

Corpus Christi, Cycle A, June 18, 2017

You may have noticed that when we celebrate Mass, there is one host much larger than the others. You may have also noticed that during the “Lamb of God,” the Agnus Dei, the priest breaks the large host. This has always happened. In fact, the oldest term to describe what we now usually call “the Mass,” was “the breaking of the bread.”

In the early Church, there was just one large loaf of bread, which looked like pita bread. They didn’t have all those little round wafers stamped out ahead of time. So, when the Lamb of God, the Agnus Dei, was being sung, the priest would break it up into little pieces to distribute to the congregation.

It was a practical measure. But it also took on a symbolic meaning. The one loaf of bread stood for the unity that the Church was meant to have. This happened very early, while the New Testament was still being written. That is why St. Paul tells us in the 2nd reading of today’s Mass: “Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.”

We, though some of us prefer traditional hymns, and others prefer more modern music, are one body. We, though some of us hold conservative political views, and others tend to be more liberal, are one body. We, even though we may not always agree on how the parish should spend its money, are one body.

I think that you would be surprised by the amount of diversity within our parish. Some of that is obvious, that we have parishioners who speak English as their first language, and others Spanish, or Vietnamese, or Tagalog. But that diversity goes far beyond that. And the diversity within our parish mirrors the diversity within the universal Church. That is why we call the Church “Catholic.”

St. Thomas Aquinas stands out as the greatest theologian of the Church. He taught that the Eucharist primarily provides the Church with two graces: the grace of charity, and the grace of unity. We stand in great need of unity.

Some people say that we should call our country the Divided States of America, instead of the United States of America. Certainly, there is a lot of

division in our country. And it appears to be becoming more and more violent, as witnessed by the recent attack on the Congressional Representatives who were playing softball. Even within political parties, there is a great deal of division, which makes it difficult for them to accomplish anything. It all ends in a stalemate. That's why nothing much has been happening in Congress.

We also see division within the Church. It is one thing to have differences of opinion. A variety of attitudes, an assortment of different emphases and objectives, can enrich the Church. One person might be passionate about caring for the poor. Another person might devote their energies to right to life issues. Another person might focus upon prayer.

These are all important concerns. Because we have people involved in them, our community is stronger. We are more closely connected to our faith. We are more truly Catholic.

We cannot expect that everyone will have exactly the same level of passion about a certain issue that we do. We are not all alike. That would be very boring. And our differences do not have to lead to division. It is all up to us. Will we tolerate those differences and recognize how they can enrich the Church, or will we allow them to become a wall, cutting us off from others?

It is one thing to disagree with another person. It is quite another thing to disparage them, to demonize them, to assume that they are evil because they think differently than us. But there is too much of that happening in our world.

St. Paul tells us that we are all one body, namely the Body of Christ. We are all members of that Body. Every time that we separate ourselves from one another, we are dismembering the Body of Christ. Every division in the Church, whether between individuals or between groups, mutilates the Body of Christ. It makes it more difficult for the Church, the Body of Christ, to function, to accomplish the mission God has entrusted to it.

Fortunately, where our sins divide us, our faith can unite us. Christ can overcome the barriers that separate us. Christ especially accomplishes that through the Eucharist, which gives us the grace of unity. How does that happen? He gathers us together around the one table, to feast on the bread of life. We, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

