Jesus. He is the one who initiates the healings. He is the one who teaches them and preaches to them. He is the one who says to his disciples, “There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves” (Mt 14:13-21). Then he multiplies the five loaves and the two fish, into an amount far beyond their wildest expectations.

My sisters and brothers, we listen to these readings and then look at the gift of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is a far greater gift of love than these miracles that our Lord reveals to us. Our Lord is one who has never, ever abandoned us. Our Lord is one who continues to feed us. Our Lord is one who makes present his one sacrifice

on the Cross for us -- for all of history. That is how much our Lord loves us. In the gift of the Eucharist, he himself feeds us. He himself gives to us communion with his body, blood, soul and divinity. It is not something that he does just once. His presence is a gift, a total gift -- one given from generation to generation. The Eucharist that you and I will receive today is the same Eucharist that all of the saints have received, that every Catholic has received, since the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. It is the same Lord and the same God that we receive. That is how great God's love is. Our God does not just feed us with bread and fish. Our God does not just give us water, grain to eat, or wine and milk. Our God gives to us the gift of his body and blood, to bring us into communion with him, so that we may love him and live in him.

When one begins to place one's faith in the great Sacrament of the Eucharist, one can see how St. Paul can cry out, in the second reading, as he writes to the Romans, "What will separate us from the love of Christ?" Absolutely nothing! "Neither anguish, nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor the sword" will cause separation (Rom 8:35). In all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us.

My sisters and brothers, do we really believe and trust in that love? Do we have the confidence of the love of the Trinity for "me"? Do we believe that not only has the Father called me by name and created me to be at this point in history, at this point in time, but that he has loved me enough to die for me on the cross and, if that were not enough, he has loved me enough to continue to give me himself in the Eucharist? What an awesome, wondrous mystery we so readily take for granted each Sunday or each day! We must listen more fully and come heedfully to the great mystery of the Eucharist. We must recognize who we receive, the love that we receive and the love that fills us, so that we may love as Christ loves, and so that we may give of ourselves to the Father as Christ gave himself for us.

As we continue with our celebration of the Eucharist this morning, let us meditate upon these words. My sisters and brothers, as we come to our God, let us pray that we may listen more fully to his Word, and to the promise that he has given to us in the Eucharist. Listen carefully to the words of the Eucharistic prayer. Offer yourselves with, in and through Jesus Christ to the Father. That is your response of love: to love him totally and completely. Make yourselves, with Christ, a gift to the Father.

Pray for a greater receptivity to that love and a greater trust in that love. Pray to have the confidence of Paul to recognize that absolutely nothing can ever stop God from loving us. We can always walk away, and in our sin we do walk away. Yet his love never stops. He always waits for our return. He will never force us. He wants us to come heedfully to him, to embrace him, and to live with him.

May our wonder, amazement and awe, and, most of all, our love for the Eucharist continue to grow. In this year of the Eucharist, may we come to know more fully and experience more fully the total love that God has for us, and may we receive that love and live it each day.