

Bread of Life

Legacy Mass 2021 at St. Paul Cathedral
Homily for Tuesday, Third Week of Easter
Acts 7:51-8:1a; John 6:30-35

Most Reverend Joseph J. Tyson, Bishop of Yakima

Welcome to our annual Legacy Mass. We did this by Zoom last year. Who would have thought we would still be struggling today? As one of my friends with a wicked sense of humor noted, “We are in Easter! But who would have thought we’d be in Lent for two straight years!”

Indeed, we have all been through many losses. I cannot help but think of our own Father Alex Trejo. He was the first priest to contract COVID-19 in the United States. We nearly lost him. I was on the phone with his sister Maria Inéz Trejo Estrada who is the religious superior of her order in Guadalajara. She was also a physician. Her calls greatly improved my medical Spanish. In February she, herself, contracted COVID and died. Fr. Alex and I zoomed in a funeral mass for her community.



The daily infections and death counts due to COVID do not include the collateral damage. The loss of businesses. The changes in employment. The doubling of death due to opioid overdoses this last year. Our own Catholic Charities has been handling a spike in calls due to mental and behavioral health issues tied to COVID-19.

We have all been part of difficult deaths and sad funerals. But this is precisely why it is so good for us to celebrate this Legacy Mass. In light of our own sure and certain death, what gift do we want to leave for future generations. Catholic Charities and the Central Washington Catholic Foundation, under the umbrella of the Diocese of Yakima, all work together to help you and your friends discern your gift. Catholic Charities speaks of bringing Christ’s hope to life through their outreach. The Foundation every year celebrates the “Gift of Faith” usually through an annual dinner and a major funding drive for scholarships in our parish faith formation programs as well as for our Catholic schools. The communion of 40 parishes and missions across the Diocese of Yakima shares the gift of Christ’s love most especially through the sacraments of the Church. You just heard the three theological virtues: Hope, Faith, Love.

How appropriate that at this Legacy Mass, then, that St. John the Evangelist flashlights the way God comes to us. "I am the bread of life," Jesus tells us. "...whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst."

The great fourth century bishop, St. Augustine, gave the Church a foundational way of understanding Jesus as "Bread of Life." From his Cathedral in the North African town of Hippo, he noted that when we receive the Eucharist, we not only receive Jesus Christ in all of his humanity and all of his divinity. But we also receive each other. St. Augustine made very little distinction between the Body of Christ received in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, and the Body of Christ received in the assembly of believers. To say "Amen" to the Body of Christ in the Eucharist meant you said "Amen" to the Body of Christ in the worshipping assembly and, equally important, the Body of Christ that makes us the universal church with its foundation on the bones of Peter in Rome. Perhaps more than most in North Africa, St. Augustine consistently united his preaching on the Eucharist with the unity of his Church with the Church in Rome.

Friends this is what we do today. Through our legacy gifts we extend the sacrament we receive. We unite the Body of Christ in this sacrament with the Body of Christ in this worshipping assembly. We extend the spiritual nutrition from this table, to the tables of countless families seeking hope in their times of darkness through Catholic Charities, discover faith through the support of the Central Washington Catholic Foundation, find love through the communion of parishes that is the Diocese of Yakima.

Just this past Holy Saturday I had the privilege of going to Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Granger. Our seminarian, Danny Sanchez, had organized the first post-COVID-19 Youth Encounter. Some 85 youths came. We had a socially spaced balloon toss as one of the icebreakers. We used long long beach towels that kept participants apart with teams of two tossing water balloons across a volleyball net. We had talks from women religious, newly ordained priests and newly married couples to help the high school youth consider God's call for them. This is a parish supported by the Foundation. The event was funded by the Annual Catholic Appeal. Some of the families came from homes in the nearby Catholic Charities Housing Services housing site. Together we shared the Bread of Life with those youth.

So, thank you. Thank you to all of you. Thank you for the many ways you pass on the gift of faith through your legacy gifts to Catholic Charities, through the Central Washington Catholic Foundation and by your support of the Diocese of Yakima. Yes, we have been through a long Lenten journey of purification due to COVID-19. But we have also discovered new ways to share Jesus, our Bread of Life, precisely because of COVID. We do so thanks to so many of you today on this special zoom Legacy Mass. May we be strengthened this day of the journey ahead by receiving Jesus as our Bread of Life. Peace be with you!

Art: Stained glass window, St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Church, Findlay, Ohio.