

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 3rd Sunday of Easter; First Communions

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First Communions

St. Joseph Church, Odenton

May 5, 2019

First Holy Communion

It is a joy to return to St. Joseph's Parish on such a happy day when eighteen young people will receive their First Holy Communion. How happy we are, how inspired we are as these, your sons and daughters, your young fellow parishioners, receive for the first time the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, for a moment or two I'd like to say something to those of you who are receiving your First Holy Communion. I'd imagine you are pretty happy and excited to receive our Lord in Holy Communion for the first time - am I right? I want you to know that this makes me really happy also - because I get to share in one of the most important days of your life. Receiving Jesus in Holy Communion means you are old enough to begin understanding your Catholic faith. It also means that you are deepening your friendship with Jesus. We receive Jesus in Holy Communion because Jesus wants to be with us - he wants to live in us and help us and love us every day of our life.

Now, I'm going to bet you prepared very carefully for today - am I right again? One thing I'm sure you studied and that you know is this. When we receive Holy Communion, it looks like a little round piece of flat bread - and we call that round piece of bread a "host". But during Mass the priest consecrates the bread and wine using these words: "This is my Body" and "This is my Blood." When the priest speaks those words in the power of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus - the same Jesus - who died for our sins and rose from the grave

to unlock the gates of heaven. So when you receive the host today, you will truly be receiving Jesus – who will always be your wonderful friend and companion!

Let me say one more thing to you, dear first communicants, before I talk to your parents and everyone else who's here. Today we celebrate your "first" communion – the first of many! Receiving Jesus in Holy Communion is something you should do often. Coming to Mass every Sunday and receiving Holy Communion is a beautiful thing. It means we receive Jesus over and over again and we really become his friends and a real part of the Body of Christ, the Church. It also means we have Jesus with us throughout the week – in school, with our friends, in our families – and Jesus will help us to love other people and to do what we should do – promptly and cheerfully! So once again, congratulations on your First Holy Communion!

Renewing Our Eucharistic Faith

Now let me offer a word of encouragement to you, the parents of these young people, and to the grandparents, relatives, friends, brothers and sisters who are here this morning, as well also to all the parishioners of St. Joseph and our honored visitors from elsewhere. I want to thank you, parents for forming your children in the Church's faith. Religious education programs and our schools are certainly meant to help in that task, but it is you who are the first educators of your children in the ways of faith. And it is not only your words but above all your example that most powerfully teach your sons and daughters what it means to be a believing, loving, active, prayerful, and practicing Catholic who bears witness to the Risen Lord and the Church's faith by word and deed.

When I see these young people receiving their First Holy Communion, I think back to the day of my First Holy Communion – in May, 1957. In fact, I still have the decoration on top of the cake my Mom baked for the occasion! This occasion brings me back to that really happy and sacred day and I hope it does the same for everyone present here this morning. I remember vividly the joy of receiving Jesus for the first time and I would invite you to think back to that very first moment when the Risen Lord came to you in the humble form of bread and wine, entering not merely into your body but into the depth of your hearts. When we eat ordinary food we digest it and our bodies make use of its nutrients. When we consume the Body and

Blood of Christ, the food we consume transforms us, changes us, into “other Christs” and living members of his Body, which is the Church. By repenting of our sins, participating in Mass each Sunday, and worthily receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus in Holy Communion, the Risen Lord moves from the periphery of our lives to the center and changes how we think, how we decide, how we love, how we interact with others, how we handle the problems of life, and how we live in hope even in difficult times.

I know that many people today think it isn't necessary to go to Mass on Sunday. People today are busy and there are plenty of things that demand our attention and yes, there is precious little time for rest and free time, and sometimes people absent themselves because of all that's gone on in the Church. All of that is understandable – I am a human being of flesh and blood! But I must tell you truly – I can't live without the Eucharist! I can't begin to be a Christian let alone a minister of Word and Sacrament without the presence of the Risen Lord coursing throughout my being. Without the Lord, without Jesus, the Bread of Life, we can do nothing.

The Faith of the Apostles

Today as we see these wonderful young people receive Jesus for the first time, let us lay claim to the developing faith of the Apostles in this morning's Gospel. When an apparent stranger told them to lower their nets for catch, the Apostle John, with the eyes of love, knew it was Jesus. Peter jumped into the water and ran to meet him. And when they all came ashore with a miraculous catch of fish, Jesus invited them to take and eat – and as they ate with Jesus their eyes were opened.

When we receive Jesus at Sunday Mass, our eyes too are opened for like the very first disciples we too recognize Jesus in the breaking of bread. We too recognize that the Risen Lord is not a mirage or a dream but our Good Shepherd and mighty Savior who truly wishes to remain with us and in us, amid all the confusion, futility, and routine that is so much a part of modern life. Above all, we come to see how the Lord wants to be very close to you and to your families and to make your houses not merely homes but indeed “little churches”—domestic churches – homes that are havens of prayer, peace, virtue, and generosity, homes that radiate the Lord's goodness and love to others, especially the poor and vulnerable.

Once the disciples' eyes were opened to the Presence of the Risen Lord, they became his bold and loving witnesses and won many people over to Him. They were baptized and shared in the earliest celebrations of the Eucharist. As the Lord moves to the center of our hearts and homes, we too can become those bold and loving witnesses who win over many of our unchurched fellow Catholics and many others who are seeking God to open their hearts anew to the Risen Lord and to his Church.

May this day of joy be also a day of renewed faith in the Risen Lord who loves us more than we could ever ask or imagine. And may God bless us and keep us always in his love!