

The Eucharist: The Joy of Easter

Homily for the Ordination of Deacon Kurt Hadley as Priest for the Diocese of Yakima
Jeremiah 1:4-9; Hebrews 5:1-10; Matthew 9:35-38

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Peace be with you! By fortunate coincidence we celebrate this ordination of Kurt Hadley between Easter and Ascension. The Gospel of St. Luke from which we read this liturgical year stresses the unity of Easter and Ascension. Indeed, St. Luke starts his final chapter with the words “on the first day” and then narrates all that happened on that “first day”: the empty tomb, the women telling the brothers the “Good News” of his rising, the disciples on the road to Emmaus who discover Jesus in the breaking of the bread, Jesus’s appearance to his followers in Jerusalem, his eating fish with them, his leading them to Bethany, and his Ascension. These all happen the same day on that “first day.” In St. Luke these events occur on the same day which is the “first day” so we grasp that this journey from Easter to Ascension is one event.

Permit me to suggest that a parallel unity exists among the scriptures Kurt requested for his ordination as a priest: the prophet Jeremiah, the Evangelist St. Matthew and the Book of Hebrews.

Both the opening reading from Jeremiah and the Gospel from St. Matthew point to preaching. We hear of God sending Jeremiah off to preach in our opening reading. Our Gospel cites the poignant observation from St. Mathew the Evangelist that as Jesus preached he “had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.”

Commenting on this passage from St. Matthew, Hilary of Poitiers noted: “No instigator had stirred up the crowds. They were not harassed and helpless because of some mishap or disturbance...but because no shepherd was about to restore to them the guardianship of the Holy Spirit.”

Simply put, when we preach God is present – as Jeremiah discovers. When we preach, Jesus becomes as real and as attractive for the flock in front of us as he did for the flock in the Gospel of St. Matthew.

Certainly, our traditional reading from the Book of Hebrews speaks of Jesus as the new Melchizedek offering the one and singular sacrifice that brings forth eternal salvation. As Catholics, we know that in the sacrifice of the Mass the crucified Christ becomes real in all of his humanity and all of his divinity through the simple elements of bread and wine. Yet this risen presence of the crucified Christ ripples out infinitely from the Eucharist as well.

Thus, with the prophet Jeremiah and the Evangelist St. Matthew surrounding this testimony from the Book of Hebrews we also know that this risen presence of the crucified Christ becomes real when we open up the scriptures through our teaching and our preaching. The risen Christ is present now. He draws near us now. He stands before us now. He points us back to his predecessor Melchizedek and forward to every ordained priest. The risen presence of Christ crucified points us this day to you: Kurt Hadley.

As a priest, in your teaching and in your preaching by the power of the Holy Spirit, you will make real for those you serve the risen presence of Christ just as you will make real his risen presence in the celebration of the Church's sacraments – most especially the Eucharist. In the same way that St. Luke's "first day" points to a single-day event of resurrection and ascension so does your ordination as a priest point to a parallel unity between feeding the flock with the Body and Blood of Christ and feeding the flock with solid teaching and good catechesis, because otherwise they would be "sheep without a shepherd."

So, Kurt, welcome to this "first day." Enter into this one sacrifice. Become and live into who you are ordained to be: the icon of Christ in Word and in Sacrament for this, His Church. Peace be with you!