

Corpus Christi 2023 “Something Worth Living For”

Bishop Frank Schuster

This is always a joyful time of year for me. It is a time of new beginnings. I celebrated the graduation mass for my eighth graders at St. Vincent de Paul last Thursday, the Archbishop recently ordained two new priests to serve the Archdiocese, this is a popular time for weddings and there is no shortage of confirmations and baptisms. Yes, for many, this is a time for new beginnings, an opening of a new chapter.

Anytime we begin a new chapter in life, such as a graduation, emotions can be mixed. On the one hand there is excitement and hope for what the future holds. On the other hand, there can be anxiety, fear, and sometimes even a little sadness as we say goodbye to some of our friends whom we have journeyed with over the years. For some, there may even be some practical considerations like, “Wow, I need to get a job”. When I graduated from the University of Washington in the 90’s, I did so with a BA in psychology. Back then, that qualified me for unemployment. What the hell was I thinking?!

There comes a time in life when we all must find a way to make a living so to put bread on the table. However, this weekend, on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, Jesus offers us a different kind of bread. Jesus tells the crowds in our Gospel from St. John: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

Why does Jesus say this? On the feast of Corpus Christi, Jesus reminds us that we cannot live on bread alone. Schools and universities are very good at helping students learn skills to put bread on the table. However, the best schools are the ones that help students discover why putting bread on the table is worth it in the first place. One of my favorite little books is “Leisure: The Basis for Culture” by Josef Pieper. In it, he essentially argues that engineering, math, the sciences, and such are all good and benefit humanity, but it is the liberal arts, music, philosophy, athletics, history, and such that make life worth living. This is because the arts help us grow in appreciation of all that is true, good, and beautiful in the world. Good schools help their students appreciate what he called the servile arts, that benefit the community and puts bread on the table. However, the best schools also help their students appreciate the liberal arts, that ironically don’t usually pay very well, but nevertheless offer us something to live for.

We cannot live on bread alone. Drawing from Saint John Henry Newman’s work, the Idea of a University, he would have us consider that the greatest of all the liberal arts is theology because the source of all that is good, true, and beautiful is God. During this time of year when we celebrate new beginnings, it is fortuitous that we celebrate the Body and Blood of Christ and meditate on what Jesus is offering us in our Gospel reading this weekend. Let’s hear Jesus again. He says, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." Consider anew what a claim that is! Jesus is saying that he is the bread of life that not only makes life worth living, but worth living forever. What does that mean for you?

For me, it means more than coming to Church. It also means becoming what we eat so to become Christ to a world that is hungry for love and starving for meaning. It means following Pope Francis' advice in his exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, of developing a deep and personal relationship with Jesus that will in turn compel us to go out to the peripheries as missionary disciples. It also means taking time each day away from our "to do" lists so to encounter the true, good, and beautiful, remembering why life is worth living in the first place. My friends, whenever we encounter a new chapter in life, it is good to remind ourselves that we cannot live on bread alone. We need Jesus. We need the bread of life.

There are few who articulated this better in my opinion than the great Jesuit theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and so I will conclude with his words taken from his masterpiece, the *Divine Milieu*. If you reflect on what he is saying, and take it to heart, no matter what the future holds for you, no matter if blue skies turn grey, you will always have something to live for.

Teilhard writes, "When the priest says the words *hoc est Corpus meum*, [this is my body], his words fall directly on to the bread and directly transforms it into the individual reality of Christ. But the great sacramental operation does not cease at that local and momentary event...[Indeed], a single event has been developing in the world: the incarnation, realized, in each individual, through the Eucharist. All the communions of a life-time are one communion. All the communions of all human beings now living are one communion. All the communions of all human beings, present, past, and future are one communion...As our humanity assimilates the material world, and as the Host assimilates our humanity, the Eucharistic transformation goes beyond and completes the transubstantiation of the bread on the altar. Step by step it irresistibly invades the universe. It is a fire that sweeps over the hearth; the stroke that vibrates through the bronze...

He then prays, "Grant, O God, that when I draw near to the altar for communion, I will ... discern the infinite perspectives hidden beneath the smallness and nearness of the Host in which you are concealed. I have already accustomed myself to seeing, beneath the stillness of that piece of bread, a devouring power, which, in the words of the greatest doctors of your Church, far from being consumed by me, [the Eucharist] consumes me."