

***“Be what you see! Believe who you are.”***

**Holy Thursday 2017**

*Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15*

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“Estote quo videtis, et accipite quod estis.” “Be what you see! Believe who you are.” Those words come from a homily in the fourth century that St. Augustine preached. They are cited in paragraph 1396 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. “Be what you see! Believe who you are!”

How might we understand these words tonight as we commemorate the institution of the Lord’s Supper? Permit me to begin with a little account from my own family. As many of you know, my mother was a student here at St. Paul school. She grew up here in the parish in a home between West MacLaren and Tieton Drive on South 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue. I actually have spoken with the owners of the house. They speak Spanish there now! But back when I was little that corner of the block spoke German.

My grandparents’ family came from a war-torn and starved part of southeast Europe, like most of the Germans from Russia. In their living memories was the great famine of 1920, where one person died every three seconds of hunger. When it came to food the three generations of immigrants had three distinct German words to describe their respective generational experiences: “Tod, Not und Brot.”

The first generation – the generation of the 1920s would know death – “Tod.” The second generation would know poverty and need: “Not.” It was the third generation that would know food and have bread: “Brot.”

I was fortunate enough to be part of that third generation – the generation of bread – and boy did we have bread! I can recall coming home to the smell of cinnamon rolls baked by my grandmother. She baked all kind of dishes based on wheat: “Kaasnipfla,” “Dümpfnudle,” and “Plachenda.”

Yet hearing her soft southwestern German dialect – the dialect spoken by all the Germans from Russia here in Yakima – I also became aware of the story behind the food: “Tod, Not und Brot.”

In a parallel fashion this is precisely what our Passover Scriptures are meant to convey this Holy Thursday evening commemorating the Lord’s Supper. Our opening scriptures recall the great Passover where the ancient Jewish people mark their doorposts with the blood of the sacrificed goats signaling for the angel of death to bypass their homes. They prepare a special bread – unleavened bread – bread that does not spoil or deteriorate – bread for the exodus journey from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land. In the

process they face down the death of the desert, their hunger and need and receive manna in the desert. "Tod, Not und Brot."

Note this too: In the ancient Jewish Passover feast participants did not believe that they were re-enacting an ancient event in Jewish history. No. Quite the opposite! Our Jewish faith ancestors believed that they were re-entering that one Passover feast anew and that they were present with their ancestors in that one great Passover feast.

The same is true for me and for you. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist we believe we are re-remembering ourselves to the singular and one sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This is precisely why in the Gospel of John – while we hear tonight about Passover preparations – we have no account of the last supper as we do in Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is as though St. John wants us to grasp that Jesus dies on the cross aligned to the slaughter of the Passover lambs. Jesus IS the Lamb of God, the Passover sacrifice, the one and singular source of salvation that brings us new life. "Tod, Not und Brot."

The world need not continue with its forced famines and wars. The world need not continue with gangbanging and violence. The world need not continue its tribalism and rivalry. With the Eucharist we can place ourselves as we are with all of our sinfulness, all of our competitiveness, all of our revengeful tendencies on the paten alongside the bread and the wine and offer them up as a "bloodless" sacrifice for ourselves AND for the world around us. We offer them up knowing that God can transform our hatred to mercy, our violence to harmony, our divisions into unity and our rivalries into mutual respect and love.

"Be what you see! Believe who you are!" Those ancient words of St. Augustine remind us that the early Church made no distinction between the "Body and Blood of Christ" received in the Eucharist and the "Body and Blood of Christ" gathered at worship. This means when we receive the "Body and Blood of Christ" we not only receive Jesus Christ in all of his humanity and all of his divinity in the Eucharist – but we also receive each other. We receive the entire community of 1.2 billion Catholics around the world gathered this night. We receive all those across countless generations who have passed on to us the gift of our faith. We receive all the living and the dead whose faith is known to God alone! More to the point we receive each other across this great Diocese of Yakima – those who speak Spanish and those who speak English; those who are documented and those who are not documented. And if we cannot do this – if we cannot receive each other as brothers and sisters regardless of our social or legal status – than we are not worthy to receive the Eucharist – the "Body and Blood of Christ."

"Be what you see! Believe who you are!" Tonight here at St. Paul Cathedral we model at this sacred meal what every human meal should look like. Tonight at St. Paul Cathedral we model the radical welcome of every person and the foundation human dignity of every person that ought to be present in our daily life. "Be what you see! Believe who you are!" Thanks for taking so seriously the most ancient teachings of the Eucharist and making them your own as followers of this One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Peace be with you!