

HOLY THURSDAY, APRIL 13, 2017

First Reading: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14 This day shall be a memorial feast celebrating the Passover

Psalm 116 "Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ"

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 Do this in remembrance of me ...

as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the death of the Lord.

Alleluia Verse: "I give you a new commandment, says the Lord: love one another as I have loved you."

Gospel: John 13:1-16 Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, and commands them to do likewise.

This is the song that came to mind as I was praying over this day and the Scripture we are about to act out tonight in the ritual of footwashing & the celebration of the Eucharist.

♪ *Receive who you are, do not be frightened. Come say "Amen" to all of your life.*

Open your heart, come and be lightened, Singing I am the body of Christ.

And I am the body of Christ, Singing I am, dancing I am.

And I am the light of the world, Cause I see who lives in me, Yeah, Lord, I receive. ♪

You may know the story, but it's worth repeating: Joe Uvegas, who grew up in Schoharie County, writes about this song in the liner notes to his album, "*When Freedom Calls.*"

"This album was inspired by an event that occurred while I was at Mass. As I approached the altar to receive the Eucharist, the priest, instead of saying 'Body of Christ' said, 'Receive who you are.'

My tentative response was. 'Amen.' Shakily, I went back to my seat, trying to understand what had just happened. I wrote the song 'Receive Who You Are' directly after that Mass. All the words came to me in a matter of minutes. It took me 2 years to travel the road that that priest challenged me to walk and to record that song on this album.

Some of his friends were shocked by the song - telling him he was making himself into Christ - and I must admit that I was a little shocked by the refrain at first. It seemed to be too close to putting **me** as an individual at the center. That, after all, is what much of our culture is obsessed about. But as I reflected more deeply, I was drawn to the words "the Body of Christ," in the phrase, "*I am the Body of Christ*", & I heard us, as a community, singing what I usually invite you to sing during the Eucharistic Prayer:

♪ "*We are the body of Christ.*" ♪

And I realized that it's really about me *and us and Christ* together.



And then I focused on the phrase in the song,

"cause I see who lives in me. Yeah, Lord, I receive."

In the Gospel passage for today, Peter has a hard time *receiving* the love of Jesus. It takes him awhile before he understands that he has to **receive** the loving service of Jesus before he can be part of the Body of Christ. So our human lives and our lives of faith embrace giving and receiving.

Even our breathing reflects this truth.

Can you live if you only breathe in? Can you continue to live if you only breathe out?

Of course not, not for very long. But in our lives we can be so focused on getting what we want, we forget to share what we have, or we can get so caught up in doing, even doing for others, that we neglect to take time to breathe in the love of God or appreciate the care of others which communicates that love.

Recently I went to Siena to be with my brother Friars for a community night. After we ate & drank and shared with each other, I went to the college chapel to help with a reconciliation service with the students.

One of them had a T shirt with the letters c o m m----- n i t y.

Under the letters was the question, "What's missing?" and on the back of the shirt were 2 letters, can you tell me what they were? **U R**

Then I thought of the 2nd verse of Joe's song:

♪ And I see the broken, and I see the weary, I breath in compassion and I breath out hope. Cause here in my heart, and here in my center, It's here that You enter all that I am.

And I am the body of Christ, Singing I am, dancing I am.

And I am the hope of the world Cause I see who lives in me, Yeah, Lord, I receive. ♪

It's not **either** *I am the Body of Xst* or *We are the Body of Xst*, it's both. We are all members of the Body of Christ, but each of us has a responsibility to use our particular gifts to build up the body, the community we are part of as members of a family, a parish, a circle of compassion.



Before the words we heard in the 2nd reading, Paul writes about the divisions he sees in the community. He is very strong in criticizing the way the more affluent and powerful, the ones who owned the houses where the church gathered & provided much of the food, do not wait for the poor and the slaves who are part of the community, so most of the food is gone before they all assemble to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

He says that this behavior does not respect the church of God and shames those who have nothing. Then, after telling the story of how Jesus took bread and wine & said, "*Take and eat, this is my Body, this is my blood, do this in remembrance of me,*" - the story we heard in the 2nd reading tonight, - he accuses the Corinthian Christians of not recognizing the Lord's Body.

Read that whole section of his letter. When Paul says, *The Body of the Lord*, he means both the real presence of Christ in the bread & the wine and his real presence in the community gathered, which is the body of Christ. What he is saying is that you cannot claim to love Jesus if you do not care for all the members of his body. We are called to sing both "*I am the body of Christ*" and "*We are the body of Christ*" with all of our lives.

If we are to be true to the vision of Jesus, we cannot just contemplate and worship the Body of Christ, we must **become** the Body of Christ & imitate the humility of the God who emptied himself to become one of us. We can't just receive communion, we must be in communion with Jesus and one another; we cannot just go to Church, we are called and given the grace to become the Church, the Body of Christ.

St Augustine at the Easter Vigil in the 5th century, held up the consecrated host and the precious blood of Christ and said, "*See who you are, be what you receive.*" Joe Uveges recorded the song that reflects that truth in 2007. That same year, Pope Benedict quoted the words of St. Augustine that probably inspired the priest who gave Joe Communion.

The words of Jesus to his disciples, "As I have done, so you must do," make it clear that when we eat the body of Christ we promise to serve one another. In a sense, we eat the Church. When we drink the precious blood of Christ, we agree to walk in the footprints of Jesus. We accept the cross of Christ in our lives.

When we do that, we are living the refrain of this hymn - which is in 3 languages: Spanish, English and Hebrew. The Spanish words mean "the Body of Christ, the Blood of the Lord." The Hebrew word, which we say often during our prayer, is Amen - and it is a promise to live what we believe, to see Christ in others & ourselves, and to be the living body of Christ in the midst of a world which is in need of our love and service.



♪ Amen, el Cuerpo de Cristo. Amen, la sangre del Señor. Eating your body, drinking your blood, we become what we receive, Amen, amen" ♪

Now we act out what it means to become what we receive by the ritual of washing feet.