“Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many are one.” What did St. Paul mean when he spoke these words to the early Christian community at Corinth? And what might those words mean for us today who are here in Pajacuaran or - like Fr. Lalo Barragan - have immigrated north to places like Yakima in the far edge of the United States?

Well let’s start with the fact that the ancient Greek city of Corinth where St. Paul preached was not – in any way shape or form – a homogenous unified town. Corinth was a seafaring town. Corinth claimed a large Greek speaking community. Corinth routinely hosted traders from Rome. Corinth had a bustling Jewish community right up until the Second World War. And long after St. Paul would preach his Christian message, Corinth would also host a large Moslem community.

Thus when St. Paul speaks those powerful words to his fellow Christians in Corinth: “Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many are one,” St. Paul is not proclaiming a unity that comes from a single language, a single culture, a single race, a single way of life, a single system of political thought, or a single manner of human affairs.

No. In a variety of ways, St. Paul seems to stress in his preaching that “unity” is not something we manufacture on our own. “Unity” is not something we make for ourselves. “Unity” is not something that can be self-generated simply on our own efforts. “Unity” is, first and foremost, a gift – a gift most real in the Eucharist.

I raise this today because – as you know – I come from the Diocese of Yakima in the United States where Father Lalo Barragan will serve as priest. I was born in the Diocese of Yakima and baptized at the Cathedral where I am bishop. I am the very first bishop to come from the Diocese of Yakima. When I was a child, about a fourth of the homes surrounding the Cathedral spoke German – just like my family. But besides German and English as a child I also heard Spanish spoken in Yakima by migrants from Texas and later from Mexico. I cannot recall a time when Spanish was not spoken in Yakima.

That’s why Yakima is not only my home, but it’s home to Lalo too. It’s home his parents, his brothers, his sisters, and numerous aunt, uncles and cousins. Yakima is home to hundreds of people with roots here in Pajacuaran. Even more, Yakima is home to literally thousands and thousands of people from Michoacan. Indeed most of our people in the Diocese of Yakima attend Mass – not in English – but in Spanish.

Sometimes I wondering what it is like for you here in Michoacan when you see so many loved ones leave. I wonder what you think when you hear about the long hours our people work in our orchards, our fields and our fruit packing plants. The fact that “because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many are one body” may be a source of spiritual comfort, but it does not take away the pain of worry, loss and separation.

This is why I have come today from Yakima to Pajacuaran – the hometown of Father Lalo and his family. My message for you – today – is quite simple. You have not lost Lalo and you have not lost any of your loved ones even as they journey north. You have given
them. Just as Christ gives us his very self – Body and Blood – in all of his humanity and all of his divinity – you have given us Lalo to be a holy priest of God. You have sent him as missionary in imitation of St. Paul.

Indeed, as you have sent loved ones north in search of a better life you have – at the very same time – sent them north as missionaries to re-plant and re-energize the Catholic Church in America. You live the words so boldlying proclaimed by St. Paul to the Corinthians: “Brothers and sisters: The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body for we all partake of the one loaf.”

Note that these stirring words of St. Paul to the Corinthians not only meant that St. Paul was a missionary. Perhaps even more important, St. Paul was forming the Corinthians to become missionaries too. Thus Corinth not only hosted the missionary efforts of St. Paul, but Corinth also became the launching point for a new generation of missionaries to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the farthest reaches of the ancient Roman world.

The very same is true of you here in Pajacuaran. You are forming and sending missionaries. While the Diocese of Yakima has certainly invested time and effort in Father Lalo Barragan the soil from which his priestly vocation grew is this earth and this soil. In so many ways his vocation is also the result of your prayers, your penances, your faith, and your oneness in Jesus Christ. What Corinth did for the Church of the West, Pajacuaran is doing for Yakima: sharing Jesus Christ.

The sharing of Jesus Christ is not simply sharing a message. No! By selecting these readings from the Feast of Corpus Christi, Lalo – himself – wants to begin is priesthood by emphasizing the sharing of Jesus himself in the Eucharist. Our sharing of Christ is much more than a message. It is sharing of HIM in the Eucharist. Sharing His Body. Sharing His Blood. This missionary initiative in which you are engaged here in Pajacuaran is quite literally bearing the very essence of Christ to the world. This is why the way you live and pray, worship and witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ here in Pajacuaran is so very important for the larger Catholic Church – the global Church – for your fidelity is the very foundation out of which the Catholic Church raises up missionaries and shares the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ to the very ends of the earth.

Our retired Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI explained this Eucharistic action so beautifully during his Wednesday catechetical talks during the year of St. Paul. Benedict noted that while the body assimilates human food with the Eucharist it’s the other way around: When we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ we are assimilated into his body.

No wonder that our Gospel from St. John is so explicit and graphic in citing the very words of Jesus: “For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.” And no wonder why St. Paul can tell his Christian brothers and sisters at Corinth, “Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body…”

Friends, the bottom line is this: the greater the fidelity you hold to the great faith of the Church, the more you will be forming missionaries for the world and the greater will be our assimilation of the world into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

What more can I say? Thank you for making Eucharist your mission. Thank you for sending us Lalo and his family. Thank you for sending us missionaries and planting your faith in the Yakima Valley. Thank you for allowing your faith to to grow and take root with us in the north.
My hope and prayer for you this day is that each and every time you received the Body and Blood of Christ you may not only know how close Christ comes to you and assimilates you into his Body but you may know that in being assimilated into his Body that your loved one in the North are very near, that Father Lalo is very near, that I – his bishop – am very near and that “...because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many are one body for we all partake of the one loaf...” which is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Peace be with you!