

“This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

June 23, 2019

Rural Life Mass/Corpus Christi
Osowski Farm, Grafton

Dear friends, I am happy to be with all of you for this second annual Rural Life Celebration. I want to thank Fr. Schroeder and the people of St. John's in Grafton and Sacred Heart at Oakwood for organizing the celebration this year, and I especially thank the Osowski family for hosting all of us here at their farm. On this beautiful day, we can't help but be grateful to God for the gift of his creation.

Today, we also celebrate the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, commonly called the Feast of Corpus Christi. St. Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians that Jesus gathered together his apostles on the night before he died. And at their supper, he gave them bread, and said to them: “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” Then he gave them the cup of wine and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” Of course, we renew this commandment of our Lord at every Mass, when we hear those same words of consecration. Every time we celebrate the Mass, as we are doing now, we celebrate the Eucharist, the sacramental mystery of our Lord's death and resurrection, which he gives to us under the appearances of bread and wine.

Whenever we celebrate the Eucharist, we are in communion with Jesus as he offers his very life for our salvation. We adore him, because this is truly his glorified Body and Blood, and we receive him with thanksgiving, which is the literal meaning of “eucharist.” When we look upon the Eucharist, we look upon Jesus, and when we receive the Eucharist, we receive Jesus, his Body and Blood, soul and divinity. With our human eyes it seems so simple and ordinary, but by the grace of the Holy Spirit and with the eyes of faith, it is the most extraordinary gift we can receive.

You might know the story of St. Isidore the Farmer, the patron saint of farmers. He and his wife, Maria, who is also recognized as a saint, lived humble lives and worked the land for their employer, the local squire. They were always generous to the poor, even though they were poor themselves, and they always put God first in their lives. Isidore went every morning to Mass, to celebrate and pray before the Eucharist. Sometimes this made him late getting to the fields, but he knew that if he put Christ first in his life, then God would provide. On one occasion, the squire heard that Isidore was coming late to his work, so he went out to see what was going on. That day Isidore arrived later than usual, walking slowly behind his plow and team of oxen. The squire was angry at first, but then he was astonished, because Isidore was not alone. Two angels, one on each side of Isidore and each with a plow, were helping him with his work. Isidore received Christ, the Bread of Angels in the Eucharist, and Christ sent his angels to assist him in the fields. Isidore and Maria were ordinary people, but they lived lives of faith, devotion, generosity to others, and love for the land. Their lives show us that holiness is within reach of everyone, and that the life of the ordinary person can be a pathway to God.

In the Mass, we also call the Eucharist “the mystery of faith.” Only by the gift of faith can we recognize the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. We believe what he told us when he said, “This is my body... this is my blood.” We put our trust in his promise, that what we do in remembrance of him will continue in the life of the Church. By faith, we know that Jesus is truly with us in the Eucharist, and we thank God for this gift.

But as you all know, the rural life is also an act of faith, even a mystery of faith. By faith, we see the beauty of this land and know that only God could have created something so wonderful. By faith, we accept the Lord's invitation to work the land, and we come to realize that we have a responsibility to his creation. By faith, we trust that seed will bring forth a crop and an abundant harvest. By faith in God's providence and love for us, we persevere even when the conditions of our rural life are challenging. There is a spirituality of living and working in the country, and a closeness to God that is unique and beautiful. In the silence of the country, which surrounds us today, we can hear the voice of God in our hearts. In our work on the land, we discover that we are partners with God in the work of creation. And with our own hands and the resources of the earth, we can feed the multitudes of the world. These are the little miracles of rural life.

During the years of my priesthood, I had the opportunity to serve in several small town and country parishes. And in those parishes, one finds a deep sense of faith and a strong feeling of community. Jesus calls us together around his altar, and he forms us as his family. Our small parishes really are families of faith, and they form the backbone of our diocesan family. We know that we can count on each other to help in times of need, to be there for each other in times of rejoicing and also in times of sadness. We pray with each other and for each other, and we know each other's stories.

Every one of our parishes, even the smallest, is a place where Christ comes to us and makes his dwelling in our midst. He shares his abundance with us so we can bring forth an abundant harvest, both materially and spiritually. He gives us a mission to live our faith joyfully and share that faith with our neighbors, first and foremost by the way we live. It's often said that people are more isolated from each other than ever before, but Jesus asks us to reach out and share the love and grace that we have received. My friends, rural life certainly has its challenges, but it also is a blessing, a path of sanctification not only for ourselves but for all those around us. Let us thank God for the calling to live the rural life, and let us pray that our Lord will make our lives and our work fruitful both here on earth and even in heaven.