

### Body of Christ Homily.

I am honored to be sharing with you this weekend - on the feast of Corpus Christ - a big one in our church. This Sunday we celebrate the real presence of the body and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Jesus' body and blood. Not just an idea or a symbol, but Jesus in the flesh - present here and now. I think this begs the question then - what was the body and blood of Christ like?

Jesus Christ was born poor. He was raised as a refugee and oppressed because of his race and religion. As an adult he lived as a homeless person. Jesus, as an incarnate being, fully embraces poverty. We already know this - but this week we have a chance to reflect about how his choice to live his life in poverty directly connects to our belief in his presence in the Eucharist.

When we choose to receive the Eucharist and become one with Christ at the altar, what we are doing every single time is becoming one with the poor, the tired and broken, the hungry and homeless, the oppressed. Every time.

Pope Paul VI, explains this connection, saying: "The real presence of Christ, which is hidden in the bread and wine, is visibly manifested in his social presence in the poor who are the sign and image of His ongoing passion in the world."

Jesus famously teaches us in Matthew to feed the hungry, cloth the naked and visit the imprisoned. I've come to realize that he was not only teaching us so that we would serve the poor, he was inviting us into yet another experience where we would meet HIM, in the SAME way that we experience him in the Eucharist.

Maybe this is why, if you've ever experienced Mass in an impoverished community you are overcome with the power of the presence of God. Because you are experiencing the real presence of the body and blood of Christ more intensely. Because Jesus is JUST as present in the poor as he is in the Eucharist.

I've been fortunate to attend Mass in a small community in El Salvador. Without understanding much of the language, I felt a powerful presence of God as clearly as the soft wind that whispered through the desperately poor assembled on plastic chairs before the altar of God.

I've been blessed to attend Mass at the Our Lady of the Road Catholic Worker House in South Bend, Indiana, where a mentally unstable homeless man confirmed the presence of Jesus to all present by walking up to the altar during the consecration, standing next to the priest and shouting "Amen" repeatedly as if he himself knew the love of Jesus as lived out truth.

Closer to home I love coming to Mass at 11:30 here because when our brothers and sisters from Congo, whose stories more reflect that of Jesus than my own, sing the Hozana, all doubt flies out the window and presence of God is felt so powerfully it is palpable to all in attendance.

I've also experienced this intense presence of God at Mass at the Brady Faith Center where I've heard the desperate cries and prayers of the poor spoken aloud during the Prayers of the Faithful and then witnessed God's healing power through fellowship at lunch, which is served after Mass on the same plastic table that Fr. John uses as an altar not 10 minutes before.

I work as a mission coordinator at Brady Faith Center on the South Side of Syracuse and I've been on a journey discovering the truth of this teaching. I want to share with you a few statistics of poverty in Syracuse, which I'm sure you know but it is good to be reminded especially in this context. Because when we become one with the poor through the taking of the Eucharist, let us remember that it isn't the theoretical poor- it is our communion with the poor among us right here, right now.

What is the face in poverty in Syracuse today?

It's significantly a face of color. Syracuse leads the nation in extreme poverty among Blacks, a number 7.6% higher than Detroit, and Latinos, 8.2% higher than Philadelphia, and is fifth poorest among whites.

It's a face that is behind bars! 14,000 people pass through the Onondaga County Justice Center every year – that's nearly 10% of our Syracuse population.

It's the face of a homeless person, whether an adult, a family or a child (all increasing in #s from 2017) who awake each day, just like you and me, searching for purpose and loving and healthy relationships.

Finally, it's the face of a child with 53% of Syracuse children living in poverty. That is 1 in 2 children.

I came across this quote that I love and am learning to live by. It was said by Frederic Ozanam, the founder of St. Vincent de Paul. He said "We should kneel at the feet of the poor, and... say to them "You are our masters; we shall be your servants; you are the visible image of God whom we do not see but whom we love in loving you."

In my personal life, I am more and more convicted to just spend time with the poor. I know longer feel a need to serve, but rather feel a need to learn. And as I learn, we learn, we need to remember to teach.

At Brady Faith Center we invite people into this presence of Christ in the poor in many different ways - one way specifically is through our Summer Servants mission trip.

I am SO happy to stand before you today and tell you that All Saints is bringing a group of teens to Summer Servants this year.

Summer Servants is an overnight mission trip for teenagers right here in Syracuse. We have a TON of fun - with games, service, cultural and community meals, rec nights, campfires and faith experiences.

One of my favorite parts of Summer Servants is our cultural night where the campers come together with a community of a different culture to share food, dance, and story. Last year we

were hosted by the Congolese community at All Saints and it was absolutely the best out of all 7 years!

Fr. Greg Boyle, in his book *Tattoos of the Heart*, explains the word kinship, which is a main theme of Summer Servants each year. He says, “Kinship – not serving the other, but being one with the other. Jesus was not “a man for others”; he was one with them. There is a world of difference in that.”

Again, this returns to the covenant of earthly presence that Jesus promises us - in the Eucharist and in the poor.

Let me remind you of a quote I used in the beginning from Pope Paul VI. “The real presence of Christ, which is hidden in the bread and wine, is visibly manifested in his social presence in the poor who are the sign and image of His ongoing passion in the world.”

Our desire at Summer Servants is for teenagers to experience this visible presence and passion of our God alive in our city. Their city.

I truly believe that when teenagers come into the visible presence of Jesus Christ in the poor they will absolutely know it and it can be transformative in their life.

Not only is All Saints sending a group to Summer Servants - but ALSO we are funding 3 of our Congolese teens to work with Project Connect, which employs them at nonprofits across our city for the summer.

Over the next few weeks and maybe even through the summer we will have fundraising going on for this opportunities - please lift up our teenagers and give them the opportunity to meet Jesus in the poor and marginalized this summer.

It is important as a parish to recognize that our common mission of social justice has to be passed down and taught. Bringing teens to Summer Servants allows them to have a mountaintop experience with their faith that is rooted in social justice. It is an invitation to believe in a Jesus who is alive, personal and active. It extends an opportunity to know a Jesus who is inclusive, who has a space for them at the table, and who will always choose love - and that begins with them knowing that Jesus will always love them as they are.

I want to end with this testimony from one of our participants from a few years ago who lives in a suburb of Syracuse, which I think explains well how service to and kinship with the poor can spur on our personal faith:

“There are instances in each of our lives that we can remember instantaneously and immediately say, “That’s it... that is the moment everything changed. If someone had sat me down a year ago and told me I would find my moment while spending my days out in downtown Syracuse and spending my nights in the downstairs of a church I had never stepped foot in before, I would have laughed in their face. Yet, that’s where it was... my life-changing moment just waiting for me to finally seize the opportunity and discover it. At Summer Servants you do a lot of volunteer work as you help play with kids or help out by doing manual labor like minor home repairs or

gardening. As the week progressed these little responsibilities changed more and more in meaning. Each weed I pulled, each meal I served, each small child I swung onto my back and ran around with opened my eyes just a little wider. I was stunned. I had lived in Syracuse my entire life, but somehow I had never seen these beautiful people with even more beautiful stories and struggles all around me. I had been living for 16 years with my eyes closed and I never even knew it. Simultaneously as I dove deeper into my relationships with these incredible people that I served and served with, I dove deeper into my relationship with God. It was when I walked and talked with His children that were struggling the most that I truly came face to face with Him.”

My prayer for us all is that we can be empowered by the actual presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist to enter into his presence among the poor. Or for some, it may be the opposite- may we be empowered by the actual presence of the body and blood of Christ in the poor to pull us closer to his presence in the Eucharist.