

# LIVING

## THE TRUE PRESENCE



**BY BISHOP MICHAEL C. BARBER, SJ**

Bishop Michael C. Barber, SJ has been bishop of the Diocese of Oakland since May 25, 2013.

**PHOTOS BY  
CHUCK DECKERT**

Last month, my brother Father Stephen Barber and I went to Sacramento to attend the funeral Mass of a priest who was a young priest when we were boys. When we first became altar boys at our parish in Sacramento in the 1960s, we served Mass for him.

He had always encouraged us and was an outstanding priest. He died at a ripe old age.

After having us as altar boys, the bishop appointed him chaplain of the Juvenile Hall in Sacramento, a post he held for 27 years.

At his funeral, they told this story:

It was Christmas morning and he was saying Mass for the young inmates in Juvenile Hall. Because it was Christmas, so many more of the

boys came to Mass. As he was distributing Holy Communion, he saw he was going to run out of hosts. The young inmate who was his server said, "Father, I know in the cupboard there's the box of hosts. I can go get some more and put them in there."

Father McSweeney said, "Joey, we can't use those hosts. They're not yet consecrated."

And Joey said, "Oh, Father, them dudes will never know the difference."

After Mass, the young boy said, "I was only trying to help, Father."

### Knowing the difference

We know the difference. We know that the bread and wine are changed into the very Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharistic Prayer, when the priest says the words of conse-

cration. That's why we're having a Eucharistic Revival in the United States and why we're having it in our diocese. We've been finding that people have been losing faith in the reality of the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist; that they think it might just be a symbol or that maybe nothing happens in the Mass. We have to say no. Perhaps next to the forgiveness of sins in confession, this is one of the greatest gifts Jesus gave us, which He left us at the Last Supper and left the priesthood to have men who would be able to confect this Sacrament for us for all eternity.

But it's not just belief in what happens at the altar; it's also the belief that we need to receive Him and, in order to receive Him, we need to come to Mass, we need to

participate with the community in this celebration.

It took our Lord a long time to convince the Jews and also His disciples of this. We heard in the Scripture that when the Jews were in the desert 40 years, and they were hungry and they were thirsty, Our Lord commanded Moses to strike the rock. Water came out of the rock and they were fed miraculously with water. He also had Manna appear, which fed them with the bread in the desert. Those are prefigurements of the Body and Blood of Christ that would later be miraculously made. Jesus Himself turned water into wine. He fed the 5,000 with loaves and fishes, another prefigurement of the gift of the Eucharist, in

don't come back. They don't realize the great gift that is here: Christ, the son of God Himself who is ready, willing, loving wants to come to them and help them and us with all our worries and problems.

### **The desire for Christ**

Among all the organizations that are present today is Night on the Streets Catholic Worker Berkeley. That organization has been feeding breakfast to the homeless in two parks in Berkeley every Sunday morning for over 25 years, never missing a Sunday.

I was helping them one Sunday and when the line of the homeless, most of whom were men, forms down the block and

but how much wiser he is than so many of our own people who go to our schools and our families who may have fallen away from our faith.

He had that desire for Jesus Christ in Holy Communion. We went and got the Blessed Sacrament. We gave him Holy Communion there.

I said, "There's a parish here, Holy Spirit Newman Hall right in Berkeley. You can go to Mass every Sunday."

He looked at his shopping cart. "I can't take my eyes off my cart. That's everything that I have."

I know there are also students here from Cal Berkeley today.

"We can arrange valet parking for that cart," I told him. "If you want to come to our Mass, we'll take care of it. That is no impediment."

He was wise. He not only had physical hunger for the breakfast; he hungered for our Lord, and that's the real hunger of the world.

Oh, my Lord, thank you for the gift of the Blessed Sacrament. Thank you all for teaching the young about the mystery of the Eucharist; that our Lord is here and he's ready and willing to help us.

### **In times of turmoil**

In addition to receiving Communion at today's Mass, we're going to have the procession. As we know from history, in times of turmoil or challenge in the Church, when there were plagues, when there were famines, when there were invasions, the priests would carry the Blessed Sacrament through streets of towns and villages, invoking the aid of the Lord on their city and their community. That is my intention when we process our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

Two weeks ago, I attended a

summit meeting of representatives of all the law enforcement agencies of Alameda County and the city of Oakland with elected representatives from the Alameda County Board of Supervisors and the Oakland City Council and mayor's office. The NAACP was there. Two pastors were there: Bishop Bob Jackson of Acts Full Gospel Church and I represented the Catholic Church.

We expressed that public safety is the number one need now. People are afraid: home invasions, carjacking, having your car smashed.

A priest came here to say the Vietnamese Mass on a Sunday morning. He went out to his car. People had opened his car and were raiding it. He had a tussle with them.

We're all afraid in Oakland and in our city. That's why, besides voting intelligently, which we can do to elect people who will protect us, we also ask our Lord's intercession.

A lot of people have written to me: You need to do an exorcism on the city.

I think we need to bless the city and dedicate this city and county to Christ, and that's what we're going to do. We have an altar set up outside. I'm going to bless the city of Oakland. I'm going to say a prayer of consecration asking our Lord and our Blessed Lady to look over and protect us in this city.

We also need to vote intelligently and do everything we can to protect ourselves.

My friends, we thank the Lord for this gift. Never take it for granted. From first Communion to our last Communion on our deathbed, Jesus wants to be with us. He's with us every day and every Sunday. Come, let us adore Him. ●

*This is excerpted from Bishop Barber's homily at the Diocesan Eucharistic Revival on Sept. 16, 2023.*



which He would feed us for all eternity.

Yet so many of our people maybe fall away from attending Mass; our young people, a lot of them, get confirmed and



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around the corner. They come up and you say, "What can I serve? Do you want the oatmeal, the grits or the Cheerios?" At the next station, "Do you want the bread with the cream cheese or do you want peanut butter?" Then, "Which kind of fruit do you want?" Then, "Coffee or hot chocolate?"

I was at my station and I asked a man, "What can I serve you? What would you like?"

He looked at me and saw I was a priest.

He said, "Father, what I really want is to receive Holy Communion."

That man may be homeless,