

THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST, Year C

Gen 14:18-20; Ps 110:1-4; 1 Cor 11:23-26; Lk 9:11-17

EIGHTH GRADE GRADUATION *THE EUCHARIST: OUR MOST VALUABLE GIFT*

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun
Saturday, June 5, 2010, 5:00 p.m. Mass

It is a nice **coincidence** that **your graduation** falls on the same day that we celebrate *Corpus Christi*, the feast of the **Body and Blood of Christ**.

Graduation means that you have successfully completed the **first major phase** of your **education**.

For most of you, this amounts **nine years**, kindergarten, then the primary grades, and then Middle School. That's a **great accomplishment!**

As a sign that you've finished the job, and that you have done the job well, very well, after Mass in the FCC, along with Mrs. Gustafson, our principal, it will be **my privilege** and pleasure to **present you** with your **diplomas**.

This **graduation** stuff is **pretty fun**.

Because you're graduating, you will get all sorts of stuff.

Tonight you're going to get **applause, compliments**.

I'm pretty sure that you'll be getting graduation **cards, gifts, money**.

Many of you have already received **awards**,

awards for sports, student council, art, choir,

behavior, attendance, leadership, academic achievement.

It's great. I'm happy for you. The parish is happy for you.

I have a really **big question** for our 8th grade graduates:

of **everything** that you receive **today**,

what is the best, most valuable gift,

either up until this five o'clock hour,

or from now until the end of the day?

For everyone else in the Assembly, what do you think?

What do you think is the **best gift** that our **graduates will receive today**?

Let's take a quiet moment to think about this! The **best gift of today**?

I hope you have an answer in mind.

You don't have to raise your hands,
but hang onto your answers,
and please, don't switch your answer, OK?

The best gift that you will receive today:
Is it the **diploma**? It represents eight or nine years of hard work!
The **money**? It means you can get yourself something nice!
The **graduation cake**? It means your family can celebrate together!
A **trophy**? It means that you've done well with your abilities!
The **compliments**? It's great to be recognized for a job well done!

It would be my guess that most of you picked one of these things,
or something like it.

If you are thinking **diploma**,
gifts or **money**,
trophies or **medals** or **certificates**,
good food or **cake**,
compliments or **praise**,
a **graduation party**,
or anything else like this,
you are **thinking as the world thinks**.

I'm sorry: I'm guilty of **entrapment**.
But as your spiritual leader, I have no need to apologize.
I've led all of us down the **worldly road**.
It is easy to go down this road.

The **best gift** that our graduates will receive tonight
is **NOT** their **DIPLOMA**,
NOT MONEY,
NOTHING I just mentioned.

The **best gift** that our graduates will receive tonight is the **Eucharist**,
the **Body** and **Blood** of our **Lord Jesus Christ**.

This is why we, as a **Catholic school**,
are so **blessed** to **celebrate graduation** within the context of a **Mass**.

JESUS COMES FIRST,

and the awarding of diplomas is great, fitting and proper,
but it is secondary,
and so it comes in a separate ceremony *after* Mass.

Nothing can compare with the **gift** of **receiving Jesus:**

first and foremost in the **Eucharist**,
also in his **Word**, the **gospel**,
and in his **gathered community**, **we**, the **Body of Christ**.

I'm not trying to lay a **burden of guilt** on anyone.

I've graduated before myself, seven times.

I've got diplomas from grade school, high school, and junior college,
an undergraduate degree, and three masters degrees.

My first four graduations were all from Catholic schools,
within the context of Mass, just like we're doing tonight,
and I must humbly admit before all of you

that I was far more excited about receiving my diploma
those first four times
than I was about receiving the Eucharist.

My next two graduations were from public schools,
the University of Minnesota and the University of Nebraska.

No Mass.

No Eucharist.

No mention of Jesus.

It wasn't until my last graduation,

when I received my theology degree,

when I was in my forties,

that I finally learned that the greatest gift of all

is not me and what I have accomplished,

but Jesus,

and all that God has given in terms of talents and opportunities.

How foolish of me!

How foolish of us!

We have an **awesome treasure** in the **Eucharist**.

The people of the world think,
“Oh come on! Get serious!
This stuff about the Eucharist is a bunch of pious platitudes.”

You adults, what was your **biggest “gift”** this past week?
Your **paycheck**?
The **big fish** you caught over Memorial Day weekend?
The **hit** you got in the softball game?
Something new that you bought?

We tend to define our **biggest gifts in worldly terms**:
financial gains,
material things,
good times.

We rarely say, at least in public, that our **greatest gift** is
Jesus in the Eucharist,
the **Word of Jesus** in the **gospel**;
or the **community** that **Jesus founded**,
the **Church**, the **Body of Christ**.

The world might say:
the Eucharist doesn't pay the bills;
the Eucharist is not as fun as catching fish.

This **graduation night** is an **opportunity**
for us to put things in **proper perspective**.

The greatest gift that each of us can receive is our Lord, Jesus Christ!
Nothing is better:
No diploma!
No amount of money!
No victory!
No award!

The **Jesus** that we will receive in the **Eucharist tonight** is
the **same Jesus** that was **born in Bethlehem** two thousand years ago,
the **same Jesus** that **calmed storms** and **cured lepers**,
the **same Jesus** that **died on the cross**, **rose from the dead**,
and **ascended into heaven**.

You, our 8th grade graduates,
this **parish community**, this **local Body of Christ**,
is immensely **proud of you**.

We want to **congratulate** you and **wish your well**
as you move on with the **journey** of your lives,
to high school, to further education, to jobs,
to **wherever God leads you**.

But you need to **be careful**.

As you venture forth, there is **grave danger ahead**.

The **world** will continue to **attempt to seduce** you,
and your parents and your family too.

The **danger is to think as the world thinks**:

to devalue Jesus, to devalue the gospel,

to devalue the community, and wander away from the Eucharist.

My friends, this is the **road to destruction**.

It is a **wide road** and **many travel it**.

At the Last Supper when Jesus instituted the Eucharist, he said,

“Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24,25).

When **God** gave us the **Ten Commandments**, God said,

“Keep holy the Sabbath day” (Ex 20:8; Dt 5:12).

The way that we keep the Sabbath Day holy

is to **attend Mass** each and **every Sunday**,

and to devoutly **receive the Eucharist**, our **greatest gift, every week**.

A diploma comes along after a two-year program,

or a four-year program, or a eight or nine-year program.

The Eucharist should come at least once a week.

Jesus wants us to receive his Body and Blood,

not just at Christmas and Easter,

not just a couple times of month,

not just when it is convenient or when we feel inclined,

but **each and every week**.

This **applies** to our **graduates**, their **parents**, our **teachers**, to **everyone**.

To do **less** is to be **spiritually malnourished**.

To the world, this makes no sense,
but to us who believe,
the **Eucharist** is the **greatest gift of all**.

You, our **eighth grade graduates**,
can be **justifiably proud** when you receive your **diploma** tonight,
it's a **wonderful achievement**.
But your **diploma** will eventually find its way into the drawer;
and your diploma **does NOT have the power to save!**

If our Catholic school has done its job,
both you and your parents should now know by now
that Jesus and **Jesus alone** has the **power to save**.

Graduates, parents, everyone, **please recommit:**
solidify your intention to receive **Jesus, the Bread of Life** (Jn 6:35).
Jesus has promised us:
“Whoever eats my Body and drinks my Blood has eternal life” (Jn 6:54).