

Homily by Fr. Edward Malesic at St. Patrick Eucharistic Devotions Based on Matthew 26:26-30

Father Houser, thank you for inviting me to Saint Patrick's Parish and to your Eucharistic Devotions. This is a wonderful parish, a beautiful church and it holds some special memories for me.

I grew up in the Steelton area. Msgr. Tom Brenner, who was pastor of St. Anne's there, would have an evening Mass during the weekdays. As a college student discerning a vocation to the priesthood, the Mass in the evening was at a convenient time for me to attend. So, I got to know Msgr. Brenner well and was saddened when he was named pastor here, at St. Pat's, but I know it was good for this parish. I was happy when he asked me to come work for him here as a seminarian in the summer of 1982 and then I was assigned here as a deacon in 1986. So, we are going way back.

Msgr. Brenner kept a very happy household here. We were always well fed by Emma, the cook in those days. I remember that Father Blascovich was living in the rectory, as was Father Jack Blandin, a Jesuit priest who visited many of the sick and shut-ins of the parish, along with Sister Monica.

Now, Father Blandin was a grand old priest, by my estimation, he was in his eighties at the time, but he was apparently younger than I thought he was. I answered the phone one day and the person on the other end of the line was claiming to be Father Blandin's mother, I laughed and said, "Jack, there's some lady who thinks she's your mommy asking for you." He grabbed the phone from my hands and said to my surprise, "Mother?"

Anyway, I just loved Father Blandin along with the parishioners here. He was like the grandfather of the rectory, often speaking to himself without even knowing it. That's important to remember when I tell you this next story. He would come down the steps, sometimes calling out a name, or saying, things like "I don't know" or "Yep, yep, yep" to himself.

We were at Mass here in the Church. I was serving at the altar and it was after Communion. Father Blandin went to the Tabernacle, opened it up, genuflected before it, and then – with the microphone on and peering into the Tabernacle – he said to himself: "Egad, what's this!" Of course, the whole church heard this.

I wondered whether he had just witnessed a Eucharistic Miracle in the Tabernacle. Had Jesus face been miraculously imprinted on the bread? Was a host dripping blood? But, that wasn't the case. He was just perplexed by the way the sacred vessels containing the Blessed Sacrament were arranged inside of the Tabernacle. He thought they were too cluttered!

I must admit that when Father Blandin said over the microphone while looking into the Tabernacle, "Egad. What's this." I was thinking to myself: "Well, Father, 'This is Jesus.'

Of course, Father Blandin already knew that. He was a good and faithful Catholic priest. Although flummoxed at how the Eucharist was arranged in the Tabernacle, he knew what we all know. This is Jesus; no matter how he was placed in the Tabernacle that particular day.

Let me talk about that for a bit and why we believe that it is Jesus in the Tabernacle and it is Jesus in our Monstrance to be adored on our altar tonight. It was Jesus who said of the bread, "Take, Eat. This is my body." And he said of the wine. "This is my blood of the covenant."

Who am I to debate the words of Jesus. If he says over the bread, "This is my body," it is. And if he says over the wine, "This is my blood," Who am I to disagree? Instead of debating the presence of Jesus under the signs of bread and wine, we simply trust in his words, get down on our knees, and adore him.

We believe that Jesus meant what He said and said what He meant. We also believe that, as God, Jesus had power behind His words, power to effect the change He claimed over the bread and wine. They are the same words spoken by a priest at Mass today; and it is the power of Christ, acting in and through a validly ordained priest, who is able to make this change in substance come about on every altar in every Catholic Church even now.

This is a great revelation to us, by the way. The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist can't be proven scientifically. It's not a hunch: after all, who could possibly guess that what looks like bread is in reality the Real Presence of Jesus Christ. We know it only through revelation. Jesus has told us what the Eucharist is and we trust Him at His word.

And so, because we have the virtue of faith, given to us in baptism, we know that it is Jesus, risen from the dead, it is His glorified body that we find in the Eucharist. It is His body, a body that was able to walk through locked doors, a body that was able to ascend into heaven. In this sacrament, Christ's body is now able to be present to us under the sign of bread and the sign of wine. But don't be fooled by the external signs of bread and wine, because the substance, the very essence of the Eucharist is Christ, whole and entire, soul and divinity.

This is so critical for us to remember as Catholics. We are Eucharistic people, a people who have been entrusted with the Sacramental Body and Blood of Christ. And we must protect it, proclaim it and worship it. In an age, when so many people disbelieve that God can be present in the Church, we find Him here. We point to Him here. When people are looking for meaning in their lives, for healing, for strength. We should get out a big arrow, point it toward this church and say, What you want is here. Who you want is here. Jesus is here!

How good it is for us to be here! How much comfort we get from being in Christ's presence! How much strength we get from gazing upon Him. This is the place where we meet Christ who comes to us sacramentally, and in a very real and personal way. We should shout it from the rooftops.

John Paul II called for a New Evangelization. It is just now starting to kick into high gear. What is this New Evangelization? Well it flows from the fact that traditionally Christian countries need to hear the good news again. We need to re-Christianize ourselves with the Gospel that is ever ancient and ever new. We need to re-learn our faith, embrace it again, and come to love it like the first disciples who were willing to shed their blood for it. We need to proclaim our faith to people who haven't heard it; teach our faith to people who don't understand it; and convince those who doubt the Christian faith about its truth and relevance in our so-called modern world.

At the heart of this New Evangelization must be the Eucharist. For it is the antidote to the way of the post-Christian world which would have us deny the importance of God, or the need for a savior. The world thinks it can feed itself, but we know different. We know that only God can feed us and satisfy us. Only God can be adored; everything else comes and goes, but God remains. And, while everything in our world is tinged with death; we know that only God can give us life that lasts for an eternity. And so, Jesus was able to say of this Eucharist, whoever eats this bread will live forever. That's what we need to proclaim to a doubting, but waiting, world.

Tonight we claim our faith in God. We come to put Jesus at the center of our faith. But more than that, we come to sit at the feet of Jesus, who is present to us. We come to listen to Him, learn from Him, be fed by Him, and unite ourselves to Him in prayer. But don't think that Jesus wants us to stay here forever. He has called us to action. That's why most of us haven't been called to live a monastic life, or the life of a hermit, although they have their place in God's plan too.

In the new translation of the Mass, one of the ways to send people forth from the Mass is to say, "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord." We come to be sent. And we are sent to proclaim this Good News. How can we do that unless we have met the Lord? And how can we meet the Lord unless we come before him?

I can still hear Father Blandin looking into the Tabernacle, saying, "Egad. What's this?" Of course, he knew what this is. He told us about what this is at every Mass. Now it is our turn. Whenever anyone might ask, what is that on your altar? What is it that you go to seek and find there? We can bring them in here, show them this Eucharist, and tell them with faith. This my friend, is Jesus.

Homily by Very Reverend Edward Malesic